

News story: New environment law to deliver a Green Brexit

A new Environmental Principles and Governance Bill will ensure environmental protections will not be weakened as we leave the EU, the government has confirmed.

A [consultation has started today](#) on the contents of the Environmental Principles and Governance Bill, which will establish a world-leading body to hold government to account for environmental outcomes.

The body will support our commitment to be the first generation to leave our environment in a better state than that in which we inherited it. It will provide scrutiny and advice as we protect and enhance our precious landscapes, wildlife and natural assets and would be able to hold government to account on environmental legislation.

Subject to consultation, the new body could specifically be responsible for:

- providing independent scrutiny and advice on existing and future government environmental law and policy;
- responding to complaints about government's delivery of environmental law; and
- holding government to account publicly over its delivery of environmental law and exercising enforcement powers where necessary.

The Government is also consulting on its intention to require ministers to produce – and then have regard to – a statutory and comprehensive policy statement setting out how they will apply core environmental principles as they develop policy and discharge their responsibilities. Currently environmental decisions made in the UK – from improving air and water quality to protecting endangered species – are overseen by the European Commission and underpinned by a number of these principles, such as the precautionary principle, sustainable development and the 'polluter pays' principle.

While these principles are already central to government environmental policy, they are not set out in one place besides the EU treaties. The new Environmental Principles and Governance Bill will ensure governments continue to have regard to important environmental principles through the policy statement, which would be scrutinised by Parliament. The consultation seeks views on whether or not the principles to be contained in the policy statement should be listed in primary legislation.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

As the Prime Minister has made clear, we will not weaken environmental protections when we leave the EU. A new Environmental Principles and Governance Bill will ensure core environmental principles remain central to government policy and decision-making.

This will help us to deliver a Green Brexit and the vision set out in our 25 Year Environment Plan.

But we will only achieve our aims by also creating a strong and objective voice that champions and enforces environmental standards. That's why our Environmental Principles and Governance Bill will also create an independent and statutory watchdog. This will hold governments to account for delivering their commitments to the natural world.

The consultation, which will run for 12 weeks, seeks views on the most effective way for the new body to hold government to account, which would include, as a minimum, the power to issue advisory notices. The consultation asks what further enforcement mechanisms may be necessary.

The Environmental Principles and Governance Bill will be published in draft in the autumn. Public consultation on the environmental principles policy statement will follow in due course. The Bill will be introduced early in the second session of this Parliament, ensuring these measures are introduced in time for the end of the implementation period in December 2020. EU environmental governance structures will continue to apply during the implementation period.

The consultation is concerned with environmental governance in England and reserved matters throughout the UK, for which the UK government has responsibility. However, we are exploring with the devolved administrations whether they wish to take a similar approach. We would welcome the opportunity to co-design proposals with them to ensure they work across the whole UK, taking account of the different government and legal systems in the individual nations.

Background

1. You can respond to our consultation on the [Citizen Space website](#)
2. Read [‘A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment’](#)