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**Migrant journey** Fieldfares, part of the thrush family, enjoy a rowan berry snack after migrating south to the UK for winter

## Data bill means censorship, BBC warns

**Matthew Moore** Media Correspondent

New powers allowing pre-publication censorship of the media would have a “chilling effect” on investigative journalism, the BBC has warned.

The newspaper industry has also raised objections to the Data Protection Bill, which is passing through parliament. It seeks to give individuals more control over their personal information and imposes harsher penalties

on companies that misuse it. Journalists are granted significant exemptions to the rules if they are working to expose wrongdoing and criminality.

However, there is concern that a clause of the bill would allow people who are under scrutiny to slow and even block investigations before they are published by appealing to the Information Commissioner's Office.

The BBC fears this would make the information commissioner a de facto

regulator of the media with unprecedented pre-publication powers, *The Times* understands.

The newspaper industry has raised separate objections to amendments tabled by a group of peers. These would tighten the public interest exemption and force print titles to join the press regulator Impress if they want legal protection while using private data. Most refuse to join the state-recognised body and are instead regulated by Ipsos.

## Hinkley Point ‘bad deal for consumers’

**Robin Pagnamenta**  
Deputy Business Editor

The government has saddled families with inflated household bills for decades because of the poor deal it negotiated over the Hinkley Point nuclear plant in Somerset, MPs have said.

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) criticised a contract awarded to EDF to build the first new nuclear station in Britain since 1995 as too expensive, with the burden falling most heavily on poorer households.

Meg Hillier, the committee's chairwoman, accused the government of “grave strategic errors” in crafting the deal, which will leave consumers paying £30 billion in subsidies over 35 years — five times more than expected.

“Bill-payers have been dealt a bad hand by the government in its approach to this project,” she said. “Its blinkered determination to agree the Hinkley deal, regardless of changing circumstances, means that for years to come energy consumers will face costs running to many times the original estimate.”

The government signed a preliminary deal in 2013 with EDF, the French state-owned nuclear generator, to pay a fixed price of £92.50 per megawatt hour for the electricity produced by the Hinkley station for 35 years, indexed to inflation. The costs are to be met via a levy on consumer bills once the station

enters service, expected to add £10 to £15 a year to the average household bill.

But when wholesale energy prices plunged sharply in 2014, amid growing doubts over the French reactor technology earmarked for use at Hinkley, following delays and cost overruns at other plants, the government failed to revisit the terms.

The PAC accused ministers of pressing ahead and locking consumers into an expensive deal.

“The economics of nuclear power in the UK have deteriorated since the government last formally considered its strategic case for nuclear in 2008,” the report said. “Estimated construction costs have increased while alternative low-carbon technologies have become cheaper. At the same time, fossil-fuel price projections have fallen.”

A spokesperson for the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said that it was a “competitive deal”.

EDF Energy said: “The cost of Hinkley Point C for customers has not changed and they will pay nothing for its reliable, low carbon electricity until the station is completed... Construction is fully under way and is already delivering a huge benefit to British jobs, skills and industrial strategy.”

Hannah Martin, head of energy at Greenpeace UK, said the PAC report showed that the government should revisit the project because it “makes absolutely no financial sense”.



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