

Michael Gove speech to Conservative Party Conference 2018

Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, speaking today at Conservative Party Conference at The ICC, Birmingham, said:

(Check against delivery)

“Thank you Lewis, for your inspirational story.

Your idealism, your dedication and your courage are an example to us all.

Thank you for campaigning on behalf of our precious oceans.

Our island nation has been defined by its relationship with the sea.

It has been our doorway to global trade, a treasure house of oil and gas, and the home to teeming stocks of fish.

But now our oceans are in danger.

Danger from climate change, from chemical residues, from exploitation and indeed from plastic.

The equivalent of a dumper truck of plastic is dropped in the sea every minute of every day.

Unless we change course, by the year 2050 the seas will contain more plastic than fish.

We cannot, and we will not, allow that to happen.

Which is why we need, in the words of Winston Churchill, action this day.

And we are acting.

Already the plastic bag charge has cut the number distributed by almost 90 per cent.

We are unleashing the innovative energy of our scientists, and the entrepreneurial flair of our businesses, to develop new greener products that are already generating new jobs.

And later this year we will launch a new front in the war against waste.

We will take steps to make recycling easier, invest in cleaner technologies, and take tougher action against the fly-tippers and waste criminals who pollute our landscape and trash our blue planet.

Determined, focussed and effective action to conserve our environment from a Conservative Government.

As we know all too well from our history, if you want a mess cleared up you need a Conservative Government.

In 1979, after our economy had been trashed by Labour, it was a Conservative Government that came to the rescue.

And in 2010, we inherited a deficit out of control, rocketing unemployment and young lives wasted.

But now, thanks to the steps we took, we have a dramatically reduced deficit, three million new jobs created and youth unemployment is at a record low.

The Conservatives rescued our country again.

I feel obliged to point out that every step of this essential economic repair was vigorously opposed by the Labour Party.

And if last week told us anything, it's that we must not allow Labour to wreck our economy ever again.

Harold Wilson used to say the Labour Party was a moral crusade or it was nothing.

Now Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party is a toxic cocktail of unrepentant Marxism-Leninism and unacceptable antisemitism.

They are giving all the errors of the twentieth century another chance to wreck our society.

We've seen how this story ends before – in misery and shame.

When our Jewish friends and neighbours live in fear for their futures, let us stand with them against prejudice, against intimidation, against bigotry and against hate.

So let us take action today. Right here, right now.

Let a message come loud and clear from this hall, a message of unshakeable solidarity with the Jewish community.

And this week, in this Party, for the sake of our children, let us commit to unite so that the Moscow-loving, Hamas-hugging, high-taxing, moderate-bashing, job-destroying, National Anthem-avoiding, NATO-hating, class war-provoking, one-man museum of economic folly that is Jeremy Corbyn, is never let anywhere near Downing Street.

And we should also never forget that Labour's threat to the economy is also a threat to the environment.

You can't invest in enhancing the environment unless you have a healthy economy.

Just as you can't have sustainable growth without protecting the environment.

And with our world warming, our forest cover dwindling, our wildlife in danger and our global population growing, we desperately need action this day.

Which is why the work of the great DEFRA team is so critical.

For all the fantastic work that they do, I thank my Parliamentary colleagues: George Eustice, Therese Coffey, David Rutley, John Gardiner, Charlotte Vere, Iain Stewart, Kevin Hollinrake and Craig Tracey.

For the great job they do, thank you also to the brilliant team of civil servants in DEFRA and its agencies.

I also want to thank tens of thousands of more great people who I get to work with.

They are people upon whom this country depends so much. They are the backbone of Britain. Our farmers. Let's show them our appreciation.

If we are to feed a hungry world and safeguard the soil, the water and the air on which sustainable food production depend, then we in Government need to act to secure a better future for farming.

And leaving the European Union allows us to act faster and more flexibly to sweep away the barriers which have stood in the way of modernising farming.

Our new Agriculture Bill will help farmers to be more productive and ensure they get a fair price for their produce.

It will mean that they can invest in new technology to help them provide a harvest for the world.

And when we are outside the EU, we will also publish a new food strategy for Britain.

We will ensure that food production is truly sustainable, replenishing the soil, using energy wisely and supporting innovation.

And we will reform food labelling so that we uphold the highest animal welfare standards and give consumers the information they need to stay safe.

Food and drink is one of our greatest success stories, not least here in Birmingham and the Midlands, home of Cadbury's and the Balti, Staffordshire cheese and Melton Mowbray pork pies.

Conservative ministers will act to ensure that we lead the world in safe, affordable, healthy food.

And the first step in that strategy will be reducing food waste.

Every year, millions of tonnes of good, nutritious, edible food is thrown away.

This is an environmental, economic and moral folly, and we will address it.

I can announce action this day to invest £15 million so that food which would otherwise be wasted is redistributed to those most in need.

Working with industry and charities, we should be able to get up to 250 million extra meals a year onto the tables and plates of the most deserving in our society.

This is determined green action from a Conservative Government.

Action that helps the planet, helps the poorest and remains true to our Conservative values.

And no Conservative value runs deeper than the desire to make our world better for our children.

To be Conservative is to love what we know, to cherish our home, and there is no more beautiful home on Earth than ours.

Whether it's the Lake District that so moved Wordsworth, the Yorkshire Dales that inspired the Brontes, the stark majesty of the Fens or the lush green fields of Somerset, Dorset and Devon, we are heirs to an inheritance of natural beauty which moves the soul.

But over the course of the last hundred years, we have seen that beauty besmirched, nature in retreat and wildlife threatened.

We have lost more than half of our farmland birds.

Water voles, red squirrels and hedgehogs have been increasingly under threat.

More than 90% of our wildflower meadows are gone.

We have a responsibility to the next generation, to the place we call home and to the whole planet, to reverse that destruction.

And that is exactly what this Conservative Government will do.

We will pay our farmers the money that they deserve – the money that they need – to look after our countryside and restore natural beauty.

We will make more space for nature with stronger protection for ancient woodland while planting eleven million new trees.

And we will ensure that when the new homes we need are built, that developers not only meet the highest standards of quality in design but they also reverse environmental damage and invest in a greener, more beautiful Britain.

And outside the European Union we can also right another historic wrong.

We can at long last reverse the tragic decline of our fishing industry.

And yes, for me this is personal.

My dad worked in the fish trade and 35 years ago his small business had to close, as the fishing industry suffered inside the EU's Common Fisheries Policy.

The CFP has inflicted deep economic and environmental damage.

But now, thanks to our vote to Leave, we are taking back control of our waters.

More fish for British boats means that there could be millions of pounds extra earned by our fishermen.

And we will make sure that we fish sustainably, by ensuring that we decide who fishes in our seas and on what terms.

As an independent coastal state, we will once more be in control of one of our most precious, renewable, national assets.

Let us all keep our eyes on that prize – a new sea of opportunity.

And leaving the EU also allows us to set a global standard for environmental protection – to deliver a Green Brexit.

No one voted to leave in order to harm the environment – far from it.

So through the first Environment Bill in more than 20 years, we will restore nature, purify our air, and ensure the powerful are properly held to account for their commitments to the natural world.

We can also do more on a mission close to my heart and to so many British hearts – improving animal welfare.

The animals who share this planet with us, and indeed often share a home with us, need our care and protection.

Exploitation, callousness and cruelty are never acceptable.

Animals are our fellow sentient beings.

They show loyalty and devotion, and they know pleasure and pain.

They are partners with us in evolution's great pattern of life.

And that is why this Government is acting today to protect and enhance animal welfare.

Already we have acted to ensure that CCTV cameras are installed in all abattoirs so there is no hiding place for cruelty.

And we are acting against the cruel abuse of puppy farming by making sure that domestic pets cannot be trafficked for tainted cash.

We will also use the full force of the criminal law to punish those responsible for the worst acts of cruelty.

At the moment those who abuse animals face a maximum sentence of 6 months.

We will ensure that is increased to 5 years.

We will show zero tolerance towards those who have zero compassion for animals.

And internationally we are protecting our most endangered species, by deploying our money and elite troops to tackle the criminal gangs who are responsible for slaughtering one of the world's most iconic species: the African elephant.

In the last ten years almost a quarter of the population of African elephants has been eradicated – victims of the poachers who are feeding the illegal trade in ivory.

That is why we are introducing some of the world's toughest measures to tackle this trade.

We have a duty to take action this day to ensure this slaughter stops and we save the African elephant from extinction.

But we know that there is more that we have to do to uphold our manifesto pledge to hand on our environment in a better state to our children.

We need more action on pollution to secure clean air for our children to breathe.

More action to safeguard marine wildlife by increasing the area of the world's oceans which is protected from less than 10% to 30%.

More action to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that fuel global warming.

More action to get water companies to tackle leakage and invest in the environment.

More action to bring dwindling fish stocks back to our rivers.

More action to save other endangered species from pangolins to rhinos.

More action to develop the technologies which will free us from reliance on harmful chemicals.

More action to help our bees and pollinators.

In short, more action to preserve our world.

Some people might say that we are setting our sights too high.

To them I say, you don't know our party.

It was Conservatives who abolished the slave trade, cleared Victorian slums, made working conditions decent in our factories, gave our cities clean water, delivered equal votes for women, introduced equal marriage for all, fought

against fascism and communism, extended state education to all, built record numbers of homes for working people, led the fight against global warming, established the first national living wage, gave the poorest pupils in our schools the most money, allowed record numbers of working people to graduate from university, and ensured a record number of people were in work.

We are the party of real progress and radical reform.

The party relentlessly focused on the future and its promise.

The party that cherishes what we have in this country and wants us to be an example to the whole world.

And together, united, we can ensure that this country, and our world, are cleaner, greener and stronger.

Thank you.”

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