

GREENER UK

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Government is running out of time to fulfil its 'green Brexit' promise, warns coalition

Ministers are not backing up their pledges on governance, with bold new laws needed for nature's recovery and a healthy environment

[Greener UK](#), a coalition of leading environmental organisations, today warns that time is running out for the government to fulfil its promise of a 'green Brexit'. [1]

Despite cross-party calls from MPs and peers, the government is declining to carry over all environmental legislation in the EU Withdrawal Bill, risking the protection of nature, water and air quality. [2]

The "world-leading" environment watchdog promised by Michael Gove in the autumn is yet to appear, and there are fears that the proposals will fall short of the environment secretary's ambitions.

In a recent Efra Committee report, three ministers from other departments were reluctant to support an oversight body fully independent of government. [3] Greener UK considers this body's independence to be integral to its success in covering the environmental governance gap that will open up with Brexit. A lack of government-wide support would undermine Defra's ambitions.

As well as the urgency of the Brexit timetable, the campaigners point to the pressing need to act on environmental problems such as air pollution and the disappearance of once common plants and animals from our gardens and countryside.

In a new [call to action](#) published today, Greener UK argues that a green Brexit will need:

- new legislation to build on the full body of existing environmental law;
- ambitious and measurable goals for nature's recovery and a healthy environment;
- strong principles to underpin fair and far-sighted judgement;
- and at least one new, empowered institution to uphold environmental laws, champion citizens' rights and hold future governments to account. [4]

The Conservative election manifesto pledged to leave the environment in a better state, and an estimated 80 per cent of environmental policy stems from EU law. Prime Minister Theresa May, Brexit Secretary David Davis and Environment Secretary Michael Gove have all promised to ensure Brexit strengthens our environmental standards. [5]

Amy Mount, of the Greener UK coalition, said:

"The government knows that no one voted for dirty beaches or the disappearance of much-loved wildlife from our gardens and wild places. But with city children choking on unhealthy air, and the future of British farming and fishing dependent on thriving ecosystems, environmental protections are not just a nice-to-have.

"With only one year to go until exit day, there are gaping holes to fill. We need new laws to make the statute book fit for the environmental challenges we face. And we need powerful, independent, well-resourced institutions to hold the authorities to account.

"The UK wants to be an international environmental leader. With ambitious new legislation at home enshrining the highest standards, the UK can credibly push for progress at the global scale. However, it has to seize this moment now, match actions to its green rhetoric and show the world what visionary leadership looks like."

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Contact

Amy Mount, head of the Greener UK unit, Green Alliance
e: amount@green-alliance.org.uk
t: 020 7630 4515

Notes to editors

[1] Greener UK is holding a press briefing on this topic from 10-11am on Wednesday 28 March. Chief executives of the major environmental charities will be present, which will be held at the **Green Alliance office, 4th floor, 11 Belgrave Road, London, SW1V 1RB**. Contact Paul McNamee pmcnamee@green-alliance.org.uk to attend.

[2] Greener UK's concerns about the Withdrawal Bill are set out in this [briefing](#).

[3] A joint committee [report](#) on air pollution published on 15 March revealed that ministers from DFT, the Treasury and MHCLG are not particularly keen on a new environment watchdog:

"24. The Secretary of State acknowledged there would be a "governance gap", and has said that an independent body would be created to hold Government to account after EU-exit. Mr Gove said Defra will consult on establishing a body that is "independent of Government ... [and] placed on a statutory footing, ensuring it has clear authority. Its ambition will be to champion and uphold environmental standards".

"25. We asked Ministers for their views on the proposed establishment of an Environmental Protection Agency which would hold the Government to account. The proposal did not appear welcome across the Departments. Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Department for Transport Jesse Norman told us that "Parliament is the correct body to hold Government to account". The then Exchequer Secretary to HM Treasury Andrew Jones likewise stated that "the best way to hold Government to account is through Parliament". The then Minister for Local Government Marcus Jones did not answer directly, saying "I do not want to get into the debate over who should be the arbiter in these situations"."

These comments were made on 30 November, which post-dates Michael Gove's statement of 12 November.

[4] See new call to action [here](#) and attached: *'Time is running out: we need to act now for nature's recovery and a healthy environment'*

[5] Recent ministerial commitments that Brexit will lead to enhanced environmental standards:

- [Theresa May](#), 11 January 2018: "We will use the opportunity Brexit provides to strengthen and enhance our environmental protections – not to weaken them."
- [David Davis](#), 20 February 2018: "we're delivering an ambitious environmental plan, that aims to leave the environment in a better state than that we found it in", and highlighting "Michael Gove's crusading zeal to improve animal welfare and environmental outcomes".
- [Michael Gove](#), 15 March 2018: "Brexit, with the right decisions, can enhance our natural environment ... not only will there be no abandonment of the environmental principles that we've adopted in our time in the EU but indeed we aim to strengthen environmental protection measures and to create new mechanisms to incentivise environmental improvement."

ABOUT GREENER UK

[Greener UK](#) is a group of 13 major environmental organisations, with a combined public membership of around eight 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 partners are: Campaign for Better Transport, Campaign to Protect Rural England, E3G, ClientEarth, Friends of the Earth, Green Alliance, Greenpeace, National Trust, RSPB, The Wildlife Trusts, Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, Woodland Trust, and WWF.