

## Queen's speech briefing

January 2020

The [Conservative manifesto](#) committed to pursuing the world's most ambitious environmental programme. As we witness the bushfires in Australia, floods in Indonesia, and unceasing depletion of nature in the UK, it is vital the government brings forward the ambitious legislation and policies that are urgently required.

The government's legislative programme is set to include a number of important bills, on the environment, agriculture, fisheries and trade. Irrespective of whether MPs and peers support the Queen's speech itself, Greener UK is urging parliamentarians to use the forthcoming debates to discuss and define what these bills should look like, and to support the following recommendations:

### 1. An ambitious Environment Bill

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

The government is expected to reintroduce the [Environment Bill](#) shortly. The bill hints at a bold agenda, including through a framework for setting legally binding targets on air, nature, water and waste. Yet the bill still falls short, with current standards at risk and existing protections set to be weaker.

Greener UK believes that the Environment Bill must be improved so that it:

- includes a legally binding commitment to maintain existing standards ('non-regression') that prevents backsliding on environmental standards after Brexit;
- makes sure the new green watchdog, the Office for Environmental Protection, is genuinely independent from government, and is equipped with the resources and powers to hold government and public authorities to account;
- tightens the framework for setting legally binding targets, with a stronger advisory function, legally binding interim targets and a strengthened significant improvement test;
- maintains the strength of the environmental principles, such as the precautionary principle, through a duty of direct application in domestic law.

## 2. Ambitious agricultural reform

The Agriculture Bill has the potential to be the UK parliament's first major domestic agriculture policy in 45 years. Previous iterations of [the bill](#) sought to refocus farm payments around the principle of 'public money for public goods'. This would reward farmers for providing public benefits, such as restoring nature, improving water quality and mitigating climate change, rather than for simply owning farmland.

We believe that this approach will help farmers in England restore nature and landscapes while producing the food we need and managing thriving businesses. Therefore, if the bill returns with a similar focus, we encourage parliamentarians to argue that the bill should continue to focus policy around the 'public goods' defined in [clause 1\(1\)](#) of the previous bill, and ensure that farmers and land managers are the recipients of payments.

Alongside this, however, there are areas where the bill should be improved. We believe the bill should:

- create a duty on the UK government to routinely assess the scale of financial need, resulting in substantial long term support to farmers via multi-annual frameworks;
- establish a strong baseline of regulations to which farmers and land managers must adhere;
- ensure that future trade deals neither lower standards nor undercut domestic farmers through the allowing of imports of agricultural goods below current UK standards.

## 3. Sustainable fisheries management

In recent years the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has improved its environmental credentials, with more sustainability commitments. Yet overfishing has been the [primary cause](#) of marine biodiversity loss in the past 40 years. Species such as North Sea cod, for example, are at critically low levels.

With the UK leaving the CFP, the forthcoming Fisheries Bill will define the UK's new approach to managing stocks and fishing practices. The [previously introduced bill](#) fell short of a 'gold standard' for sustainable fisheries, but the [Queen's speech announcement](#) before Christmas indicated that the bill would reflect more promising Conservative manifesto commitments: to put legal requirements on sustainable fishing and on sustainable fishing limits for each stock.

It would be helpful for parliamentarians to push the government for details in this area, helping to shape a bill that:

- includes a legal commitment to set fishing limits below scientifically defined sustainable levels ('MSY');

- implements a legal duty on relevant public authorities to ensure sustainable fishing;
- requires the government to secure the sustainable management of shared stocks in negotiations, and avoid overfishing;
- allocates fishing opportunities on the basis of transparent and objective environmental and social criteria, in a way that incentivises the most sustainable fishing;
- commits 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

The government is introducing a Trade Bill that will guide its approach to negotiations with the EU and others, such as the United States. As trade has huge implications for our environment, from domestic regulations and the products we import to our global footprint, the forthcoming bill needs to make sure that the environment is protected.

Greener UK is therefore calling for a bill that means UK trade policy:

- 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;
- guarantees 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.

More detailed information on the bills can be found on the [Greener UK website](#).

Sarah Williams, head of the Greener UK unit, Green Alliance  
 e: [swilliams@green-alliance.org.uk](mailto:swilliams@green-alliance.org.uk)  
 t: 020 7630 4515

## GREENER UK

