

Stronger protections for the environment move closer as landmark Bill takes shape

New measures to enhance wildlife, transform our waste system and improve the resilience of water supplies have been set out today by Environment Secretary Michael Gove (Tuesday 23 July).

In an update on progress towards the introduction of the landmark [Environment Bill](#) – the first for 20 years – the government has published firm positions, following a range of consultations, on issues ranging from trees to water to recycling, to boost our natural environment.

Mr Gove has set out the government's ambitions for the full Environment Bill in an [updated summer policy statement](#), including commitments to legislate on environmental governance, air, biodiversity, water, and waste and resource efficiency.

As well as this, the government has published a [report on the feasibility of achieving the World Health Organisation \(WHO\) guideline level of 10 micrograms per cubic metre for fine particulate matter \(PM2.5\)](#). This report concludes that, whilst challenging, it would be technically feasible to meet the WHO guideline level across the UK. Further analysis is needed to understand what would be an appropriate timescale and means, and we will work with a broad range of experts, factoring in full economic, social and technological feasibility to do this.

Environment Secretary Michael Gove said:

We know we must do all we can to protect our precious natural environment. There is a clear need to act to ensure we do not leave this planet to the next generation more polluted, more dangerous and denuded of its natural riches.

The measures in our Environment Bill will position the UK as a world leader, ensuring that after EU Exit environmental ambition and accountability are placed more clearly than ever before at the heart of government.

As we have set out today, our plans will improve air quality so that our children live longer, restore habitats and increase biodiversity, strive towards a more circular economy and ensure we can manage our precious water resources in a changing climate.

Announced by the Prime Minister last year, the landmark Environment Bill will be an essential step to put the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) on statutory footing, placing environmental ambition and accountability at the heart of

government. It will be introduced early in the second session of this Parliament.

HM Treasury has also published a summary of responses to its consultation on a world-leading new plastic packaging tax that will encourage greater use of recycled plastic and help to tackle plastic waste.

The great amount of interest shown from both the public, environmental groups and industry, highlights how important an issue this is to many. The government will set out next steps related to the tax at the Budget.

Government responses to consultations

Today's publications include responses to six public consultations and set out next steps for:

- [A deposit return scheme \(DRS\) for drinks containers](#) – More than 200,000 people responded to this consultation, demonstrating strong support for a DRS scheme. The Bill will introduce powers that will enable a deposit return scheme to be implemented in England, Wales and Northern Ireland from 2023.
- [Consistency in household and business recycling](#) – The government aims to make it easier for people to recycle by implementing a consistent and simplified approach across local authorities. The government will legislate to introduce a core set of consistent recyclable materials (including food waste) to be collected from all households and businesses, supporting frequent and comprehensive rubbish and recycling collections. It will also require manufacturers to put clearer labelling on packaging so consumers know what they can recycle.
- [Extended producer responsibility \(EPR\)](#) – The Environment Secretary has been clear he wants to drive a shift in the market towards durable, repairable and recyclable products. New powers to enact EPR schemes that will ensure producers pay the full costs of managing the disposal of their products will be sought, as well as powers to enable government to set resource efficient product requirements.
- [Biodiversity net gain](#) – A mandatory approach to biodiversity net gain will be introduced in the Bill that will legally require developers to ensure habitats for wildlife are enhanced, with a 10% increase in habitat for wildlife compared with the pre-development baseline.
- [Conservation covenants](#) – The government plans to legislate on conservation covenants, a voluntary agreement between a landowner and others (for example, a conservation charity) to help guarantee positive local conservation for the long term.

- [Improving our management of water in the environment](#) – The Environment Secretary has been clear that water companies need to do more to help improve the environment and better prepare for future demand for water. There was strong support in response to a consultation on proposals to improve long-term planning of water resources and drainage. The Bill will introduce powers to direct water companies to work together to address these issues, such as transferring supplies between catchments during drought conditions, and instructing them to have robust plans in place to maintain supplies.

Report on air quality target

The government is committed to tackling air pollution, and has already published its Clean Air Strategy which the World Health Organisation praised as an example for the rest of the world to follow. Alongside the consultation responses, the government has also published a [report on air quality](#), assessing progress towards WHO guideline levels for fine particulate matter (PM2.5) of 10 micrograms per cubic metre.

On the basis of scientific modelling, which has not considered economic viability and practical deliverability, we believe that, whilst challenging, it would be technically feasible to meet the World Health Organization guideline level for PM2.5 – the most damaging air pollutant – across the UK. The government will continue to work with experts on further analysis to understand potential timescales for achieving this guideline level.

This will be underpinned by legislation on key measures in the Clean Air Strategy, giving legal force to our plans. The government will also enable greater local action on air pollution by, for example, ensuring responsibility for tackling air pollution is shared (across local government structures and with relevant public bodies) and by better enabling local government to tackle emissions from burning coal and wood.

Background

A [policy statement](#) has also been published today, summarising progress so far and updating on the direction and vision of the Bill.

The headline announcements set out are:

Governance

1. The Office for Environmental Protection will offer a free-to-use complaints system, and crucially have the power to undertake its own investigations at its own instigation.
2. The Office for Environmental Protection will be able to take central Government and public bodies to court for any failure to abide by environmental law, if necessary.

Air Quality

1. Air quality has been steadily improving thanks to our £3.5 billion plan to clean up vehicle emissions and our Clean Air Strategy, which the WHO praised as an example for the rest of the world to follow.
2. On the basis of scientific modelling, which has not considered economic viability and practical deliverability, we believe that, whilst challenging, it would be technically feasible to meet the World Health Organization guideline level for PM2.5 – the most damaging air pollutant – across the UK.
3. We will ensure that all local bodies with powers to control emissions act together in a coordinated way.
4. We will be giving Local Authorities stronger powers in the Environment Bill to reduce emissions from polluting domestic burning.

Nature

1. In the Environment Bill, we will legislate to mandate biodiversity 'net gain' in future developments.
2. We will ensure that the environmental impacts of new commercial and residential developments are more than made up for, either on-site or by ensuring money is invested in improving existing habitats and restoring nature depleted environments to health.
3. We believe mandating biodiversity net gain will secure tens of millions of pounds a year in additional revenue for nature. That money will be invested in habitats such as new woodlands, grasslands and wetlands.
4. By legislating for conservation covenants, we can ensure that land owners have the opportunity legally to lock in the benefits generated by policies like net gain and our farming reform.
5. We will include a new system of environmental spatial mapping in the Environment Bill.
6. We will legislate for a new framework for Local Nature Recovery Strategies in the Environment Bill, to help support the Nature Recovery Network and better direct investment in the environment and green infrastructure, for example through biodiversity net gain – creating places that are richer in wildlife and provide wider benefits for local communities.
7. We will fulfill our manifesto commitment with a clear legal duty to consult before any street trees are felled, learning lessons from the Forestry Commission's investigation into the Sheffield Council's felling programme. Waste and Resource Efficiency
8. Our new legal powers will allow us to set resource- efficiency product standards, driving a shift in the market towards more durable, repairable and recyclable products. We will also set information requirements so that manufacturers can communicate the resource efficiency of their products more effectively, allowing consumers to make more environmentally friendly purchasing decisions.
9. We will ensure packaging producers pay the full net costs of disposing of their packaging at end of life. At the moment, producers pay only around 10% of the cost of household packaging waste. We will make them responsible for 100% of the net cost incurred in dealing with their

packaging once it becomes waste.

10. Where waste cannot be avoided, we will introduce a consistent and simplified approach to recycling across local authorities, making it simpler for everyone to recycle, with a consistent set of materials to be collected from all households and businesses (including food waste), and clearer labelling on packaging so we all know what we can recycle.
11. We will take powers in the Environment Bill to introduce deposit return schemes, and powers to introduce an electronic system of waste tracking to enable better use of waste as a resource and make it easier to identify and stop illegal activity.
12. We want to introduce a DRS from 2023, subject to further consultation and analysis of the costs and benefits.

Water

1. The government's priorities for the water sector, in line with the 25 Year Plan, are clear: they should be securing long-term, resilient water and wastewater services, protecting customers from potentially unaffordable bills and also making sure that we have a cleaner, greener country for the next generation.
2. Through the Environment Bill, we will support regulators in ensuring that customers and the environment are protected. We will legislate to strengthen Ofwat's powers to update water companies' licences, in order to make sure that they can do their job.

FURTHER BACKGROUND

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

- The government consulted on plans which will see the costs of recycling borne by those that produce packaging waste and place it on the market.
- Currently, packaging producers pay only around 10 per cent of the cost of dealing with packaging waste. By increasing that to cover the full net amount, government will incentivise producers to think carefully about using less packaging, and to switch to using packaging that is easier to recycle.
- Following the overhaul of the packaging regulations, the government will explore extended producer responsibility schemes for items that can be harder or costly to recycle, as set out in our Resources and Waste Strategy. As well as reviewing existing schemes for cars, electrical goods and batteries, this could include things such as textiles, fishing gear, vehicle tyres, certain materials from construction and demolition, and bulky waste such as mattresses, furniture and carpets.