

Queen's speech briefing

October 2019

We face an environmental crisis. Across the world, wildlife populations are collapsing, ecosystems are breaking down and temperatures are rising at an alarming rate. The story is no different at home. The UK is now one of the most nature depleted countries in the world and is experiencing a growing number of extreme weather events. Public support for tackling this crisis is growing, with mounting calls for politicians to act now. The declaration of a climate and environment emergency by the UK parliament was a good start, but we urgently need to see ambitious environmental legislation and policies that can deliver the change desperately required.

The Queen's speech is expected to include a number of important bills. The speech and following debates, therefore, provide an opportunity for MPs and peers to discuss and define what ambitious legislation and policies should look like. **Irrespective of whether MPs and peers support the Queen's speech itself**, Greener UK is calling on parliamentarians to use this time to support the following recommendations, should the bills or relevant topics be introduced.

1. An ambitious Environment Bill

If we are to solve the environmental crisis, we need a much more joined-up approach from government, underpinned by strong enforcement and ambitious, legally binding targets to drive improvement.

The government is expected to introduce an Environment Bill in the Queen's speech. While ministers have promised to pursue an ambitious agenda, the [substance of the bill](#) has thus far fallen short, with existing protections set to be weakened. Greener UK believes that the Environment Bill must be improved so that it:

- establishes legally binding targets in areas such as biodiversity, air, water and waste, with mechanisms for delivering and reporting on their delivery;
- provides a firm legal basis for environmental principles, including the precautionary principle, in domestic law;
- equips the new green watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection, with the necessary independence, resources and powers to hold government and public authorities to account, with climate law included in its remit;
- includes a provision on 'non-regression' that prevents backsliding on environmental standards after Brexit;
- establishes Nature Recovery Networks across England, to enhance nature at the local level, with the close engagement of stakeholders.

2. Ambitious agricultural reform

The Agriculture Bill had the potential to be the UK parliament's first major domestic agriculture policy in 45 years, before it fell with the prorogation of parliament. If the bill returns, via the Queen's speech, we encourage parliamentarians to support its current central principle of 'public money for public goods'. This would refocus farm payments on restoring nature, improving water quality and mitigating climate change, rather than paying subsidies for simply owning farmland. We believe that this approach will help farmers in England to restore nature and landscapes while producing the food we need and managing thriving businesses.

There are, however, some areas where the existing bill should be improved. If the bill returns, we think that it should be brought forward quickly and should:

- continue to focus policy around 'public money for public goods', which are defined in clause 1(1) in the [previous bill](#), and ensure that farmers and land managers are the recipients of payments;
- create a duty on the UK government to routinely assess the scale of financial need, which should result in substantial long term support to farmers paid through multi-annual frameworks;
- establish a strong regulatory baseline to which farmers and land managers must adhere;
- ensure that future trade deals cannot lower standards and do not undercut domestic farmers by allowing the import of agricultural goods that do not meet UK standards.

3. Sustainable fisheries management

In recent years the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has improved its environmental credentials, with more commitments to sustainability. Nevertheless, overfishing has been the [primary cause](#) of marine biodiversity loss in the past 40 years. This year, scientists urged that the fishing of North Sea cod should be drastically reduced owing to critically low levels.

With the UK preparing to leave the CFP, and the government's Fisheries Bill was set to define the UK's new approach to managing stocks and fishing practices. While it aimed to introduce a 'gold standard' for sustainable fisheries, the bill fell short in a number of crucial areas, particularly on legal commitments. If it returns, Greener UK believes the bill should:

- include a legal commitment to set fishing limits below scientifically defined sustainable levels (maximum sustainable yield, or 'MSY');
- implement a legal duty on relevant public authorities to ensure sustainable fishing;
- require the government to secure the sustainable management of shared stocks in negotiations, and avoid overfishing;

- allocate fishing opportunities on the basis of transparent and objective environmental and social criteria, in a way that incentivises the most sustainable fishing;
- commit the UK to full and verifiable documentation of all catches, with strong requirements on monitoring, compliance and enforcement, including electric monitoring with cameras.

4. Trade that does not compromise our environment

Trade has significant implications for the environment, from domestic regulations and the quality of the products we import, to our global environmental footprint. There are, therefore, many questions around future trading relationships and how those relationships might affect existing and future protections and standards.

The government’s Trade Bill has fallen, and is thought not to be returning in the Queen’s speech. Providing proper environmental and democratic safeguards in trade policy should really be done through new primary legislation. We are looking for the government to set out a clear framework for future trading relationships that:

- guarantees that environmental standards are maintained or enhanced, including through legal commitments to ‘non-regression’ on current UK standards;
- minimises the environmental footprint of trade and reinforces existing international environmental commitments, such as the Paris Climate Agreement and Convention on Biological Diversity;
- is developed with public participation, accountability and scrutiny, with civil society given a meaningful role, and parliament proper votes, on the negotiation, ratification and implementation of trade agreements.

More detailed information on, and further recommendations for, the bills can be found on the [Greener UK website](#).

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