

My speech during the Report Stage of the Environment Bill, 26 May 2021

There is much to welcome in the Government's aims. Like most MPs, I look forward to cleaner water and cleaner air. It is right that we take more care of the other species that we share our islands with, and I look forward to those greener and pleasanter lands having more protection and more support. I also welcome the idea that we should plant many more trees. However, at this point in our deliberations, we should ask the Minister to give us a bit more background and information about the costs of this transformation so that we can know that it is realistic and that it will be properly shared.

When we look at the legislation itself and at the impact assessments, we see that there is very little by way of hard information about how much cost may be entailed and who should primarily bear that. There are wide-ranging powers to introduce more waste charges, for example, but the statements in the impact materials say that an impact cannot be assessed and that it will depend, in due course, on what actual charges are brought in. When we look at the very expensive rules on producer responsibility—taking more responsibility for packaging, batteries, waste, electrical equipment and end-of-life vehicles—we are told that a partial cost of the first item is about £1 billion a year, but there is no information on the full cost and there is no information on the others. There is a bit of information on the cost on housebuilders for the habitat provisions, and there is not a lot of worked-through financial information on the deposit return scheme.

I think that there are ways forward where we can make sure both that we have a better environment and that we are earning more revenue from suitable and sustainable exploitation of nature's abundance. I hope that the Government will work hard on finding ways that enable livelihoods to be increased and improved, just as we are also doing the right things by the environment.

Let us take the case of trees, for example. I do hope that, as we plant many more trees, there will be more sustainable forestry. I always thought it quite wrong that we import so much wood from across the Atlantic to burn in the Drax power station, when surely we should be looking for sustainable sources at home. It is also quite wrong that we import so much of the timber that we need for our big house building projects, when, again, this is a good climate for growing softwood. Surely we can go about our task of finding sustainable ways. We need to cut the wood miles and to have that sustainable forestry here, as well as having the beautiful and diverse trees in our landscape in suitable places where the Government will offer their own taxpayer-based financial support.

Let us hear a little more about the livelihoods and the opportunities. Let us show how we can have both a beautiful countryside and a working countryside, so that we can cut the wood miles and the food miles. We should ensure more buy-in from business and individuals to these great aims of having a better natural environment because of the opportunities to do more at home, and have

that happy conjunction of success in business, harnessing nature's abundance and the beauty of nature's abundance, while respecting all the other species that share our islands with us.