

Time is running out: we need to act now for nature's recovery and a healthy environment

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Brexit is a pivotal moment for our environment

Nature is struggling. We are depleting soils, generating mountains of plastic and food waste, changing our climate, making the air in our cities dangerous to breathe and polluting our oceans. Once familiar animals and plants are vanishing from our gardens and countryside. Yet we know how to reverse these problems and we know that a high quality environment is fundamental to the health of our society and our economy.

Currently, the majority of our environmental legislation comes from the EU. The clock is ticking towards the day we leave, which will be a pivotal moment for the environment. Westminster and the devolved governments recognise that new institutions will be required to avoid gaps in environmental protection after Brexit and hold those in power to account on their environmental performance.

International leadership springs from domestic ambition

Even under current protections, nature has been declining, so governments will need to be bold and ambitious to restore the health of our environment and ensure nature's recovery. To secure a greener UK for future generations, we must act now.

Countries across the world will be coming together in 2020 for a series of crucial summits on planetary challenges relating to biodiversity, oceans, sustainable development and climate. Visionary international leadership is required. As a world leader, the UK should inject new confidence and ideas into the international arena at this decisive time.

But to lead with credibility, the work must start at home. Ambitious new legislation is needed. Will our governments step up?

Action across borders

Environmental processes are blind to borders. Air pollution blows from one country to the next, fish swim from sea to sea, rivers flow across political boundaries and greenhouse gases cause global warming no matter where they originate. Equally, we impact on nature and the environment beyond our shores through the goods we consume, the food we eat and the waste we

produce. Our health and shared natural world can only be protected if governments co-operate, and this applies within the UK as well as internationally.

Environmental policy is largely a devolved matter in the UK, and, as we exit the EU, our policies will no longer be under the umbrella of EU-wide laws and standards. A joined-up approach should be agreed and supported by the UK's four governments, to ensure that no part of the UK can lower its environmental protections.

Ambitious new laws

New laws should build on the strong foundations of the full body of existing environmental law and result in:

1. **Ambitious and measurable goals** for nature's recovery and a healthy environment.
2. **Strong principles** to underpin fair and far-sighted decision making.
3. **Independent institutions** to uphold environmental law, champion citizens' rights and prevent the roll-back of existing environmental protections.

A Westminster Environment Act will be an important part of this, as will relevant legislation in the devolved legislatures.

Ambitious and measurable goals

The level of environmental ambition must take, as a starting point, existing international commitments, while setting a gold standard for the future. The governments of the UK should work together to agree shared environmental goals that are legally binding and ensure:

- Air that's cleaner and fit to breathe
- More abundant and diverse wildlife
- Beautiful landscapes in the places we love
- Reduced emissions of climate changing gases
- Efficient use of resources and elimination of waste
- Reduction in our global environmental footprint
- Fair access for everyone to wild places and green spaces
- Protection from chemicals and toxic substances

- Water of the highest quality for people and wildlife
- Healthy and productive soils
- Resilient ecosystems on land and at sea

Strong principles

We need to ensure that all law and decision making, whether by governments or the courts, is underpinned by strong environmental principles. These are fundamental to international environmental law, and are set out in the EU treaties. So far, they have not been comprehensively embedded into the domestic statute book across all four nations. The governments of the UK should work together to achieve this.

These principles would ensure, for example, that polluters pay for their polluting activities, that dangerous chemicals posing risks to health are not authorised for use while their effects are not fully known, and that environmental considerations are properly woven into all government decision making.

Independent institutions

The four governments of the UK should collaborate to establish world-class governance arrangements which ensure:

- proper scrutiny of governments, public authorities, and international trade deals and treaties, with a transparent monitoring and reporting process;
- compliance with the law, with the ability for enforcement action against governments and their agencies when necessary;
- all citizens have access to justice, with simple and affordable ways to challenge public decisions; and
- a process for setting and regularly reviewing environmental objectives.

Achieving this will require the establishment of at least one new scrutiny body through primary legislation, in place, even if on an interim basis, before exit day. Such a body must be robust, independent, and have the necessary resources and expertise to do the job well.

Together, we can secure nature's recovery and improve our environment for future generations

With these building blocks, we can lay firm foundations for a greener future. Failure to act risks a loss of environmental protection and a new era of uncertainty. But, if done right, we can demonstrate that we are environmental leaders on the world stage. And we can look forward to green cities, clean industry, farming and forestry that enriches wildlife, fishing in thriving seas, and a fair future where everyone can benefit from a richer natural world.

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Greener UK is a group of 13 major environmental organisations, with a combined public membership of more than 8 million, united in the belief that leaving the EU is a pivotal moment to restore and enhance the UK's environment.

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