

Compliance & Risk

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- Figures point to widening of UK gender pay gap, p.18
- Commissioner airs current modern slavery concerns, p.19

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Irish Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill published

The Irish Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, Catherine Martin, has launched the Online Safety and Media Regulation Bill, which was published on 12 January 2022, by saying that the new legislation “marks a watershed moment as we move from self-regulation to an era of accountability in online safety”.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the Bill is the creation of a new regulator, a multi-person Media Commission, to which an Online Safety Commissioner will be appointed.

The Media Commission will primarily be responsible for overseeing the new regulatory framework for online safety created by the Bill.

The new body will replace the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland and will be at the forefront of managing updated regulations for broadcasting and video on-demand services country-wide.

The Bill will also transpose the revised Audio-visual Media Services Directive into Irish law, including the regulation of video-sharing platform services, to enhance

online safety standards.

Under the Bill, the Media Commission has robust powers to force compliance, to sanction digital platforms and, if necessary, to completely block online services. The Commission will have the power to institute and prosecute summary offences, and will also have enhanced powers to impose financial sanctions.

The regulator will be able to issue financial penalties of up to €20 million or 10% of turnover against

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Whistleblowers say Environment Agency ‘no longer deters polluters’

Three officers at England’s Environment Agency (EA) have blown the whistle to *The Guardian* newspaper and *Ends Report* environmental magazine saying that there have been such severe cuts at the regulator that they cannot do their jobs.

The officers, who wished to remain anonymous, described how they are increasingly unable to hold polluters to account or to improve the environment

as a result of the body’s policies.

The individuals preferred not to be named in the reports for fear of reprisals – one officer said that Sir James Bevan, the EA’s Chief Executive, had “been very clear that he will sack anybody that is seen to be openly criticising the agency”.

Funding for the regulator is very variable - government grants to the

agency rose from £880m to £1.05bn over the past two years, but funding for the agency’s environmental protection work has plummeted from about £170m in 2009-10 to just £94m in 2021.

Although the EA’s overall budget is substantial, the whistleblowers say that it is not being directed towards protecting or improving the environment.

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