

Let's create higher environmental standards

I am grateful to Owen Paterson for pointing out in recent speeches that the EU's environmental policy which we have to adopt has in several crucial ways let us down badly. It is a myth that the EU has created high environmental standards that we would not have created for ourselves, and a myth that all the EU's environmental decisions have raised those standards.

Indeed, the UK was a pioneer of higher environmental standards before joining the EU, and an author and enthusiast of some of the better environmental measures the EU did introduce. The UK was early into the crucial business of cleaning up the water courses and containing and processing sewage, with large Victorian schemes to segregate fluids and to eliminate disease carrying water from our tanks and taps.

In more recent years the UK pioneered clean air acts to reduce the burden of dirty smoke, particulates and harmful chemicals coming from factories and commercial premises, and from the domestic fireplace.

The UK pre the EU was good at public open spaces, parks and National Parks to preserve some of the rural landscape in or near to built up areas.

The EU has forced us into environmental damage in several important respects. It has decided that burning biomass – wood to you and me – is good because it lowers CO2 output and recommends it for power stations. That leaves us with a problem with the smoke and particulates.

It pushed diesel cars as another good answer to CO2 issues. Now people are worried about the impact so many older diesel cars have on Nox and Sox and particulates in the air around our busier roads.

It now pushes electric vehicles without exploring the full impact of battery production and disposal on the environment, or considering the ways in which the electricity will be generated to sustain this extra demand. In a country like Germany present policies rely on burning a lot of coal in power stations.

Out of the EU we can have a more positive environmental policy. It might include concreting over fewer acres of countryside for houses, once we have in place a new migration policy. It would definitely include a fishing policy that lands all fish caught, instead of returning many of them dead to the ocean.