

Monday 7 May 2018**Tentative progress on plastics and 'green Brexit' held back by absence of environment watchdog**

Environmentalists argue that improvements in plastics, agriculture and chemicals policy are tempered by continuing uncertainty over how environmental laws will be enforced after Brexit

A coalition of 13 major environmental organisations has today found that government is making tentative progress on its 'green Brexit' plans, but that improvements will be undone if the government doesn't put in place a strong green watchdog to enforce laws after exit day [1].

The results are published in the fourth edition of [Greener UK's](#) Brexit 'Risk Tracker', a scorecard rating the government's progress on protecting the environment during Brexit. It suggests notable improvement from the last analysis in January [2].

The waste & resources category has improved from a red to amber rating, largely due to the government's increasingly tough attitude towards waste – including its decisions to reverse its opposition to new EU recycling targets. From consulting on banning plastic straws to promising a deposit return scheme for drinks containers, the government is demonstrating post-Brexit ambition [3]. Similarly, the chemicals rating has improved from red to amber, with the government pledging in March to seek 'associate membership' of the EU chemicals regime, REACH, which has the most comprehensive database of chemicals worldwide [4].

The Risk Tracker identifies other noteworthy progress. In February the government published its intentions to reward farmers for providing public benefits rather than for the area farmed. The principal public benefits cited were environmental protection and enhancement [5]. It was also announced that the UK would remain in the Common Fisheries Policy through the transition period. This provides the government with more time to agree sustainable fishing quotas with the EU, essential to protecting the survival of species that swim across international borders [6].

However, the Risk Tracker finds that there is damaging uncertainty over the government's plans to protect vital laws and principles post-Brexit. Environment Secretary Michael Gove has pledged a 'world-leading' independent body to replace the EU in making sure the UK government is meeting environmental standards. The government has also pledged to set out important environmental principles, such as the polluter pays, in legislation, as they have not been included in the EU Withdrawal Bill [7].

Amidst reports of Cabinet disagreement, neither have yet appeared – and time is running out to get them in primary legislation before exit day [8].

Amy Mount of the Greener UK coalition said:

"We have been pleased to see the government make progress on several vital issues. It has taken steps to eradicate the plastic waste doing so much damage to our seas and countryside, and is trying to work with our neighbours to stop toxic chemicals harming people and nature.

"Yet the government is at risk of undoing all its good work if it does not give people the ability to hold government to account on laws that protect nature and our communities. We need a powerful green watchdog, which can act on behalf of the public and is answerable to parliament. Otherwise, the government could flaunt its promises to reduce plastic pollution and increase recycling, fail to protect

much-loved wildlife like golden eagles and red kites, and fall short in cleaning up our air and looking after our beaches.

“The government has claimed that Brexit offers an opportunity to strengthen environmental protections. It now needs to prove it.”

ENDS

Notes to editors

[1] See the fourth edition of the Greener UK Brexit ‘Risk Tracker’ attached. It will go live [here](#) as an interactive web graphic.

[2] The previous Risk Tracker, published in January, is available [here](#).

[3] BBC News, [Plastic straw and cotton bud ban proposed](#), 19 April 2018

[4] Chemical Watch, [Prime minister: UK to seek 'associate membership' of Echa](#), 5 March 2018

[5] Defra, [The future for food, farming and the environment](#), 27 February 2018

[6] BBC News, [EU fishing deal 'far from acceptable' to Scottish industry](#), 19 March 2018

[7] The Daily Telegraph, [Exclusive: Michael Gove's plan for a green revolution after Brexit](#), 11 November 2017

[8] The Daily Telegraph, [Michael Gove faces backlash from Philip Hammond and Chris Grayling over green Brexit](#), 13 April 2018

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. The coalition members include WWF, National Trust, RSPB, Friends of the Earth, Green Alliance and The Wildlife Trusts.