River Action wins landmark High Court case against Shropshire Council over industrial chicken farm chaos

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High Court ruling sets national precedent that marks turning point for polluting factory farming in the UK

We have **won a major legal victory** in the High Court against Shropshire Council today, **successfully overturning the approval of a 200,000-bird intensive poultry unit** near Shrewsbury in the River Severn catchment. The High Court judgment marks a pivotal moment in the movement against factory farming in the UK.

The case was brought by **local campaigner and River Action board member Dr Alison Caffyn, supported by River Action**. The judgment quashes Shropshire Council's planning decision and marks a major turning point in the fight against the irresponsible and harmful spread of factory farms and the protection of the UK's iconic rivers.

This victory sends a clear message that planning authorities must:

1) Assess the cumulative impacts of having multiple intensive agricultural developments in one river catchment before granting permission for another.

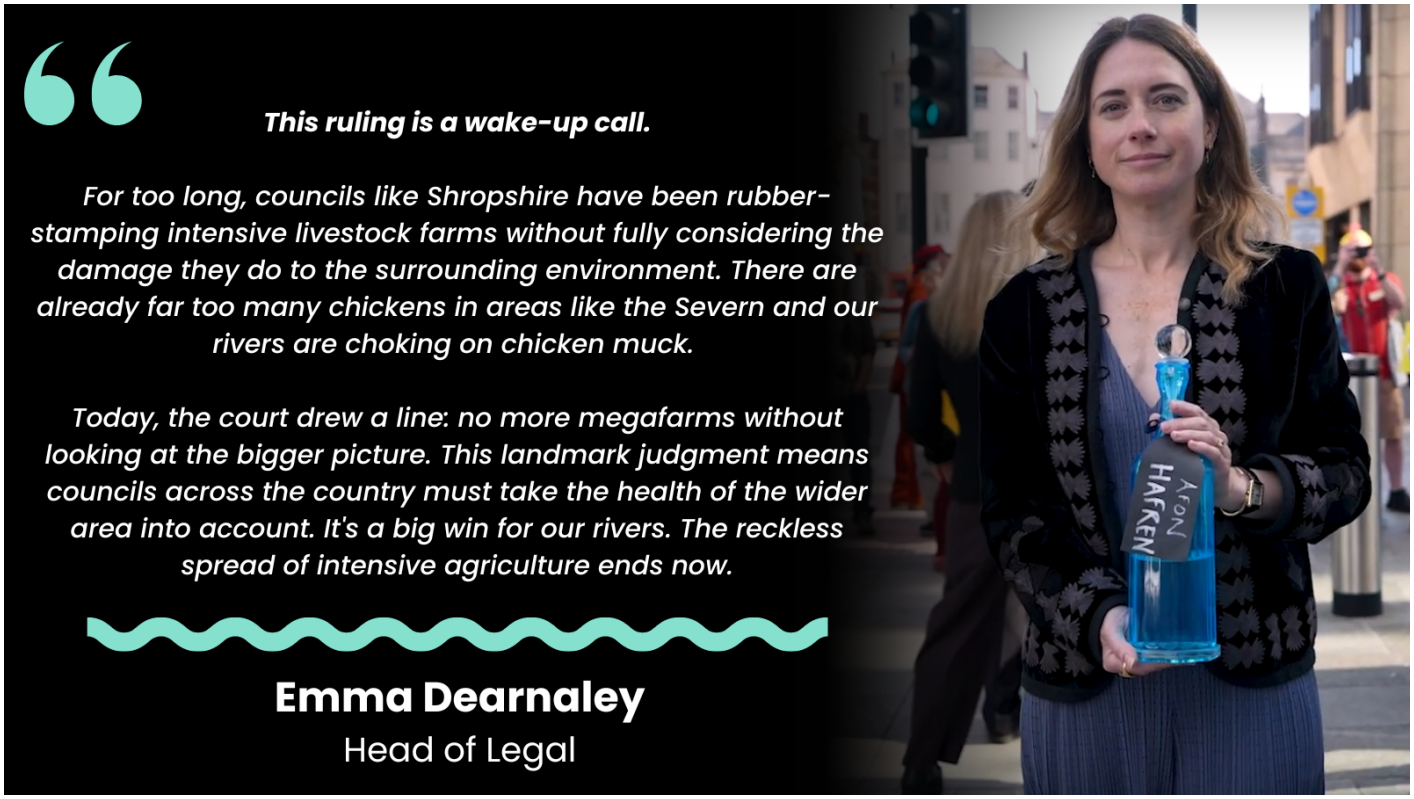
2) Consider how livestock production units dispose of the waste from treatment facilities downstream, including from anaerobic digestion plants.

The case highlights systemic failures to account for the environmental toll of having clusters of industrial-scale poultry farms in one area causing "ecological death by thousands of tonnes of chicken muck."

It has shone a light on the problems with the planning system when it comes to agricultural developments in precious and protected environmental sites, such as the River Severn and River Wye catchments.

This case has importantly clarified the approach that local authorities across the country will need to take to properly assess the cumulative and downstream environmental impacts of any future intensive farming developments in protected areas. This will mean taking a combined approach when assessing new intensive agricultural developments instead of viewing them as being unconnected to what is already there.

A watershed moment for rivers



The judicial review focused on Shropshire Council's failure to lawfully assess the environmental impact of the development, including the widespread and damaging practice of spreading poultry manure or digestate on surrounding land.

Key issues upheld by the court included:

> **Failure to assess cumulative impacts:** The council failed to assess the total impacts of the development alongside other existing ones (including increases to chicken numbers consented through environmental permits instead of planning permissions).
> **Failure to assess indirect environmental impacts:** The council failed to lawfully assess the downstream impacts of the development, in particular the spreading of digestate on land.

There are nearly 65 chickens for every person in Shropshire and yet the council still thought we needed more.

This ruling proves what we've said all along: the planning system has been putting our rivers at risk.

This case is a win for communities across the UK who are standing up to the environmental degradation caused by industrial factory farming.

Alison Caffyn
Legal Claimant and River Action Advisory Board Member

Legal significance

The tide of megafarm pollution is turning

This judgment follows several recent challenges against industrial agriculture. In March, the High Court ruled in *The National Farmers' Union v Herefordshire Council* that farming manure constitutes industrial waste in law, with significant implications for the sustainable management of manure-as-waste across the UK. Earlier this year, a proposed megafarm in Methwold, Norfolk was rejected over environmental concerns including the need to take full climate impacts into account when deciding whether to grant permission and the need to properly manage waste to prevent air and water pollution.

With the future of megafarms and our iconic rivers at a crossroads, the government now needs to drive industry-wide reform.

We hope that today's victory will be a turning point in agricultural planning and policy, putting environmental health at the heart of decisions, stopping the spread of unsustainable megafarms and delivering proper protection for our rivers.

The grant of planning permission was quashed by the court.

Shropshire Council will not be appealing the decision.

Read the full judgment here.