

Gove: Cleaner, Greener, Stronger – Britain after Brexit

Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, speaking today at Conservative Party Conference in Manchester said:

(Check against delivery)

“It’s wonderful to be here in Manchester – speaking to you as Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The fact that I’m on this stage this year is proof that this Government is committed to recycling.

And, let me tell you, no-one is a bigger supporter of re-using once discarded material than me.

So I’m naturally keen on politicians coming back to the frontline from a period of doing other things.

But I do have a problem when those politicians return to the fray with a message that – in their absence – the public have got it wrong.

When Tony Blair or Vince Cable tell us that the referendum decision to leave the EU must be overturned, that the votes of 17.4 million people should be disregarded, that we should exit from Brexit and stay in the European Union – then I feel it’s time to stand up for something precious, something special to us all, something that defines us a nation.

Democracy.

So let’s send a clear message from this hall today.

We’re leaving.

We’re taking back control.

We’re going to make a success of life outside the European Union.

And nowhere are the possibilities for progress greater than with the environment.

We now have a once in a lifetime opportunity.

For the first time in more than forty years we can – together – now determine our own environmental policies.

We can do what we think is best to make our country cleaner, greener and more beautiful.

For everyone who loves the natural world these are exciting times.

And that is why I feel privileged to be part of a great team at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs determined to seize the moment.

My colleagues George Eustice, Thérèse Coffey, John Gardiner, Charlotte Vere, Nigel Adams, Kevin Hollinrake and Rebecca Pow are the Tory Green Team.

We are fortunate to follow superb ministers such as Andrea Leadsom, Liz Truss, Owen Paterson, Caroline Spelman, Jim Paice, Rupert de Mauley, Oliver Henley, John Taylor, Richard Benyon and Rory Stewart.

They achieved a huge amount in office.

But there is still so much to do.

Global warming threatens the balance of life on earth.

Plastics in our oceans, waste in our rivers and nitrogen oxide in our air endanger our fellow animals and harm our children's health.

Precious habitats – from ancient woodlands in our own country to the great green lungs of our tropical rainforests – are being lost – and with them a home for threatened wildlife.

Even as I speak a Labour Council – a Labour Council – is chopping down precious historic trees in Sheffield – hiding behind a PFI contract as it engages in wanton ecological vandalism.

The fight against these threats is our fight. Our country's. And our party's.

Because Conservatism is rooted in nature. In respect for human nature. And in reverence for the natural world.

Each of us has an attachment to a special part of this beautiful country, somewhere we call home or know as a haven of peace, somewhere enchanted by childhood memories of play, adventure and exploration.

And as Conservatives, as those whose love of country is rooted in love of home, we are instinctive defenders of beauty in the landscape, protectors of wildlife, friends of the earth.

The first, and still the most ambitious, green party in this country is the Conservative Party.

And leaving the European Union gives us the chance to secure a special prize – a Green Brexit.

Now, of course, there have been environmental rules which we helped develop while in the EU which are important and which we must keep – indeed – where possible – strengthen.

And we will want to secure an ambitious free trade deal with the EU – alongside other new trade deals – so our great farmers can sell more of their

wonderful produce.

But now we are leaving – and taking back control – there are so many ways in which we can enhance our environment.

Take the EU's Common Fisheries Policy – it has been economically and environmentally disastrous.

Lack of control over our own waters has gone hand in hand with drastic overfishing and the depletion of a wonderful, renewable, natural resource.

Outside the EU we can do so much better.

And the EU's Common Agricultural Policy has been a failure – environmentally damaging and socially unjust.

It's damaged natural habitats, hit biodiversity and harmed wildlife.

The number of farmland birds has reduced by more than half, pollinators such as wild and honey bees have suffered a drastic decline in numbers, and our rivers and chalk streams have seen fish stocks decline and small mammals disappear.

On top of that, the CAP has channeled hundreds of thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money to the already wealthy, simply because of the amount of land they have.

That is plain wrong.

And what makes it worse is that the CAP hasn't provided the right support to our farmers in their drive to improve animal welfare standards and enhance the environment.

We have the best farmers in the world, producing the best food in the world, but inside the EU they are held back by bureaucracy, hampered in their efforts to get into new markets, and hindered in their ambitions to further improve our environment.

Our rural communities need a new deal.

Outside the EU we can do so much better.

For a start, outside the Common Fisheries Policy there is a sea of opportunity for British fishermen.

We can take back control of our territorial waters.

We'll let in others only on our terms.

We can then develop a world-leading policy on marine conservation.

And give British fishermen first call on this resource.

Isn't that a great prize to aim for?

And, outside the Common Agricultural Policy, we can stop subsidising the rich on the basis of how much land they own and instead spend money on enhancing the environment, supporting innovation, improving productivity, training a new generation of entrepreneurial young farmers and reviving rural communities.

Isn't that a great Conservative mission?

And outside the European Union's single market, we can improve animal welfare, supporting more humane methods of farming and restricting the live export of animals.

Isn't that a cause in which we can all believe?

The opportunities to show leadership in respect for animal life, in restoring health to our oceans and in farming sustainably, are now all the greater because we've decided to be outside the European Union.

Which is another reason why that vote to take back control was a liberating, progressive and democratic act.

One of the reasons I campaigned for us to leave the EU is because I believe so deeply in democracy.

Politicians should be held accountable for the promises they make and citizens should be able to decide their nation's destiny.

That is the prize we chose to seize last year with the referendum vote.

But like all prizes worth winning, there will be challenges on the road to securing that freedom.

In my own department we need to get the systems in place to allow exports and imports to flow as they should.

But while we should never underestimate the work that needs to be done, neither should we understate the re-invigorating power of restoring democratic control to politics.

Inside the EU ministers have been, and still are, prevented from acting as they think right and as the people want.

Whether its fisheries or farming, bin collections or VAT rates, controlling our borders or improving animal welfare, EU law currently binds our hands.

But we will be free of those handcuffs by the time of the next election, outside the EU, and able to put in our manifesto the policies the country needs, which the European Court can no longer strike down.

Let us pledge to use that freedom wisely, to better support the vulnerable and the voiceless, to fight injustice and to build a country which everyone is proud to call home.

But let us also be determined never again to give that freedom away.

Of course while we plan for the opportunities to come, it's vital that we start setting the direction of travel now.

Which is why, since the election, we've been acting decisively and rapidly to show how determined we are, to use every lever we can to improve our environment.

That is why we have shown immediate leadership by demanding that our roads become greener and ending the sale of new diesel and petrol cars from 2040.

That leadership has resulted in car companies offering their own scrappage schemes to get rid of dirty diesels. It has meant that taxi firms like Uber have pledged to get rid of polluting vehicles well before that 2040 deadline.

And now great British entrepreneurs like James Dyson are inventing new cleaner, greener vehicles to meet global demand.

We have also acted decisively in protecting our seas.

Plastic pollution has been slowly choking our oceans.

There is a need to act before fish and bird life are devastated.

And so we have acted.

The plastic bag charge has seen a massive reduction in demand, down 80%.

And already this Government has announced a ban on the plastic microbeads which pollute our seas.

And we are looking to go further to reduce plastic waste by working with industry to see how we could introduce a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles.

Our oceans are our planet's greatest natural resource and this Government is determined to ensure we restore them to health for the next generation.

And on animal welfare we will take the tough action necessary to deal with those whose callousness or greed inflicts pain and suffering on innocent creatures.

At the moment the maximum sentence for animal cruelty is just six months.

I believe that when we face deliberate, calculating and sadistic behaviour, we need to deploy the full force of the law to show we will not tolerate evil.

Which is why we will bring forward legislation to increase punishments for the most horrific acts of animal cruelty to five year sentences.

Animals are sentient beings, they are in our care, they deserve our protection.

The policy choices we've made are demonstrations of the values in which we believe.

Values we need to articulate more clearly than ever.

At times of technological change and international uncertainty, it has always been conservatives – committed to the values of enterprise and compassion, national renewal and care for the environment – who have generated greater prosperity and secured a better world for the next generation.

In the late Victorian Age, it was Benjamin Disraeli who responded to the dramatic upheavals of his own age by restoring confidence in British global leadership, giving workers the chance to have a home of their own and introducing ground-breaking legislation to improve our environment.

At the turn of the Century in America, it was the Republican Teddy Roosevelt who was the world's most progressive leader. He met the challenge of populism head on by showing how vigorous, self-confident, conservative leadership could make change work for everyone. He tackled the monopolies that were sapping faith in free markets and established the national parks that set a new standard in environmental protection.

And in the Eighties here in Britain, it was Margaret Thatcher who responded to the sense across the West that decline was inevitable by renewing Britain's role as a leader on the world stage. She boldly took on those economic interests that stood in the way of growth and innovation and she alerted the world to the need for environmental action to deal with CFCs and combat climate change.

That is why we should learn from Benjamin Disraeli, Theodore Roosevelt and Margaret Thatcher, by demonstrating that it is through the democratic vitality of nation states that we can show the leadership necessary to build a better future for the next generation.

And by confronting vested interests, we can unleash the innovation which will provide prosperity for the next generation.

And by enhancing environmental protection, we can hand on our planet in cleaner, greener and healthier state to the next generation.

That is our responsibility, our duty, our mission.

In a time of global uncertainty, when our nation can lead again, it is our responsibility, our duty, our mission to show what Britain can do and lead the way to renewal.

That is Conservatism at it very best and that is the path we choose to take."

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For further information, please contact the Press Office on 020 7984 8121.