

Government introduces ground-breaking Environment Bill

The government will today (Tuesday 15 October) introduce a landmark Bill to Parliament to tackle the biggest environmental priorities of our time, signalling a historic step change in the way we protect and enhance our precious natural environment.

The transformative Environment Bill will help ensure that we maintain and improve our environmental protections as we leave the EU. It will build on the UK's strong track record and sets out a comprehensive and world-leading vision to allow future generations to prosper. Environmental principles will be enshrined in law and measures will be introduced to improve air and water quality, tackle plastic pollution and restore habitats so plants and wildlife can thrive.

Legislation will also create, legally-binding environmental improvement targets. A new independent Office for Environmental Protection will be established to scrutinise environmental policy and law, investigate complaints and take enforcement action against public authorities, if necessary, to uphold our environmental standards. The office's powers will cover all climate change legislation and hold the government to account on its commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2050. By also championing nature-based solutions, the Bill demonstrates our commitment to tackle climate change.

The Bill also places the bold ambition of our flagship 25 Year Environment Plan on a statutory footing and goes beyond the [key government commitments outlined earlier this year](#) by confirming powers to enhance nature and habitats and combat the devastating effects of plastics on our natural environment. Introducing charges for a number of single use plastic items will build on the success of the government's 5p plastic bag charge, which has cut sales from the biggest supermarkets by 90% since 2015.

The Bill, announced in [the Queen's Speech](#) and introduced today, will:

- Ensure the environment is at the heart of all government policy making and that this government – and future governments – are held to account if they fail to uphold their environmental duties, including meeting net-zero by 2050, and wider long-term legally binding targets on biodiversity, air quality, water, and resource and waste efficiency established under the Bill;
- Improve air quality – by fighting pollution so children and young people can live longer healthier lives. We will do this by setting an ambitious, legally-binding target to reduce fine particulate matter, PM2.5, and by increasing local powers to address sources of air pollution, enabling local authorities to work with families to cut harmful pollution from domestic burning by using cleaner fuels. The government will also be empowered to mandate manufacturers to recall

- vehicles when they do not meet the relevant environmental standards;
- Restore and enhance nature – through ‘biodiversity net gain’ ensure that the new houses we build are delivered in a way which protects and enhances nature, helping to deliver thriving natural spaces for local communities. We will improve protection for our natural habitats in supporting a Nature Recovery Network by establishing Local Nature Recovery Strategies and giving communities a greater say in the protection of local trees;
 - Transform the way we manage our waste – through powers to ensure that producers take responsibility for the waste they create, introducing a consistent approach to recycling, tackling waste crime, introducing bottle deposit return schemes and more effective litter enforcement. Powers to introduce new charges will minimise the use and impacts of single use plastics;
 - Protect precious water resources – by increasing sustainable water management through securing long-term, resilient water and wastewater services in the face of a changing climate. Powers to direct water companies to work together to meet current and future demand for water will make planning more robust.

While the Bill applies only to England, more than half of its measures – such as those designed to drive up recycling rates – are designed to apply across the UK, with the consent of devolved administrations, helping the nation deal with the major environmental challenges we face together.

Environment Secretary Theresa Villiers said:

Our natural environment is a vital shared resource and the need to act to secure it for generations to come is clear.

That’s why our landmark Environment Bill leads a green transformation that will help our country to thrive. It positions the UK as a world leader on improving air quality, environmental biodiversity, a more circular economy, and managing our precious water resources in a changing climate.

Crucially, it also ensures that after Brexit, environmental ambition and accountability are placed more clearly than ever before at the heart of government, both now and in the future.

The Bill builds on this government’s decisive action to protect the environment, as set out in our 25 Year Environment Plan. Legislation to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and hosting the Climate-focussed COP26 in 2020 will keep the UK at the forefront of international work on these issues.

Public consultations have played an important part in shaping numerous measures in the Bill, including on: environmental governance, the Clean Air

Strategy, biodiversity net gain, protections for urban trees, conservation covenants, packaging producer responsibility, consistency in recycling, deposit return schemes and water resources.

Extensive and continued collaboration with the Scottish and Welsh Governments and the Northern Ireland Civil Service has also enabled us to bring forward measures that we expect to see adopted outside of England, for example measures which aim to increase recycling rates.

The ground-breaking Bill will bring a step-change in the way we protect and enhance all parts of our natural environment.

As well as introducing the Bill to Parliament today, the government will publish an updated policy statement which outlines the many transformative measures included in the Bill, and the government response on our consultation on tree measures.

Key areas where changes will bring wide-reaching benefits include:

Environmental governance

- The Environment Bill will create a world-leading system for environmental governance.
- A new public body – the Office for Environmental Protection – will be our independent watchdog with the teeth to hold government and other public bodies to account on fulfilling their obligations on the environment – including on climate change.
- The government has also confirmed that, once established, the office will be located in Bristol, as recommended by the Cabinet Office Places for Growth Programme, and employ up to 120 staff.
- By setting legally-binding environmental targets, the UK will show global environmental leadership at a crucial time for our planet.
- Environmental principles will be embedded in Government decision-making. Combined with the obligation to publish environmental improvement plans, these measures will help protect and improve our environment.

A new direction for resources and waste management

- The Environment Bill signals a radical step change in how we deal with our waste and shows we are serious about tackling the scourge of plastics and pollution.
- Measures will extend responsibility for waste disposal to those who produce it, reducing waste in the long term as well as creating incentives for the reuse of material, and moving towards a more circular economy.
- We are also cracking down on litter, helping to end this blight on our communities, whilst tackling the organised gangs who profit from waste crime.

Further improving the air we breathe

- Poor air quality is the greatest environmental risk to our health. Our air is now cleaner than at any point since the industrial revolution,

but there is more work to be done if we are to protect the health of our nation.

- The Environment Bill builds on our world-class Clean Air Strategy, and highlights our drive to go further, faster to clean up our air.
- The Bill will set an ambitious, legally-binding target to ensure emissions of the pollutant with the most significant impact on human health, fine particulate matter, are limited. This target will be among the most ambitious in the world and improve the quality of millions of people's lives.
- Measures will drive change at a local level, improving cooperation between local authorities who have legal responsibility for air quality in their areas, and those who have the ability to do something about it, as well as improving the outdated Clean Air Act.

Delivering sustainable water resources

- We all rely on a clean and plentiful water supply, so our Bill will deliver on the pledge in our 25 Year Environment Plan to ensure everyone has access to exactly that.
- We will improve our long-term management of water, including providing for cooperation across water company boundaries, to better enable us to meet the challenges of our changing climate.
- There are also measures to prevent environmentally damaging removal of water from the environment, protecting this precious natural asset.

Restoring and enhancing nature and green spaces

- Nature is in decline. For too long, we haven't been able to reverse this downward trend and now urgent action is needed to drive necessary change.
- The Environment Bill delivers a step-change in our ambition to restore and enhance our natural environment, introducing measures to require and support lasting action for nature.
- Biodiversity net gain will allow us to deliver the increases in housing we need, whilst also enhancing nature, and has been co-designed with MHCLG. An amended duty on public authorities around biodiversity will make sure that every level of government is playing its part.