

Legally binding targets to help “build back greener”

Today the government has [set out how it will use ambitious, legally binding targets](#) under its landmark Environment Bill to combat the environmental and climate challenges we face.

The government will introduce at least one long-term target in four priority areas to drive significant and lasting environmental improvements: cleaner air, cleaner water, less waste and more biodiversity.

To make sure we are continuing to tackle the most pressing or newly emerging issues – further priority areas and targets can be introduced at a later date, informed by the latest scientific evidence.

This major new step will make sure both this and any future governments continue to deliver a truly green recovery – meeting the Prime Minister’s commitment to “build back greener”.

These long-term targets will be supported by interim targets to ensure we stay on track – these will set out our five-year trajectory, and the government will report annually on our progress.

The four priority areas, and proposed objectives for targets, include:

- Air quality: To support our robust action to improve air quality across the country, we will explore targets focusing specifically on reducing public exposure to fine particulate matter (PM2.5), the air pollutant that has the most significant impact on our health
- Resource efficiency and waste reduction: Potential targets will look to increase resource productivity and reduce the volume of residual waste and plastic pollution we generate
- Biodiversity: We will explore targets to restore and create wildlife-rich habitats in our protected sites on land, in freshwaters and at sea and in the wider countryside, and to increase species populations on land and improve marine biodiversity
- Water: We will also look to set targets to tackle pollution from agriculture and waste water to improve water quality, as well as a target on water demand to reduce the volume that is abstracted

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

The targets we set under our landmark Environment Bill will be the driving force behind our bold action to protect and enhance our natural world – guaranteeing real and lasting progress on some of the biggest environmental issues facing us today.

I hope these targets will provide some much-needed certainty to businesses and society, as we work together to build back better

and greener.

To set these ambitious targets, which will also apply to any future governments, Defra will use a robust, evidence-led process in collaboration with independent experts and stakeholders to make sure these are strong, meaningful and environmental outcome focused.

These will build on the significant progress made through the existing commitments in the [25 Year Environment Plan](#), by identifying further gaps for improvement to tackle some of the serious challenges that remain.

To hold the Government to account, the new environmental watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection, will also report annually on the progress that has been made in improving the natural environment in accordance with these targets.

Once proposed targets are developed, businesses, communities and civil society will have an opportunity to share their views in response to a public consultation that is expected in early 2022.

The Environment Bill, which will resume its passage through parliament as soon as possible, 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 our presidency of COP26 in November 2021 will also keep the UK at the forefront of international work on these issues.