

Speech: Environment Secretary sets out plans to enhance environmental standards

I am the last person to shy away from criticising the European Union when they get it wrong. Indeed, one of the reasons I campaigned for us to leave the EU was because I've seen first hand the damage it has done to our environment.

I grew up in Aberdeen in the Eighties all too vividly aware of how the Common Fisheries policy depleted fish stocks, damaged sustainability and, in the process, undermined the long-term health of our coastal communities.

And as a worker at one point in a Farmers' co-operative, I also saw how another arm of EU environmental action, the Common Agricultural Policy, damaged our countryside.

It paid farmers according to the amount of land they farmed, not the way they managed it, and has harmed biodiversity. Outside the EU – once we have taken back control of our agricultural, fisheries and environmental policies – we can do so much better.

But it is also important to acknowledge that there have been some changes which have occurred during our time in the EU which have helped improve our environment.

Indeed, British politicians, from Margaret Thatcher to Stanley Johnson, John Gummer to Owen Paterson, have played a part in shaping policy at the European level to improve environmental protection.

Rules and protocols that protect important habitats and endangered species have been drafted by British authors working internationally. And I want to preserve the gains we have made.

Indeed, this Government has pledged that we must be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

I have argued therefore that we must not only maintain but enhance environmental standards as we leave the EU. And that means making sure we secure the environmental gains we have made while in the EU even as we use our new independence to aim even higher.

Our first task is to ensure that we have a coherent, functioning body of law in place on the day we leave. That is why we are transferring all existing European law, including environmental protections, into UK law through the EU (Withdrawal) Bill. Rules and regulations in place the day before Brexit will still be in place the day after.

However, this alone is not enough. Some of the mechanisms which have

developed during our time in the EU which helpfully scrutinise the achievement of environmental targets and standards by Government will no longer exist in the same way, and principles which guide policy will have less scope and coverage than they do now.

Without further action, there will be a governance gap. The environment won't be protected as it should be from the unscrupulous, unprincipled or careless.

Of course, in the UK we benefit from a vibrant democracy and robust legal system which allow individuals and parliaments to hold the powerful to account when they do the wrong thing – whether it's turning a blind eye to pollution or damaging our beautiful countryside.

But when it comes to protecting the environment, this is not sufficient on its own. Nature is, by definition, voiceless. Animals and plants, habitats and coastlines cannot petition parliament or defend themselves through judicial review.

That is why the EU asked the European Commission to play a role as environmental watchdog. It's been far from perfect.

Sometimes the Commission makes decisions which fail to protect the environment, or even harm it. But on other occasions the Commission has contributed to helping raise environmental standards.

Outside the EU, we have an opportunity to learn from both the Commission's successes and failures. We can develop new institutions which do a better job and hold us to higher standards.

So we will consult on using the new freedoms we have to establish a new, world-leading body to give the environment a voice and hold the powerful to account. It will be independent of government, able to speak its mind freely.

And it will be placed on a statutory footing, ensuring it has clear authority. Its ambition will be to champion and uphold environmental standards, always rooted in rigorous scientific evidence.

We will consult widely on the precise functions, remit and powers of the new body, but we are in no doubt that it must have real bite.

We also need to ensure that environmental enforcement and policy-making is underpinned by a clear set of principles. Environmental principles are already central to Government policy.

However, besides their mention in the EU treaties, we do not set these principles down anywhere or define their role in policy making.

So as we leave the EU, we will create a new policy statement setting out the environmental principles which will guide us. This statement will draw on the EU's current principles and it will underpin future policy-making.

By early next year, we will launch a formal consultation on both the new environmental body and the new policy statement.

There are significant questions to answer – such as exactly what functions and powers the new body has to enforce environmental laws, exactly how a new policy statement is embedded into public policy making, and whether Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland wish to take a different or similar approach.

Of course, we will be engaging widely before bringing forward a final proposal and want to hear from as many people and organisations as possible – from business, NGOs, the farming sector, civil society, and others.

We are already working with the devolved administrations on which powers coming back from the EU should be devolved further.

We will discuss this proposal with them as part of wider conversations on how and where powers should be exercised on return from the EU, and the need or otherwise for common frameworks across the UK.

Nothing can be more vital than the future of our environment and the natural world. We are their custodians and we must safeguard their future if our ambition for a Green Brexit is to become a reality.

We have the chance to set the gold standard for environmental science and become a home to centres of environmental excellence. A new independent, statutory body and a strong statement of principles will ensure that outside the EU, we become the world-leading curator of the most precious asset of all: our planet.

Speech: Environment Minister speaks at the UN Climate Change Conference

I am delighted to be here at COP23, working with other nations, international organisations and of course Peter Thomson.

I thank Fiji for their leadership in the Presidency and Germany for being great hosts.

We have had feedback that the UK can play a greater role globally and we are happy to do that.

Oceans make up around two thirds of our planet and our lives are inextricably linked with our blue seas. However, our oceans are changing and we must take action to save them.

We now have nearly 300 Marine Protected Areas in UK waters, and by 2020 we will deliver a network of Marine Protected Areas that will cover 25 per cent of the UK's Exclusive Economic Zone. In addition, the UK is on track to protect 4 million square kilometres of ocean across its Overseas Territories

by 2020.

The UK continues to be a global leader in protecting oceans and marine life. Action on plastic bag use has been taken across the UK, for instance, the 5p plastic bag charge in England has cut the use of plastic bags by over 80 per cent, or over 9 billion in just one year, and our microbead ban will be one of the toughest in the world.

We recognise the particularly damaging effects of climate change on developing countries. That is why the UK has committed at least £5.8 billion of international climate finance between 2016 and 2020 to help developing countries mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

One example of this is the £10 million we have committed to tackle mangrove loss in Madagascar that will benefit over 100,000 people in coastal communities by providing protection against natural disasters and supporting their livelihoods. It will deliver around 13 million tonnes of CO2 savings.

It is only by collaboration on a global scale that we can truly address marine climate issues, including ocean acidification.

We have already seen the devastating impact of rising sea levels on our coastal communities. We should be clear that ocean acidification could threaten the very basis of life itself. I say that because acidification threatens the whole basis of the marine ecosystem, as it literally attacks the building blocks of life as key organisms fail to develop fully, which is starting to disrupt the food web.

Earlier this year we published a synopsis of our [UK Ocean Acidification Research Programme](#) and, based on current projections, cold water corals will be 20-30 per cent weaker, causing reef disintegration and losing the rich biodiversity that they support.

The programme provided an extremely successful collaborative science partnership across the UK and internationally, particularly with the EU European Project on Ocean Acidification and the German BIOACID programme. Science is the spur to action and the more we can collaborate across nations, the more we can innovate.

The UK set up the Marine Climate Change Impacts Partnership (MCCIP) to provide verifiable evidence of the effect of climate change. This brings together scientists, government, its agencies and NGOs and has just published "Marine Climate change Impacts – 10 years' experience of science to policy reporting".

However, there is more that we can do. This is why the UK Government is committed to a new United Nations Agreement for the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, which will deliver real protection across the world's oceans.

Oceans Action Day reminds us of the importance of the two thirds of our world and that our blue spaces are just as precious as our green spaces – and that actions on land have consequences for all parts of this blue planet,

especially those actions which are altering our climate.

That is why I am pleased to announce that the United Kingdom will today sign up to the "Because the Oceans" declaration and I encourage others who have not done so, to do the same.

Thank you.

Press release: Appointment of new members to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England

Communities Secretary Sajid Javid has today (Monday 13 November) confirmed that, following his recommendation to Her Majesty The Queen, two new commissioners have been appointed to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

Andrew Scallan CBE and Steve Robinson have been appointed for a term of 4 years, until 6 November 2021. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England's role is to review and implement changes to the electoral arrangements of local authorities, having regard to the statutory criteria of equality of representation, community identity and effective and convenient local government.

This involves determining the number of councillors for an individual authority, the boundaries for wards and electoral divisions and the number of councillors for each ward.

Andrew Scallan CBE was the Deputy Chief Counting Officer at the referendum on membership of the European Union in 2016 and also served as Director of Electoral Administration at the Electoral Commission for 10 years until January 2017. Before joining the Electoral Commission, he worked for Manchester City Council in a range of roles including democratic and regulatory services. He is also an Honorary Member of the Association of Electoral Administrators and is a former joint editor of Schofield's Election Law.

Andrew was appointed CBE in January 2016 for services to electoral democracy.

Steve Robinson, who has a background in housing and regeneration, was the first chief executive of the new unitary council in Cheshire West and Chester established in September 2008. Before joining Cheshire West and Chester Council, he was the chief executive of Stoke on Trent City Council and was responsible for the transformation of council services in his previous role as Director of Community Services.

Steve is currently also a member of the Birmingham Independent Improvement Panel that is supporting Birmingham City Council.

Further appointments of Commissioners to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England are expected to be made early in 2018.

The [Local Government Boundary Commission for England](#) is a parliamentary body, independent of both central and local government. However, appointments to the Commission, other than that of the Chair, are made by the Crown on the recommendation of the Secretary of State.

The Commission Board consists of a Chair and at least 4 and no more than 11 other (ordinary) members. With these appointments the board will consist of the Chair and 5 members.

The Commission has a staff of approximately 25. The average annual expenditure, which is funded directly by Parliamentary, is in the order of £2.2 million.

[Press release: And, Cut! 10 years bankruptcy restriction for film producer](#)

An Insolvency Service investigation found Mr Wilkinson, formerly of Brighton and Polegate in Sussex, failed to disclose income of £180,964 during the 12 months in which he was subject to bankruptcy, and the existence of three bank accounts that he held at the date of his bankruptcy.

Mr Wilkinson gave an undertaking to the Secretary of State for Business, Energy, & Industrial Strategy, to be bound for 10 years, by the restrictions until 4 October 2027. In addition, he cannot manage or control a company during this period without leave of the court.

The undisclosed income and bank accounts came to light during the Official Receiver's investigation into Warlord Productions Ltd, a company with which Mr Wilkinson had some involvement. The company was [wound up by the High Court in July 2015](#) on a petition presented by the Secretary of State in the public interest.

In April 2012 Mr Wilkinson entered into an Individual Voluntary Arrangement (IVA). The arrangement failed and so the IVA supervisor presented a petition for his bankruptcy. The bankruptcy order was made in the County Court at Brighton on 1 February 2013. The deficiency to creditors was £5,172,044.

At the date of the bankruptcy order, Mr Wilkinson was in receipt of

Jobseekers Allowance, but that ceased shortly afterwards and during the 12 months of bankruptcy he received income totaling £180,964. Because the income and bank accounts were not disclosed by Mr Wilkinson, the creditors have been deprived of a possible return of some money.

Commenting on this case Anthony Hannon, Official Receiver in the Public Interest Unit, said:

Mr Wilkinson attended on the Official Receiver shortly after the making of the bankruptcy order and was made aware of his duty to disclose all his assets. He disclosed the existence of a single bank current account, but failed to disclose three further "wealth accounts" held at the bank.

He was also made aware of his duty to disclose full details of his income during the 12 months that he would be subject to the restrictions of bankruptcy. This duty exists so that the Official Receiver or trustee can decide whether to claim some of the income over and above what is needed for the bankrupt's living expenses for the benefit of creditors.

This ten years restriction should act as a deterrent to him and others from acting in the same way.

The bankruptcy order was made in the County Court at Brighton on 1 February 2013 following a petition presented on 8 August 2012. Mr Wilkinson received his automatic discharge from bankruptcy 12 months later on 1 February 2014.

Mr Wilkinson's date of birth is August 1970.

If the Official Receiver considers that the conduct of a bankrupt has been dishonest or blameworthy in some other way, they will report the facts to court and ask for a Bankruptcy Restrictions Order (BRO) to be made. The court will consider this report and any other evidence put before it, and will decide whether it should make a BRO. If it does, the bankrupt will be subject to certain restrictions for the period stated in the order. This can be from 2 to 15 years.

The bankrupt may instead agree to a Bankruptcy Restrictions Undertaking (BRU) which has the same effect as an order, but will mean that the matter does not go to court.

These are restrictions set out in insolvency law that the bankrupt is subject to until they are discharged from bankruptcy – normally 12 months and include that bankrupts:

- must disclose their status to a credit provider if they wish to get

credit of more than £500

- who carry on business in a different name from the name in which they were made bankrupt, they must disclose to those they wish to do business with the name (or trading style) under which they were made bankrupt
- may not act as the director of a company nor take part in its promotion, formation or management unless they have a court's permission to do so
- may not act as an insolvency practitioner, or as the receiver or manager of the property of a company on behalf of debenture holder

Additionally, a person subject to a Bankruptcy Restrictions Order/Undertaking or a Debt Relief Restrictions Order/Undertaking may not be a Member of Parliament in England or Wales.

The Insolvency Service, an executive agency sponsored by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), administers the insolvency regime, and aims to deliver and promote a range of investigation and enforcement activities both civil and criminal in nature, to support fair and open markets. We do this by effectively enforcing the statutory company and insolvency regimes, maintaining public confidence in those regimes and reducing the harm caused to victims of fraudulent activity and to the business community, including dealing with the disqualification of directors in corporate failures. Further information about the work of the Insolvency Service, and how to complain about financial misconduct, is [available](#).

BEIS' mission is to build a dynamic and competitive UK economy that works for all, in particular by creating the conditions for business success and promoting an open global economy. The Criminal Investigations and Prosecutions team contributes to this aim by taking action to deter fraud and to regulate the market. They investigate and prosecute a range of offences, primarily relating to personal or company insolvencies.

You can also follow the Insolvency Service on:

[News story: IPO customer visit programme 2016 to 2017](#)

The IPO customer visit team has published its annual report.

The Intellectual Property Office (IPO) customer visit programme is part of a

wider schedule of stakeholder engagement. It provides us with an opportunity to meet our customers, share information on our services and collect a wide range of feedback.

The 2016 to 2017 report summarises the issues that were raised this year and provides further information from the IPO.

[Customer visit programme 2016/17](#) (PDF, 722KB, 24 pages)

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Reports from [2015](#), [2014](#) and [2013](#) are also available.