The Environmental Services Association (ESA), the voice of the UK's waste and resource management industry, today welcomed the release of the Sentencing Councils guidance for judges sentencing those involved in waste crime. ESA's Director General, Barry Dennis said:

ESA welcomes this guidance and hopes that it will help to deter environmental criminals who pose the greatest environmental risk, whose transgressions are most difficult to detect and whose adverse environmental impact is greatest.

ESA has for many years expressed concerns that courts do not have sufficient guidance or receive sufficient training on dealing with environmental offences. They often do not fully appreciate the seriousness of such crimes, and therefore impose inadequate sentences. We would like to see a transfer of environmental knowledge to the courts, enabling them to impose appropriate sentences, and we hope this guidance and continued training of magistrates will further this aim.

The regulated industry that the ESA represents is one of the direct victims of environmental crime, as its business activities are often directly undercut by those environmental criminals who cut costs by ignoring the relevant environmental laws. Managing waste properly comes at a cost and there is always a temptation for the criminal element to seek financial benefit from circumventing the law - either through operating illegal sites, or through fly-tipping. The impact of these crimes has serious economic, environmental and social consequences.

ESA believes that a combination of education and crime prevention measures along with stronger, more consistent sentencing from the courts would lead to a reduction in environmental crime. The current situation, where the environment and human health are threatened and legitimate waste businesses are undermined by illegal operators, must be brought to an end.

ESA has also contributed to the ESAET report into crime in the waste and resource management sector, which is due to for publication in March. It will explore in more detail the impact of waste crime and make recommendations on how the waste and resource management sector can work with the Government and its agencies to tackle this important environmental and economic problem.