

Environment Bill sets out vision for a greener future

Our precious natural environment will be better protected for generations to come with today's (Thursday 30 January) introduction of a far-reaching Environment Bill.

The speedy return of the Bill to Parliament following the General Election underlines the government's commitment to tackling climate change and to protecting and restoring our natural environment for future generations.

For the first time, the enhanced Bill will create new powers to stop the exports of polluting plastic waste to developing countries, which could prevent harmful waste from being shipped out of sight whilst boosting the UK's domestic recycling system.

Tackling plastic pollution is just one example of where our commitments to the environment will go beyond the EU's level of ambition and – by freeing ourselves from future changes to EU law – we will be able to lead the way at home and abroad to deliver global environmental change.

More broadly, the ground-breaking Bill will enshrine environmental principles in law and introduce measures to improve air and water quality, tackle plastic pollution and restore habitats so plants and wildlife can thrive.

The Bill will include a new commitment to review the biggest developments in environmental legislation from around the world every other year. We use the findings in considering the UK's own environmental plans.

This will work alongside a requirement for current and future Ministers to make a statement to Parliament identifying environmental impacts of all new environmental primary legislation – demonstrating the government's ambition to be a world leader on these issues.

Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers said:

We are facing climate change and our precious natural environment is under threat. We need to take decisive action.

We have set out our pitch to be a world leader on the environment as we leave the EU and the Environment Bill is a crucial part of achieving this aim. It sets a gold standard for improving air quality, protecting nature, increasing recycling and cutting down on plastic waste.

This will build on the UK's strong track record as the [first major economy to commit to reach net zero emissions by 2050](#) and will drive further action in this super year for the environment, culminating in the UK welcoming the world to the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference in November in Glasgow.

As well as the measures outlined above, legislation will create legally-binding environmental improvement targets. A new independent Office for Environmental Protection will be established to scrutinise environmental policy and law, investigate complaints and take enforcement action against public authorities, if necessary, to uphold our environmental standards. The office's powers will cover all climate change legislation and hold the government to account on its commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050. This ambition will be supported by championing nature-based solutions, helping to demonstrate our commitment to tackle climate change.

The Bill places the bold ambition of our flagship [25 Year Environment Plan](#) on a statutory footing and creates powers to enhance nature and habitats, and combat the devastating effects of plastics on our natural environment. Introducing charges for a number of single use plastic items will build on the success of the government's 5p plastic bag charge, which has cut sales from the biggest supermarkets by 90% since 2015.

The Bill, included in December's [Queen's Speech](#) and introduced today, will:

- ensure the environment is at the heart of all government policy making and that this government – and future governments – are held to account if they fail to uphold their environmental duties, including meeting [net-zero by 2050](#) and wider long-term legally binding targets on biodiversity, air quality, water, and resource efficiency and waste management that are established under the Bill. And, as announced for the first time today, we will conduct a review every two years of significant developments in international legislation on the environment to ensure we keep abreast of developments in driving forward our environmental protection legislation. We will publish this review and ensure its findings are factored into our Environmental Improvement Plan and environmental target setting process, both of which will be enshrined in law.
- transform the way we manage our waste – through powers that enable us to require producers to take more responsibility for the products and materials they place on the market, including when they become waste, introducing a consistent approach to recycling, tackling waste crime, creating powers to introduce bottle deposit return schemes and having more effective litter enforcement. A power to stop the export of polluting plastic waste to less developed countries will ensure we deal with more of our waste at home and lighten our footprint on the planet. We will consult with industry, NGOs, and local authorities on specific

restrictions or prohibitions. The Bill will also create powers to introduce new charges for single use plastic items to minimise their use and incentivising reusable alternatives to reduce their environmental impact.

- improve air quality – by introducing measures to reduce pollution so children and young people can live longer healthier lives. We are committing to set an ambitious, legally-binding target to reduce fine particulate matter, the pollutant of greatest harm to human health. In addition, this Bill will ensure that local authorities have a clear framework for tackling air pollution and simple to use powers to address pollution in their areas. The government will also be empowered to mandate manufacturers to recall vehicles and machinery when they do not meet the relevant environmental standards.
- restore and enhance nature – through ‘biodiversity net gain’ we will ensure that the new houses we build are delivered in a way which protects and enhances nature, helping to deliver thriving natural spaces for local communities. We will lay the foundation for the Nature Recovery Network to deliver long lasting action for nature by establishing Local Nature Recovery Strategies, strengthening the duty on public authorities to enhance biodiversity and giving communities a greater say in the management of street trees. We are also legislating for conservation covenants to improve long term conservation management.
- 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 Bill builds on this government’s decisive action to protect the environment, as set out in our 25 Year Environment Plan. Legislation to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and hosting the Climate-focussed COP26 in 2020 will also keep the UK at the forefront of international work on these issues.

The Bill was included in December’s ambitious Queen’s Speech which outlined the government’s plans to take us out of the EU, overhaul our immigration system, and enshrine in law record investment for the NHS.

What is new in this Bill:

- Powers to stop the exports of polluting plastic waste to developing countries: Today’s Bill includes a power which will enable the government to deliver its pledge to ban or restrict the export of polluting plastic waste to non-OECD countries. We will consult with industry, NGOs, and local authorities on specific restrictions or

prohibitions.

- A two-yearly review of the significant developments in international legislation on the environment to ensure we keep abreast of developments in driving forward our environmental protection legislation: We will be a global leader in championing the most effective policies and legislation for our environmental ambition. We will publish a report of the significant developments in international legislation on the environment every two years and ensure its findings are factored into our Environmental Improvement Plan and environmental target setting process, both of which will be enshrined in law.