George Eustice speech on environmental recovery: 20 July 2020

I would like to begin by thanking all those who have been working hard to protect and enhance our environment over the past few months. It is great to see sites open to the public again but I am also conscious that this crisis has had financial impacts on many organisations, impacts on membership and that you face real pressures in keeping nature reserves and parks open.

The impacts of this pandemic will be felt deeply for many years, but the experience has also led people to appreciate the difference that nature makes to our lives in a new way. There is an increased awareness of the link between our own health, and that of the planet.

Studies across the spectrum, from health to financial risk, remind us that it is in our best interests to look after nature. We know that a connection with nature contributes to well-being, and improved mental health. So starting this autumn, we'll be investing a further £4m in a two-year pilot to bring green prescribing to four urban and rural areas that have been hit the hardest by coronavirus and then we want to scale that project up.

When we destroy nature, we undermine our very foundations. Every country faces a choice as they map out their recovery – store up problems by sticking with the status quo, or get back on our feet by building back better and greener.

In our own country, nature has been in decline for decades. The last breeding populations of Kentish plovers were lost in 1928. Between 1932 and 1984, we lost 97% of our species-rich grassland – and heathlands have fared little better. Five species of butterfly have become extinct in the last 150 years. And our farmland bird indicator stands at less than half its value of 1970 – following a precipitous decline during the 1980s and 90s, and further losses since.

This Government's pledge is not only to stem the tide of loss, but to turn it around – to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

In a few months' time the Transition Period will come to an end, and the UK will be free to chart a new course. It is an important moment for policy makers and nowhere more so than in our approach to the environment.

As a country we have opted for the freedom to act and to decide our own environment policies in future. But with that freedom comes new responsibilities. It will no longer be the case that the UK can register a position as an outlier around the table during the development of a particular EU dossier, safe in the knowledge that a QMV voting system will always drive out something more nuanced. Instead we must learn to temper our own approach. And we will not be able to hide behind EU law when there are difficult decisions to make or indeed blame the EU when things don't work.

Instead we must level with people about difficult decisions and take responsibility for delivering the change that is required.

Tackling environmental challenges requires a long-term approach and political commitment to that journey – even when the political cycle can be short term. So we will shortly be publishing a paper that sets out our approach to setting long-term targets on biodiversity, waste, water, and air quality through the new Environment Bill, so they are established in time by October 2022. We will shortly be launching the appointment campaign for the first Chair of the Office for Environmental Protection so that they will be in place to lead a new Public Body in 2021 – to scrutinise and assess progress towards these targets.

When it comes to our new approach to the environment, we must have an appreciation of what worked in the EU in the past, and also what didn't work. Where there were approaches inside the EU that helped our environment, we should recognise these and be willing to borrow features from them.

But there is no point leaving the EU to keep everything the same. The old model has not stopped the decline in our natural world. We must therefore challenge ourselves to think creatively, to innovate and to consciously avoid clinging to processes and procedures just because they are familiar. On environmental policy, we can do better or differently, and I want to open a discussion in this space today.

And of course, leaving the EU table does not mean retreating from our role in the world. In fact it means we should redouble our efforts globally.

Long before we joined the EU, the UK was a driving force in establishing other international conventions to help our natural environment. We turned the IWC from being a forum that decided quotas for whaling to being a force for conservation. We were in at the beginning when CITES was first mooted in 1963 to protect endangered species, when Ramsar protected wetland areas in 1971, when the Bern Convention protected habitats and species, when the convention on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds was introduced, and later when CBD was established to safeguard biodiversity.

Next year we will host COP26 where we will be seeking to secure international action on climate change and biodiversity loss which will include emphasising the role of nature-based solutions in that global endeavour – such as our work to tackle illegal deforestation and promote sustainable supply chains.

So while the environmental legislation we currently have is often credited to flagship EU directives like the Habitats Directive or the Birds Directive, these directives themselves were often principally about implementing at an EU level things that had already been agreed internationally through other international conventions like the Bern Convention. International conventions that the UK was always part of, will remain part of and where we will continue to drive international consensus for change and progress.

Now a few years ago, shortly after becoming a Minister in Defra, I remember being given a huge report running to hundreds of pages setting out exactly

what the UK was doing to deliver its obligations under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. It was a formidable piece of work which listed every piece of legislation we already had including laws like the Protection of Seals Act 1970. But a covering note to the document recommended that I need not waste my time reading it because it said nothing new, committed us to nothing we were not already doing, and was mainly a summary of the laws and measures that we already had in place dating back to the 1960s. When I asked what the purpose of the document was, the answer came back that "it's just a requirement of EU law".

Now EU environmental law always has good intentions but there are also negative consequences to attempting to legislate for these matters at a supranational level. It tends to lead to a culture of perpetual legal jeopardy where national governments can become reluctant to try new things or make new commitments for fear of irreversible and unpredictable legal risks. This in turn creates a culture where there are frankly too many lawyers and not enough scientists and too many reports but not enough action.

So, as we chart a new course for our approach to protecting the environment, we can retain the features that worked and change the features that didn't. We should recognise that the environment and our ecosystems are a complex web of interactions that mankind will never fully understand let alone manage. We should re-balance the way we approach policy development with more focus on science and technical knowledge and less time fretting about legal risks of doing something new or innovative. We should have fewer reports that say nothing new – but more new ideas that we should actually try.

And we should be willing to try new approaches safe in the knowledge that we have the power to change things again if a policy idea fails. Our targets framework should give us a clear set of objectives to work to but to meet those targets our approach to policy development must be agile or iterative and must create the space for more experimentation and innovation.

If we are to protect species and habitats and also deliver biodiversity net gain, we need to properly understand the science to inform these crucial decisions. And we should ask ourselves whether the current processes are as effective or efficient as they could be.

Is there sufficient access to data and knowledge to know which species should be assessed? If we had better more up to date data about things such as flood risk, habitats, species, and air quality could we design plans for sustainable new projects and developments more effectively and efficiently than we do now? Do we have enough focus on improvements at a landscape scale? Do Local Authorities adopt a consistent approach to the screening process through Environmental Impact Assessment? Do they have the capability to engage over the lifetime of a project?

Later this autumn we will be launching a new consultation on changing our approach to environmental assessment and mitigation in the planning system. If we can front-load ecological considerations in the planning development process, we can protect more of what is precious.

We can set out which habitats and species will always be off-limit, so everyone knows where they stand. And we can add to that list where we want better protection for species that are characteristic of our country and critical to our ecosystems that the EU has sometimes overlooked– things like water voles, red squirrels, adders and pine martens. We want everyone to be able to access an accurate, centralised body of data on species populations so that taking nature into account is the first, speedy step to an application.

So today I can announce a £5m pilot on establishing a new Natural Capital and Ecosystem Assessment. At the heart of our approach is a simple premise. If we can improve the baseline understanding of habitats and species abundance across the country in every planning authority, then we can make better decisions towards achieving our vision to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. We can reduce process while simultaneously improving the quality of the data that informs our decisions. We can move quickly to rule out issues that we know don't exist leaving us time to focus on the protections that matter most for the species and habitats most affected – so we ensure that new developments really do mean a net gain for people and for nature.

In conclusion, in recent decades, our approach to environmental regulation, particularly in regards to nature and biodiversity, has been to protect what is left and to stem the tide of decline. We have had some successes so far as that approach goes and should acknowledge this. However, if we really want to realise the aspirations that the public have for nature then we need policies that will not only protect but that will build back – with more diverse habitats that lead to a greater abundance of those species currently in decline.

Delivering this change is what lies at the heart of our approach to future farming policy, our approach to biodiversity net gain in the planning system, and also behind other initiatives like highly protected marine areas that we intend to pilot. Building back greener means what it says, and I want to work with all of you to make that happen.

Environment Agency resumes on-site bathing water monitoring

Press release

Bathing water monitoring has resumed at designated bathing water sites in England.

The Environment Agency has resumed sampling at bathing water sites following the government advice on easing lockdown restrictions.

Throughout lockdown, regulatory work has continued to maintain the quality of bathing waters, including pollution prevention measures such as ensuring that permitted discharges do not affect water quality.

Now that on-site monitoring can resume, the data from this will help highlight trends in bathing water quality and provide useful data to the public this summer.

Bathing water quality in England remains high with 98.3% of bathing waters passing the minimum standard in 2019, and of these, 71% are classified as Excellent.

The latest classifications for over 400 designated bathing waters in England can be found on our water quality website.

Our daily pollution risk forecasting service has been providing updates on water quality throughout lockdown. This year the system has been upgraded providing even more accurate forecasts of when a temporary reduction in water quality is likely. Information on pollution risk forecasts and warnings can be found on gov.uk.

The Environment Agency will continue to seek improvements to bathing water quality, but everyone has a part to play. You can protect the quality of bathing waters and beaches by following some simple advice:

- Always put litter in the bin at the beach or take it away with you to dispose of at home;
- Wet wipes, cotton buds and sanitary items should go in the bin and not be flushed.
- Don’t pour fats, oils and grease down the sink, these can pollute rivers and coastal waters and can set in pipes causing blockages.

Published 20 July 2020

Review launched to boost UK Fintech sector

The independent Fintech Strategic Review, which will be led by Ron Kalifa OBE, former CEO of Worldpay, will establish priority areas for industry, policy makers, and regulators to explore in order to support the ongoing success of the UK fintech sector.

The UK fintech sector is estimated to be worth around £7 billion to the economy and employs around 60,000 people up and down the UK. The review will help to ensure UK fintech has the resources to grow and succeed, that conditions are right for the widespread adoption of financial technology, and that the UK's global reputation for innovation is maintained and advanced.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury & City Minister John Glen said:

> The UK is one of the leading places in the world to start and grow a fintech firm, and I am determined to ensure this continues. The sector is worth around £7 billion to our economy and will therefore be vital in ensuring both that the country bounces back post-Coronavirus, and continues to be at the forefront of financial innovation now we have left the EU.
>
> This independent review will help us to uphold and enhance our global reputation, support growing firms, and promote the integration of new technologies across financial services to the benefit of businesses and their customers.

Ron Kalifa OBE, said:

> Tech based solutions in financial services have experienced wide scale adoption in the UK, with growth fuelled by a favourable startup environment that supports entrepreneurship and innovation.
>
> This Review will ascertain what is required to accelerate this change, to create a financial services ecosystem that is above all, sustainable, inclusive and world leading.
>
> Technology has a vital role to play in the UK's Covid-19 economic recovery. The fintech review will ensure that we can leverage this innovative technology to help consumers and businesses, through a joined-up strategy that combines investment, skills and policy to deliver it.

First announced at Budget 2020, the intention of this review is to establish priority areas for industry, policy makers, and regulators to explore in

order to support the ongoing success of the UK fintech sector. The first meeting of the fintech review governance board took place today, attended by John Glen. Ron Kalifa as Chair will be assisted by the secretariat led by Innovate Finance and City of London Corporation.

Five workstreams will provide recommendations on: skills and talent, investment, national connectivity, policy, and international attractiveness. The review will be independent and is expected to report back to HM Treasury at the start of next year.

The UK fintech sector attracted £4.1bn in venture capital in 2019, and the market has been estimated to have grown by nearly 70% since 2015.

Further information

The terms of reference for the review are available here.

UK aerospace sector to benefit from £400 million funding to go green

- Government and industry announce cutting-edge aerospace research and development projects, supported by £400 million public and private sector funding
- projects include developing high-performance engines, new wing designs, and ultra-lightweight materials to reduce fuel consumption
- new FlyZero initiative will bring together 100 experts to kickstart work into zero-emission aircraft technology, with the aim of securing future manufacturing in the UK

Aerospace jobs and supply chains across the UK will benefit from cutting-edge research and development projects announced today by the government and aerospace industry leaders.

Government grants totalling £200 million, delivered through the Aerospace Technology Institute (ATI) programme, will be matched by industry to create the total investment of £400 million in new research and technology, enabling ambitious projects to lift off and support the sector's recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

New projects set to receive funding will include developing high performance engines, new wing designs, ultra-lightweight materials, energy-efficient electric components, and other brand new concepts to enhance innovation within the sector. A project led by Williams Advanced Engineering in Oxford, for example, will develop ultra-lightweight seat structures that will reduce an aircraft's fuel consumption.

The funding will also secure highly-skilled jobs in the UK's aerospace sector and will benefit companies of all sizes from Caldicot in Wales to Bedlington in the North of England. Higher education institutions will also be a part of the projects, including the universities of Nottingham and Birmingham.

The funding was announced today by Business Secretary Alok Sharma at Farnborough Connect, the virtual version of Farnborough International Airshow.

Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Alok Sharma said:

> We have an incredible aerospace industry right here in the UK that defines the way aircraft are manufactured globally.
>
> This £400 million ATI investment will help secure our world-leading position in developing new flight technology to make air travel safer and greener into the future.

The successful projects that will receive a share of the government's £200 million grant funding through the ATI programme, and match it with their own investment, include:

- wings: the UK is the home of Airbus wing design and manufacturing. Airbus-led projects (Broughton, Filton) will drive forward more efficient wing assembly, systems installation, digital design processes and a range of innovative wing concepts including folding wing tips
- engines: Rolls-Royce-led projects will support the development of the UltraFan engine technology, which will make a step change in the efficiency and environmental performance of aircraft
- power systems: the AEPEC project led by Safran Electrical & Power UK (Pitstone) will research how new electrical power systems can lead to more efficient energy usage
- cabin systems: an Oxford-based project led by Williams Advanced Engineering will develop ultra-lightweight seat structures for air travel, reducing the weight of aircraft

Stu Olden, Senior Commercial Manager for Defence, Aerospace & Emerging Markets at Williams Advanced Engineering, said:

> A key benefit for us of the ATI support has been to enable accelerated development of the 3 companies involved in the consortium.
>
> Additionally, by developing UK technologies and innovation, the ATI programme is enabling UK-based product development and, hopefully, future jobs. For Williams Advanced Engineering it has allowed us to participate in the aerospace sector as a non-traditional supplier.

During his speech today, the Business Secretary also announced the FlyZero initiative to kickstart exploration into zero-carbon emission commercial aircraft.

The FlyZero study will receive government funding and bring together around 100 experts to tackle issues involved in designing and building a commercially successful zero-emission aircraft. The study will create a strong basis for further research and development into a wide of technologies necessary for future flight, with the aim of securing future manufacturing in the UK.

This follows the launch of the Jet Zero Council, which brings industry and government together to make net zero emissions possible for future flights. The FlyZero study will feed into the work of the Council in defining and delivering this ambition.

Gary Elliott, Chief Executive of the Aerospace Technology Institute, said:

> FlyZero represents an acceleration of the UK's ambition to lead the world in green aviation. These are challenging but also exciting times for the aerospace sector; we need to help UK companies to recover while also creating new approaches to technology development and innovation.
>
> FlyZero will engage a team of highly-skilled engineers and technologists from across the UK to look into how to design and build a zero emission commercial aircraft, with the solid aim of securing future manufacturing in the UK.

The UK was the first major economy to commit to achieving net zero emissions by 2050, and over the past decade, the UK has cut carbon emissions by more than any similar developed country. In 2019, UK emissions were 42% lower than in 1990, while our economy grew by 72%.

Note to editors

Projects approved by the ATI's rigorous assessment programme create opportunities to secure jobs in research and manufacturing across the UK as well as sharing knowledge across industry and academia.

Further background on the projects:

- Airbus projects: Wing of Tomorrow will develop new technologies and manufacturing processes to produce the next generation composite wings and help Airbus's leading position in the single aisle market. A critical part of the programme is to develop capability to manufacture more efficient, light weight carbon-fibre wings, at a rate much higher than previously possible
- Rolls-Royce projects: UltraFan will be the most efficient engine produced by Rolls-Royce and will use less fuel and produce lower CO2 emissions. Projects funded as part of the £200 million will drive

efficiency and contribute towards shared government and industry ambitions on decarbonisation
- Williams Advanced Engineering: the AIRTEK project is focused on developing lightweight seat structures for the civilian aerospace sector. Williams Advanced Engineering, in a collaboration with JPA Design and SWS Certification, is developing new lightweight aircraft seats in order to reduce the weight of aircraft, which in turn will lead to airlines saving fuel and CO2
- Safran Electrical & Power UK: AEPEC: The Aerospace Electric Propulsion Equipment, Controls & Machines (AEPEC) project involves lead partner Safran Electrical & Power UK and its supply chain partners. They will develop electrical power systems to improve energy use on future aircraft, covering power generation, control systems, and other functions on more-electric aircraft

About the Aerospace Technology Institute

The Aerospace Technology Institute (ATI) is at the heart of UK aerospace R&T. Working collaboratively across the UK aerospace sector and beyond, the Institute sets the national technology strategy to reflect the sector's vision and ambition. The ATI Programme is a joint government and industry commitment to invest £3.9 billion in research to 2026. In addition to the ATI Programme and FlyZero, the Institute also supports the supply chain through NATEP and aerospace start-ups through the ATI Boeing Accelerator.

Further information:

- small businesses will benefit from the continuation of the National Aerospace Technology Exploitation Programme (NATEP) whose next call is scheduled for October and the launch of the next R&D call for small business scheduled for November.
- at the same time as supporting R&D activities for SMEs the Supply Chain 21 Competitiveness and Growth programme remains open for applications to help businesses improve their competitiveness.

New production lines will make millions of face coverings each week

- The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has announced that government is setting up face covering production lines in cooperation with UK manufacturers
- Production has already started at two sites in England and Wales, with another site in Scotland starting production in the coming weeks
- Ten production lines have been procured and a further ten British production lines are being made with government support

Following the procurement of ten production lines, the government has been working with suppliers in Port Talbot and Blackburn to start producing high quality face coverings. Another site in Livingston in Scotland will also start manufacturing face coverings in the coming weeks.

The production sites will ensure that public demand for face coverings does not impact on the supply of higher-grade face masks for NHS front line staff.

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Michael Gove said:

> This is a major step to ensure that this country can meet any increase in demand for face coverings by working with British firms to establish the capability, capacity and skills required to manufacture these items at scale.
>
> These production lines will be able to get millions of face coverings to the public, without putting any additional pressure on NHS supply chains.
>
> It is fantastic to see companies in Lancashire, Neath Port Talbot and West Lothian coming together to provide face coverings for every corner of our United Kingdom.

The government has bought ten production lines, which include 34 tons of equipment and machinery, and following checks and testing at a machine manufacturer, DCR Machines in Leeds, the machines have been set up across the UK.

A further ten production lines have been commissioned from a UK automotive company, Expert Tooling and Automation Ltd, based in Coventry.

The manufacturers will produce millions of masks each week.

The first production lines are being established at:

- The British Rototherm Group, in Port Talbot, Wales.
- Cookson & Clegg, Blackburn
- Transcal, in Livingston, Scotland

Scotland Secretary Alister Jack said:

> I’m delighted that a Scottish manufacturer is joining the UK wide effort to ramp up production of face coverings. The UK Government has secured extra production lines to ensure we can get high quality face coverings to those who need them without impacting supply of higher grade masks for front line health workers.

Secretary of State for Wales Simon Hart said:

> As our economy bounces back from the coronavirus pandemic and people look to get back to work safely, it is vital that our supply of protective equipment meets demand.
>
> Firms like Rototherm in Port Talbot will ensure we have a strong domestic manufacturing capability and that high-quality face coverings are available to everyone who needs them.

This is the first time that face coverings are being made at such scale in the UK.

Orders for the coverings have already been placed by a number of public and private sector buyers and the government is in discussions with a number of other retail companies on the purchasing of the items.

Additionally the critical materials for the manufacture of these masks are sourced from UK manufacturers

Government guidance to the public encourages the wearing of face coverings in enclosed public spaces, where it is less easy to socially distance, or where you are more likely to come into contact with people you do not normally meet. It is mandatory to wear face coverings on public transport and from 24th July, in England it will be mandatory to wear face coverings in shops and supermarkets. Both disposable and reusable face coverings made from cloth are suitable to be worn in shops and public transport.

Different regulations exist for wearing face coverings in different parts of the UK about which you can find out more on devolved government websites.