Environment Agency Permitting decisions

We have decided to vary the permit for W.J Watkins & Son Limited operating at Cross Farm and Beacon Farm, Holsworthy Beacon, Holsworthy, Devon, EX22 7ND

The permit number is EPR/RP3632MU

The operator is W.J. Watkins & Son Limited

The facility is located at Cross Farm and Beacon Farm, Holsworthy Beacon, Holsworthy, Devon, EX22 7ND

The decision was effective from 01 April 2010

Summary of the decision

We have decided to vary the permit to remove an improvement condition. The condition required the permit holder to submit an emission reduction plan to reduce the level of ammonia impact from the installation at a nearby conservation site. The condition was originally included in the permit because a screening assessment conducted by the Environment Agency indicated that the farm had the potential to cause levels of ammonia in air that might cause damage or have an adverse affect to the Culm Grasslands SAC (UK0012679) and Brendon Farm (North) SSSI (Woodland Section) (1001065) conservation site.

Natural England has recently conducted a survey of Culm Grasslands SAC (UK0012679) and Brendon Farm (North) SSSI (Woodland Section) (1001065) to assess the evidence of impacts from airborne ammonia.

The results of the survey concluded that there is insufficient evidence of effects on the designated features of the conservation site consistent with the impact of ammonia.

We consider in reaching that decision we have taken into account all relevant considerations and legal requirements and that the permit will ensure that the appropriate level of environment protection is provided.

Under the Environmental Permitting Regulations (2007) we are required to review permits periodically and additionally may do so at any time in the light of new information. Should evidence of an effect consistent with the impact of ammonia be found in future site surveys, we may need to revise the permit to address the issue.

Purpose of this document

This decision document:

- explains how the applicant's application has been determined;
- provides a record of the decision-making process; and
- shows how all relevant factors have been taken into account.

Unless the decision document specifies otherwise we have accepted the applicant's proposals.

Structure of this document

- Key Issues of the decision.

Key Issues of the decision

The permit for this installation contains improvement conditions requiring the permit holder to submit an emission reduction plan to reduce the level of ammonia impact from the installation at nearby nature conservation sites; Culm Grasslands SAC (UK0012679) and Brendon Farm (North) SSSI (Woodland Section) (1001065). The improvement conditions were amended in the variation notice dated 8th August 2008.

The determination of the original application involved an assessment of the potential impact of ammonia releases from the installation on ecological receptors (European sites and Sites of Special Scientific Interest), and was carried out following the Operational Instruction 'Assessing the impact of ammonia releases from existing intensive farms on conservation sites' and supplementary guidance 'Revised habitats Assessments against UNECE Critical Levels', dated 1st August 2007. The assessment was undertaken using the Environment Agency AFP1 Screening Tool and AFP2 Modelling Tool.

This assessment showed that the installation was likely to emit ammonia at levels that might exceed the contribution to the critical level which had been assigned for Culm Grasslands SAC (UK0012679) and Brendon Farm (North) SSSI (Woodland Section) (1001065).

In support of the determination of the original permit, Natural England has subsequently undertaken additional site survey work to assess the evidence for impacts of ammonia on the sites.

As a result of this survey work Natural England wrote to the Environment Agency on the 18th June 2009 concluding that the predicted risk to the site (as predicted by the Environment Agency's original modelling assessment) does not appear to be evident in the vegetation of the sites despite the installation being in existence for a significant period of time.

On the basis of this new information the Environment Agency has removed improvement conditions IC2 and IC3 from table S1.3 Improvement programme requirements listed in Variation Notice dated 8th August 2008.

Enclosed with the variation are the following documents showing how the the conclusions have been reached in the this determination:

Letter from Natural England dated 02 June 2009