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Environment faces ‘multiple risks’ from a no deal Brexit

Campaigners call for government to do all it can to avoid a no deal Brexit

Greener UK, the coalition of major environmental organisations working on Brexit, is today warning against the potentially harmful impact of a ‘chaotic no deal’ on the environment.

In a paper considering the possible effects of no deal on different areas of the environment, Greener UK argues that a no deal Brexit is likely to have a damaging impact on areas from climate to chemicals [1]. There are significant fears of harm to nature, animal welfare, human wellbeing and accountability.

In the agriculture sector, Greener UK projects that a no deal would allow trade deals to force the import of goods produced to lower standards than those in the UK. This could undercut domestic producers and increase pressure to water down British standards. There is also the likelihood that failing to agree a customs deal would lead to a hard border in Ireland. This could lead to delays in border crossings and potentially jeopardise the welfare of the 800,000 pigs and lambs that currently cross the border each year [2].

Regarding chemicals, the paper suggests that abruptly leaving the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) could threaten the environment as well as business. In one case, costs for a business to re-register chemicals in the EU have been estimated at £100,000 [3]. Meanwhile, chemicals banned in Europe could find their way to the UK if domestic regulation does not keep pace. Greener UK suggests it is ‘highly unlikely’ that the UK will be able to replicate the EU’s existing chemicals regime, often considered the gold standard for chemical regulation.

Finally, a no deal Brexit raises questions about accountability. Environmental laws and protections are currently upheld by the European Commission and European Court of Justice (ECJ), with the government planning to replace their role with a domestic ‘green watchdog’ before exit day. It is clear, however, that should the UK leave without a deal and the transition period be cancelled, the new body will not be ready in time and there will be no independent legal authority to hold the UK government and public authorities to account.

Following the cabinet disagreement in the last few weeks there is increasing talk of a ‘no deal’. Some MPs who back leaving the EU have been vocal about the positives of leaving without a deal [4]. However, there are well-publicised fears in the business community [5], as well as significant concern in other sectors, including the environment.

Shaun Spiers, chair of the Greener UK coalition, said:

“A no deal Brexit is becoming more likely by the day. The EU is preparing for it and some backbench MPs seem to welcome the prospect. But make no mistake, there can be no green Brexit if the UK crashes out of the EU without a deal.

“There are multiple risks of harm in the event of no deal, including lower environmental standards, poor food safety, and a reduced ability to tackle climate change. For the environment, no deal is the worst possible outcome of Brexit.”

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

[1] Greener UK, What would a no deal Brexit mean for the environment?, July 2018.

[2] Irish Farmers Association, [Brexit: The imperatives for Irish farmers and the agri-food sector](#), 2017, p 17.

[3] Chemicals Industry Association, [EU Energy and Environment Sub-Committee](#), House of Lords, 27 June 2018, at 11:01:30.

[4] FT, [‘Tory MP claims hard Brexit would put Jaguar Land Rover in ‘wonderful position’](#), 5 July 2018.

[5] CBI, [The trade costs of a “no deal” scenario](#).

ABOUT GREENER UK

[Greener UK](#) is a group of 13 major environmental organisations, with a combined public membership of 7.9 million. They are united in the belief that leaving the EU is a pivotal moment to restore and enhance the UK’s environment.