# government environmental agencies criticised over remote working from overseas amid farming sector crisis



The agencies charged with protecting Britain's natural environment and supporting farmers are increasingly veering away from their fundamental responsibilities amidst a series of alarming controversies. The recent revelations raise significant concerns as employees at various government quangos have reportedly conducted work from far-flung locations, including Asia, North America, and Australia. This situation is particularly troublesome for British farmers, who are already grappling with Labour's proposed inheritance tax policies that threaten their financial viability.

An investigation has uncovered that staff members at these agencies, employing approximately 6,000 individuals and receiving significant taxpayer funding, logged hundreds of overseas workdays in just the last three years. Data obtained under the Freedom of Information Act suggests there were over 300 instances in which employees managed the flexibility to work remotely from abroad, accumulating a total likely exceeding the reported 1,174 days due to incomplete records from NatureScot.

Among these agencies, Natural England has emerged as a standout culprit, with 150 approvals leading to nearly 1,000 working days logged abroad. Disturbingly, some employees undertook extended work periods far from home, including a notable 28-day stint in Ireland, along with multiple trips from locations such as Egypt and Japan. Critics rightly question the productivity and accountability of such arrangements, especially when British farmers must navigate a landscape of financial uncertainty and dwindling government support.

Commenting on this troubling situation, the shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster highlighted the absurdity of government employees perhaps “working from the beach,” a sentiment shared by Conservative Party representatives who emphasized that those endangering the agricultural community should not evade responsibility by retreating to exotic locales.

The Rural Payments Agency, frequently criticized for its sluggish subsidy payments to farmers, has attempted to justify the international travel of its staff, claiming such trips are essential for official duties to improve service delivery to rural businesses. However, such narratives do little to quell skepticism about how effectively these bureaucratic bodies are serving the very people who need support during this tumultuous period.

A spokesperson for Natural England defended the organization, asserting that overseas work occasionally arises from obligations requiring attendance at pivotal international conferences like COP16. Yet, with pressing challenges facing the agricultural sector—such as changing climate policies and urgent environmental measures—the rationale for such travel remains elusive and questionable.

The widening rift between bureaucratic convenience and the urgent needs of farmers will undoubtedly continue to fuel discourse, especially as the agricultural sector braces for imminent financial upheaval. With minimal regulatory oversight and a growing perception of detachment between agency operations and local concerns, tensions are set to escalate between distant bureaucrats and farmers whose livelihoods depend on these agencies' decisions.

As these organizations grapple with the ongoing fallout from their questionable operational ethics, both the public and the farming community will be watching intently, demanding accountability and assurance that environmental commitments won't come at the expense of the very individuals they are pledged to support.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14766747/Quangos-tasked-deciding-farmers-futures-allowing-staff-work-world.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rural-payments-agency-framework-document/rural-payments-agency-framework-document> - The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) is a UK government department responsible for administering financial support to farmers and rural businesses. The framework document outlines the RPA's objectives, governance, and operational procedures, including staff remuneration and conditions. It specifies that staff are subject to levels of remuneration and terms and conditions of service within the general pay structure approved by the sponsor department and the Treasury. The RPA has no delegated power to amend these terms and conditions, ensuring consistency and compliance with public sector pay controls. This document provides transparency and accountability in the RPA's operations, detailing how staff costs are managed and the agency's commitment to prudent financial management.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rural-payments-agency-annual-report-and-accounts-2022-to-2023/supporting-the-rural-community-annual-report-and-accounts-2022-23-html-version> - The Rural Payments Agency's Annual Report and Accounts for 2022-23 provides comprehensive information on the agency's performance, financial statements, and staff remuneration. The report includes a Remuneration and Staff Report, detailing the agency's remuneration policy for directors and the amounts awarded. It specifies that the CEO and members of the Executive Team are employed by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), with their remuneration set by the Prime Minister following independent advice from the Senior Salaries Review Body. This ensures that the RPA's staff remuneration aligns with government standards and maintains transparency and accountability in the agency's financial management.
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