

A photograph of two young women, one in a red shirt and one in a white shirt, smiling and looking at a slug held in the white-shirted woman's hand. They are outdoors on a grassy area with a building in the background.

# Securing a healthier environment and nature's recovery

A briefing for policy makers following the EU referendum

If the UK is to remain a progressive nation and one that invests in future generations, we must secure the stringent protections that being a member of the European Union has offered us





Everyone benefits from a rich natural environment, clean air and water, healthy soil, thriving wildlife and vibrant green spaces. They underpin the well-being and prosperity of our society and nature brings joy and wonder to millions of people.

**Yet, the 2016 State of Nature report showed that our wildlife is in serious decline. Fifty six per cent of UK species studied are in decline and more than one in ten of all species assessed are under threat of disappearing from our shores<sup>1</sup>.**

Nature matters in its own right; but it matters to us too. For example, our separation from nature contributes to chronic physical and mental health problems: if every household in England had good access to quality green space, it could save over £2 billion in healthcare costs per year<sup>2</sup>. And health problems resulting from exposure to air pollution cost an additional £20 billion annually, causing 40,000 premature deaths each year<sup>3</sup>. Meanwhile, unsustainable use of natural resources and degradation of habitats are also costing billions of pounds. Flooding and water contamination alone cost the UK economy £2.4 billion every year<sup>4</sup>.

Without the laws the UK has developed with the EU on pollution and wildlife, the current situation would be far worse. As we negotiate a new future for the UK, these issues must be addressed. We must secure and properly implement the laws we currently have; and we should go further still. We need a step change in efforts to secure nature's recovery and in how we value, use and interact with our natural world.

**We must not let environmental standards drop as we agree new trade deals.**

**We must not let environmental protection, principles and accountability be eroded as we leave the EU.**

**Instead, we must safeguard the environmental protections we have developed with Europe and go further still.**

## World leadership in nature's recovery

New impetus is needed if the UK is to be a world leader on the environment. Even before the referendum, our environmental protections were not working as effectively as they could. Despite having robust laws for environmental protection, they have often been poorly implemented and enforced, with no overall sense of purpose and insufficient cultural commitment from politicians and decision makers. Additional measures are required if we are not only to halt damage and decline, but also to restore our degraded environment and biodiversity.

The 2005-10 Westminster government commissioned *Making Space for Nature*, which set out an unquestionable case for investment in restoring England's environment. This led to the 2011 Natural Environment White Paper and the current government's commitment to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it. The government's 25 Year Environment Plan for England will aim to deliver this commitment. It is essential that this has legislative underpinning to ensure long term environmental protection and nature's recovery, and to secure the investment and accountability needed to achieve it.

Wildlife and pollution do not respect borders and the Westminster government should work closely and collaboratively with the devolved administrations to achieve effective environmental protection and nature's recovery across all countries of the UK. It will also need to comply with international legal obligations and co-operate closely with the EU and beyond.

<sup>1</sup> D B Hayhow et al, 2016, State of Nature 2016, The State of Nature Partnership

<sup>2</sup> Natural England (2009) Our Natural Health Service: The role of the natural environment in maintaining healthy lives

<sup>3</sup> Royal College of Physicians, 2016, Every Breath We Take: The Lifelong Impact of Air Pollution

<sup>4</sup> Green Alliance, 2016, New Markets for Land and Nature: How Natural Infrastructure Schemes Could Pay for a Better Environment

# A healthy environment for everyone

By restoring ecosystems, bringing wildlife back and cleaning up our air and water, we can lead the way globally in environmental restoration, and create a more resilient economy and healthier environment for everyone. To do this, we must secure current environmental protections through the Repeal Bill. Then we must move forward to build on current protections. For England, that means a strong 25 Year Environment Plan, reinforced by an ambitious Environment Act.

We need to ensure that the UK does not slip behind the world and weaken environmental protection. We must:

1. Use the Repeal Bill to sustain our current legal protections for species, habitats, protected areas and the wider environment on land and at sea.
2. Keep a level playing field for the UK in terms of international research and environmental standards.
3. Create a robust framework for environmental accountability that raises our game, to offset the loss of the EU framework and to ensure that government aspirations are matched by real delivery.

The Westminster government should set a world standard with a visionary and ambitious framework Environment Act for England with a clear pathway for ecological recovery. It should:

1. Set ambitious, measurable milestones for rebuilding the country's natural assets.
2. Create a powerful independent statutory committee to monitor progress.
3. Establish an effective new approach to environmental regulation, a robust enforcement plan and accountability for the state of nature across all government departments.
4. Ensure local frameworks deliver positive spatial planning for nature's recovery and access to nature.
5. Ensure integration with agricultural and fisheries policies to secure investment in rebuilding our environmental assets.

Our organisations are working together to ensure a healthier environment for everyone. If you would like more information please contact:

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