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**Your ref:**  
**Our ref:**  
**Date:** 24 November 2022

Dear Ruth

### **Joint complaint**

Thank you for your joint letter of 1 November, from members of Greener UK, Wildlife and Countryside Link and the Healthy Air Coalition.

The written ministerial statement made by Defra's Secretary of State on 28 October announced that government would not be able to publish long-term environment targets, as required by the Environment Act 2021, by 31 October. As requested, we are treating your letter as a formal complaint under Defra procedures. We note that you have written separately to the Office for Environmental Protection.

The Secretary of State set out in the statement that we will continue to work at pace to lay draft statutory instruments (SIs) as soon as practicable. The Secretary of State needs to be satisfied that the targets to be set are deliverable and we have prioritised work to facilitate decisions. As you will appreciate, the SIs also need to undergo legal checks. Once the SIs have been laid, the final step will be for Parliament to approve the draft targets SIs, through an affirmative debate procedure, at which point the SIs can come into force.

Our efforts at this time are focused on delivering the environment targets SIs as quickly as possible. We do not believe that an independent review into timeframes, departmental programming and delivery mechanisms is needed. However, we plan to conduct a thorough lessons learned exercise once the targets are laid and the Environmental Improvement Plan is published, taking account of a range of internal and external perspectives and setting out lessons learned for the future.

We are committed to reviewing and revising the Environment Improvement Plan by 31 January 2023 and we are continuing to progress work across other key delivery areas to improve and restore our natural environment. For example, we announced at the Spending Review 2021 the investment of more than £250 million over three years to protect and restore nature. This included designating at least 15 new National Nature Reserves and expanding the Species Recovery Programme supported by new grants. The Secretary of State also announced the £30m Big Nature Impact Fund at COP27, which will help meet our target of mobilising at least £500m per year in private finance into nature recovery by 2027, rising to £1bn per year by 2030.

We very much value the wide range of input that you and colleagues across the sector have provided to inform the development of Defra policy on the environment targets and our wider environmental agenda. We look forward to continuing to work with you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Deb Hankins', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Deb Hankins  
Director of Environment Strategy  
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