

Environment Bill resumes passage through Parliament

The government's landmark legislation to transform our environment has returned to Parliament today (Tuesday, 3 November) after a pause due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The [Environment Bill sets out a comprehensive and world-leading vision](#) to allow our environment to prosper for future generations and ensure that we maintain and enhance our environmental protections.

A key vehicle for delivering the bold vision [set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan](#), the Bill will enhance wildlife, tackle air pollution, transform how we manage our resources and waste, and improve the resilience of water supplies in a changing climate to ensure we protect and restore the natural environment.

Welcoming the Environment Bill back to Parliament, Environment Minister Rebecca Pow said:

Protecting and enhancing our environment is a priority for this Government, especially as we strive to build back greener from the coronavirus pandemic.

The Environment Bill is one of the most important pieces of legislation for a generation, and it's essential that we complete its passage into law as soon as possible so that we can continue our work to transform society and improve our air, water and nature.

Legally binding targets will be introduced for air quality, nature, water and resource and waste efficiency, and a new, independent Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) will be created to hold government and public bodies to account for their environmental credentials.

The Office's enforcement powers will cover all climate change legislation and hold the government to account on its commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050. By also championing nature-based solutions, the Bill demonstrates our commitment to tackle climate change.

The Environment Bill will:

- ensure the environment is at the heart of all government policy making and that both this government and future governments are held to account if they fail to uphold their environmental duties, including meeting net-zero by 2050 and new long-term legally binding targets on biodiversity, air quality, water, and resource and waste efficiency
- improve air quality – by requiring a legally-binding target to reduce

concentrations of fine particulate matter (PM2.5), the pollutant of most concern for human health, and by increasing local powers to address sources of air pollution

- restore and enhance nature – through ‘biodiversity net gain’ ensuring new development enhances nature, helping to deliver thriving natural spaces for local communities. We will improve protection for our natural habitats in supporting a Nature Recovery Network by establishing Local Nature Recovery Strategies, giving communities a greater say in the protection of nature
- transform the way we manage our waste – through powers to ensure that producers take responsibility for the waste they create, introducing a consistent approach to recycling including food waste, tackling waste crime, introducing deposit return schemes and more effective litter enforcement. Powers to introduce new charges will minimise the use and impacts of single use plastics, and we will also be able to ban the export of plastic waste to developing countries
- protect precious water resources – by increasing sustainable water management through securing long-term, resilient water and wastewater services in the face of a changing climate. Powers to direct water companies to work together to meet current and future demand for water will make planning more robust

The legislation builds on this government’s decisive action to protect the environment as [set out in our 25 Year Environment Plan](#). Our binding commitment to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and [hosting the COP26 climate change conference](#) will keep the UK at the forefront of international work on these issues.

The Bill also sets a new and ambitious domestic framework for environmental governance as we maximise the opportunities created by leaving the European Union.

Ahead of the Environment Bill’s return, a number of amendments have been tabled by the Government for consideration. These clarify how the OEP should exercise its enforcement powers so as to leave no doubt about its thresholds for action, and to protect its confidence and ability to focus on the most serious cases whilst maintaining its crucial independence.

Other amendments would enable the creation of Species Conservation Strategies and Protected Site Strategies to deal with the complex challenge of protecting and restoring species and habitats at risk, while also enabling much needed development.

Following the Bill’s completion of Committee Stage, it will be further scrutinised by the whole House of Commons at Report Stage and Third Reading, after which it will move to the House of Lords for further debate and scrutiny.