



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

The Rt Hon Theresa Villiers MP

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Dear Colleague

I am pleased to announce that today we will be introducing the government's flagship Environment Bill. There is a clear and urgent scientific case, and growing public demand for acting decisively to address biodiversity loss and climate change. The Environment Bill is a central part in the government delivering a step-change in environmental protection and recovery. It will also support recent legislation to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 by minimising our waste, cleaning our air and water, and restoring habitats to allow plants and wildlife to thrive.

We published the Draft Environment (Principles and Governance) Bill in December 2018, which set out draft proposals for environmental governance after we leave the EU and were grateful to receive pre-legislative scrutiny reports from the EAC and EFRA Committees in April 2019. Since then, the government has developed an ambitious package of additional policy measures to enhance our environment which will be presented in the Bill.

Taken together the measures in the Bill will help to manage the impact of human activity on the environment, create a more sustainable economy, and enhance well-being and quality of life. The Bill will engage and empower citizens, local government, and businesses to deliver environmental outcomes and create a positive legacy for future generations.

As set out in the draft Bill we will establish a **new system of green governance and accountability**, creating a world-leading environmental watchdog in the Office of Environmental Protection (OEP), and enshrining Environmental Principles in law, which will embed environmental values at the heart of government policy making. To ensure the UK continues to drive forward ambitious action to tackle climate change, we are bringing climate change legislation within the enforcement remit of the OEP. The Bill will also implement a new statutory cycle of target setting, monitoring, planning and reporting to help deliver significant, long-term environmental improvement. This will include Environmental Improvement Plans (EIPs), the first being the 25 Year Environment Plan, and a framework for setting legally-binding targets in four priority areas: air quality, waste and resource efficiency, water, and nature. Together they will drive action by businesses and wider society to deliver environmental improvement alongside sustainable growth.

The Bill will drive a major shift in **maximising resource efficiency**, minimising waste, and moving towards a more circular economic model. We will introduce measures based on the 'polluter pays' principle, create a simplified approach to recycling, and tackle waste crime. Powers to introduce new extended producer responsibility schemes will make producers responsible for the full net costs of managing their products at end of life, encouraging them to design their products with re-use and recycling in mind. New government powers to set resource-efficiency standards for products will drive market and consumer behaviour towards durable, repairable, and recyclable products. To tackle plastic pollution, the Environment Bill will enable the creation of new charges for other single-use plastic items, similar to the carrier bag charge, which will incentivise a shift towards the use of more reusable items. We are also taking powers to establish deposit return schemes which will further incentivise consumers to reduce litter and recycle more.

The Bill will enable greater local action on **air pollution**, ensuring responsibility is shared across local government structures and public bodies; better enabling them to tackle emissions from burning coal and wood; and bringing forward powers for government to mandate recalls of vehicles and machinery when they do not meet relevant legal emission standards. The Environment Bill makes a clear commitment to set a legally binding target for the pollutant with the most significant impact on human health, fine particulate matter.

The Environment Bill will help to secure long-term, **resilient water and wastewater services**. The Bill will introduce additional requirements for water company planning for future water supply and wastewater and drainage networks, enabling more resilient solutions to drought and flooding. In a changing climate, these measures will ensure the water regulator has the powers it needs to respond to changing priorities. The Bill enhances flood and coastal erosion risk management, allowing for the expansion of existing internal drainage boards or the creation of new ones where there is local appetite to do so. We are also reforming elements of abstraction licensing to link it more tightly to our goal of restoring water bodies to as close to natural state as possible, and are creating a power to update the lists of substances and their respective standards which are potentially harmful to surface waters and groundwater.

The Environment Bill supports and enables action to **create or restore wildlife rich habitats** to enable wildlife to recover and thrive. The Bill introduces mandatory biodiversity net gain, to ensure that new developments enhance biodiversity and help deliver thriving natural spaces for communities. This will also support certainty in the planning system and therefore the delivery of new housing, while retaining and providing habitats that can enhance biodiversity. Provisions requiring the development of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) across England will support better spatial planning for nature recovery, by setting out priorities and opportunities for protecting and investing in nature within a local area. The Bill also strengthens a duty within the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 to ensure public authorities play their part in conserving and enhancing biodiversity.

The Environment Bill gives the Secretary of State the power to amend two pieces of legislation **regulating the use of chemicals** in the UK (REACH 2008). This will allow the Secretary of State to take further steps where necessary to ensure a smooth transition to a UK chemicals regime following the UK's exit from the EU. It will also make it possible to keep the legislation up to date and respond to emerging needs or ambitions for the effective management of chemicals.

The Environment Bill is the result of extensive public consultation. In July 2019 we published six government responses to consultations on measures in the Bill. Alongside the Bill we

will also publish the government response to the consultation on protecting and enhancing England's trees and woodland, covering measures to increase the transparency and accountability in the process of felling street trees.

Over half of all measures in the Environment Bill are to be extended beyond England and adopted across the Devolved Administrations. The positive extent of the join up demonstrates our ambition in working with the Devolved Administrations across the UK to better protect the environment and strengthen the Union, while respecting the devolution settlement. This join-up is the result of extensive engagement with the Devolved Administrations over the past year by both Ministers and officials during which we have discussed all policy areas of the Bill and is extremely welcome.

The Environment Bill is one of the key vehicles for delivering the ambitious vision we set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan. It will also enable us to make big steps towards delivering our goal that this will be the first generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than we found it. I would welcome your support in ensuring successful parliamentary passage of this landmark legislation. It is a tremendous opportunity and I hope that you will agree we should grasp it with both hands.

Following introduction, I will be holding a series of drop-in sessions to discuss the Bill and its measures with colleagues. If you would like to attend one of these sessions please contact robert.courts.mp@parliament.uk.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theresa Villiers', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Theresa Villiers

