

Significant risk of reduced environmental protections post-Brexit, reports coalition

Co-operation and capacity necessary for green Brexit in doubt, according to Risk Tracker

Greener UK has today published its latest Brexit Risk Tracker, which assesses the UK government's performance in planning for a green Brexit. It has found that all main areas of environmental policy are still at medium or even high risk of being less protected after we leave the EU [1].

The government recently published its 25-year plan for the environment, including a pledge to eliminate all avoidable plastic waste by 2042 and plans to consult on a new environmental watchdog [2]. However, [Greener UK](#), a coalition of leading environmental organisations, has found few signs that the environment is a priority for the government in Brexit negotiations, despite the significant impact Brexit could have.

For example, the Risk Tracker finds that air quality, chemicals and waste are still at high risk of seeing lower protection post-Brexit. The UK is in breach of the Ambient Air Quality Directive and its most recent plan in July 2017 was largely similar to a widely criticised earlier draft [3]. Accompanying guidance to local authorities has lacked detail to meet important legal tests. Greener UK is concerned that the government's approach is an indication of its likely approach to air quality after the UK leaves.

On chemicals, the UK has asserted that it wants to adopt important rules imposed by the EU regulatory regime, REACH, but campaigners have made it clear that this would be far less effective than staying in REACH with access to its database of safety information [4]. On waste, despite the government's announcement on plastic, Greener UK highlights that WRAP (the Waste and Resources Action Programme) has just announced the loss of around 25 jobs, a tenth of its staff, after years of budget cuts from government [5].

Recommendations

To deliver a green Brexit, Greener UK believes that better co-operation is needed both with the EU and within the UK, and that concerns around capacity to deliver a green Brexit must be resolved.

Greener UK points to disagreements between the UK and EU on emissions trading as exposing divisive tactics that threaten high environmental standards and future collaboration with the EU [6]. The coalition also points to a forum of UK and devolved government ministers responsible for planning Brexit, which has so far demonstrated little commitment to adopting common frameworks that would ensure a high level of environmental protection across the UK [7].

The Risk Tracker also highlights particular concerns about the capacity of government to plan for and deliver a green Brexit. A recent National Audit Office report has prompted questions about Defra's capacity to deliver the second most demanding Brexit workload of all departments and to maintain current environmental standards while sustaining significant budget cuts [8].

Shaun Spiers, chair of Greener UK and executive director of Green Alliance, said:

"Michael Gove has been a highly engaged and effective environment secretary and the prime minister has promised to put the environment at the centre of government policy.

"Yet these green aspirations have not carried over to the government's narrative on Brexit. There are serious concerns about the level of future co-operation between the UK government and the EU, and the impact this will have on issues such as climate change and air quality. We also fear there is a lack of willpower to ensure high standards across the UK when we lose the common frameworks currently provided by the EU.

"In the last fortnight the government has pledged to be a global leader on plastic waste, but has made swingeing cuts to one of the main bodies charged with reducing it. There are big questions about whether the government is willing to devote the resources necessary to deliver a green Brexit.

“As the government has said, Brexit presents opportunities to restore and enhance our environment. This will not happen without adequate resources and better co-operation between the UK government and the EU, and within the UK.”

ENDS

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Notes to editors

[1] Greener UK, [Risk Tracker: January 2018 update](#), 21 January 2018 [will go live at 00:01 on Sunday 21 January]. The two previous Risk Trackers, analysing progress on the environment between June 2016 and June 2017, and July and September 2017, can be found on the same page.

[2] BBC, [Environment strategy aims to stop needless plastic waste](#), 11 January 2018.

[3] Healthy Air, [Client Earth's legal case](#), 23 February 2015.

[4] Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union Steve Baker MP, House of Commons Hansard, [European Union \(Withdrawal\) Bill](#), Volume 663, 20 December 2017.

Financial Times, [Chemical and pharma groups urge Gove to stick to EU regime](#), 11 December 2017.

Chem Trust, [Written submission commenting on the UK Government's response to the Environmental Audit Committee on "Future of Chemicals Regulation after the EU Referendum" inquiry](#), October 2017.

[5] According to *Resource*, WRAP has just announced major changes due to funding issues, anticipated to lead to the loss of around 25 jobs. Its funding from Defra has shrunk from £56 million in 2009/10, to £15.5 million in 2015/16 (a decrease of 72 per cent), to a current budget for 2017/18 of less than £10 million. See: *Resource*, [WRAP funding issues to lead to the loss of 25 jobs](#), 17 January 2018.

[6] Forbes, [In The First Brexit Direct Hit, UK Carbon Traders Are Set To Lose £400m On Jan. 1](#), 22 November 2017.

[7] From Greener UK's Risk Tracker, January 2018:

In a sign of welcome progress for intra-UK co-operation, agreement was reached in October (2017) via the Joint Ministerial Committee (JMC) that common frameworks would continue to be required in at least some areas post-Brexit, including to ensure the effective management of common resources. However, following the subsequent JMC meeting in December, it was announced that common legislative frameworks would only be maintained in a minority of areas, with no mention of whether any environmental issues would be included in this minority or how they could be affected.

The NAO has identified “failure to agree overarching UK frameworks with the devolved administrations” as a key risk to Defra. See National Audit Office (NAO), [Implementing the UK's exit from the European Union: The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#), p. 11.

[8] A recent National Audit Committee report stated that the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) is expected to complete 43 policy streams for EU Exit, the second most of any department, and is seeking to employ 1,200 extra policy staff to complete the task. Defra has been allocated £94.4 million for managing EU Exit in 2017-18. At the same time, Defra is facing £147 million in Budget reductions across 2017-18 and 2018-19, and has been targeting total savings, through Budget considerations and policy choices, of £243 million over the two years to 2019.

National Audit Office (NAO), [Implementing the UK's exit from the European Union: The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs](#), 20 December 2017: pp. 4-5, 17.

ABOUT GREENER UK

[Greener UK](#) is a group of 13 major environmental organisations, with a combined public membership of c. 8 million. They are united in the belief that leaving the EU is a pivotal moment to restore and enhance the UK's environment. The coalition members include RSPB, National Trust, The Wildlife Trusts, WWF, Green Alliance, ClientEarth, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, WWT, Woodland Trust, Campaign to Protect Rural England, E3G and Campaign for Better Transport.