

# Environment Audit Committee

## Oral evidence: Environmental compliance and enforcement, HC 1092

Wednesday 8 February 2023

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Members present: Philip Dunne (Chair); Duncan Baker; Barry Gardiner; Helen Hayes; Caroline Lucas; Cherilyn Mackrory; Anna McMorrin; John McNally; Dr Matthew Offord; Claudia Webbe.

Questions 49 - 70

### Witnesses

I: Dame Glenys Stacey DBE, Chair, Office for Environmental Protection; and Natalie Prosser, Chief Executive, Office for Environmental Protection.

### Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dame Glenys Stacey and Natalie Prosser.

Q49 **Chair:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Environment Audit Committee, where we are pleased to have two panels today discussing the environmental protection policies of DEFRA. We are particularly pleased to welcome back to the Committee the chair and chief executive of the Office for Environmental Protection. I would like to start by apologising to Dame Glenys Stacey and Natalie Prosser for being unable to have our session last week as a result of parliamentary votes. However, we are here today and very much look forward to hearing what you have to say to us now that you have been established for a year or so at the OEP.

I would like to start by asking you a question that is a follow-up to some of our previous conversations on the extent to which you have clarity over your role and are comfortable in the resource that you have to fulfil it. Glenys, would you like to kick off?

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** Thank you. It is true that when you look at the Office for Environmental Protection in terms of the provisions of the Environment Act, it does look an odd beast. There is a very wide range of powers; in one sense we can do a lot of things. Our enforcement powers are not as strong as some advocated. Indeed, enforcement is not



necessarily the best way to go about things, and we have had to find our way through that. Certainly we set out in our strategy last year our approach, which I can sum up as doing everything that we have to do—reporting annually on the Government’s progress, for example, in delivering their 25-year plan. They are givens and we make a very great deal of effort to get that as well as possible.

Otherwise, where we have discretion, we tend to take an issue-based approach, taking the most prominent, pertinent issue in the environment where we think that we can make a difference, and then looking across our range of tools to see which tool or tools—which powers—we can apply to make the difference that is required. If we can make enough difference, then we get on and do it. I think we are getting comfortable with our role. Fortunately, we have done some excellent recruitment. We have some excellent people at the OEP. I am very proud and pleased about that. Together, they are able to deliver exceptionally well.

As to whether we have enough resources, I welcome your interest—thank you. Of course, we do have to report to Parliament annually on whether we have enough resources. The position that we are in at the moment is that we have resources that we agreed for start-up and our first year and we are now in a process of bidding, with everyone else in the public sector—our bids go into DEFRA and we are bidding for our future funding.

We have done a good deal of work to estimate, as far as we are able, what we think we need in order to be a credible organisation that is to deliver as Parliament intended. We are not there yet. Oddly—well, not oddly, I suppose; expectedly—the figure that we have come up with, which is about 95 staff, sits squarely within all the original estimates for the OEP. DEFRA did some good work with PA Consulting to look at what size we might be. That came out, I recollect, at between 80 and 120, so we are almost in the middle of that. We are as confident as we can be that we have that right, and we certainly have not over-egged it, but we are now waiting to see what comes of it.

Natalie, you might be able to update the Chair on the current position and how things are looking in the bid process.

**Natalie Prosser:** I would be very happy to do that. We have modelled what we think is our target operating model total staffing, which, as Dame Glenys said, we estimate to be about 95 people. We think that we need about 18 months or so to build up to that, so for this financial year we have sought funding for a little over £10 million, with a sought headcount of 85. That is 70 in our English remit and 15 in our Northern Ireland remit. We have made that case to DEFRA officials.

Q50 **Chair:** Can I just be clear? Is that what you have budgeted for the current year, or what you are asking for for next year?

**Natalie Prosser:** What we are asking for for next year.



Q51 **Chair:** How does that compare with what you have today?

**Natalie Prosser:** Our ringfenced funding for the next financial year is currently £7.25 million, with a headcount of 50 for England and eight for Northern Ireland. At the moment we have a temporary uplift of an extra 10 members of staff, which, absent agreement, we would lose into the next financial year. We are looking for a uplift, as I said, to a total headcount of 85, 70 for England.

A proportion of that £10 million is capital funding for our estates; that is just over £1 million. In terms of non-capital funding, that is just under £9 million for our resourcing. We would aim to grow a little bit more again into financial year 2024-25, which would take us to that target number that Dame Glenys mentioned.

Q52 **Chair:** So you are looking for about £2 million of revenue uplift.

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** Is it £2 million or is it a little bit more? It is a little over £2 million.

Just to say, Chair, that if we do not get this money, if we do not get permission to recruit to 95 in the timetable that we are talking about, we will not be able to develop the foresight that we need to play an active, constructive role in scrutinising the trajectory of progress that Government are making. You will know that we produced our annual assessment just a short while ago. It looks back. We do not yet have the capacity to look forward, but that is very much what is going to be required, in the same way that the Climate Change Committee is able to do that and then advise Government accordingly.

**Chair:** And that is part of your remit—to look forward.

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** It is. We will also really struggle on complaints and investigations. Some meaty complaints are now coming in, and you know how resource intensive investigation and subsequent enforcement work can be. We will not be able to properly monitor the application of environmental law. Again, you and your Committee will know just how important that is at the moment, given legislation that is going through Parliament and the changes that are to come about.

Q53 **Chair:** I was going to ask: how many of your staff are involved in investigations as opposed to the other work?

**Natalie Prosser:** The whole complaints and investigation team is maybe seven or eight people at the moment. That is not just investigations; that is also reviewing and triaging all of our complaints. Dedicated investigators are maybe four members of staff at the moment.

Q54 **Chair:** That sounds quite a small number compared with other regulators.

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** Yes, it is.



**Chair:** Within your 95, how many would be investigators?

**Natalie Prosser:** We have not concluded all of our organisational design work at the moment, because pending knowing the absolute numbers we would not want to waste resources on that, but we would want to put, we think, three or four additional staff, if we were to secure the entire uplift that we are looking for, into our investigations team.

Q55 **Chair:** Thank you for that. Can we touch on your report? You have brought it with you, which is helpful. Can you give us the headlines and your main concerns? We note that I think you say that 23 targets have been missed. Is that right?

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** Well, “not demonstrably met” is the term that we used, which is a little bit different. Some of those targets are quite new, so it is not surprising, but it is surprising that all 23 we find are not demonstrably met. You will see that we looked at key areas of activity as well—environmental trends—and that was not a happy picture either, with a minority going in the direction that we would wish.

The main findings are, first, that progress so far falls far short of what is required for Government to meet their ambitions for the environment. A change of pace, a change of gear and a fresh determination is needed. Secondly, you will see some tables in the report and some areas that are greyed out. They are greyed because we do not have, and the Government do not have, the data and information to show how they are doing.

What we have exposed here, I think, is the extent of the data gap. There are a lot of data but the question is whether they are measuring the right attributes, the right things, whether it is collated, and whether it is collated in a sufficiently timely way. It is disheartening that we are looking at information on SSIs that is 2018 and not beyond. That is already five years ago. If the Government are seeking to meet these laudable targets by 2030 to halt species decline and biodiversity decline, they are going to have to get much better, up-to-date data. We would be very willing to play our part in assisting in the development of that.

**Natalie Prosser:** I would add that the Government are investing very heavily in both their outcome indicator framework and their new natural capital and ecosystem assessment work, which is incredibly encouraging because that level of analysis will give good insight as to whether Government policy and programmes are delivering the outcomes that the targets and the EIP are looking to achieve. We have had very constructive discussions with DEFRA in the light of our findings around the adequacy of the datasets that it has. It has been very open to those conversations, so I am optimistic that that will be addressed.

However, the key point is not lack of data; it is ensuring that the data is coherent with the targets and the ambitions so that you can assess meaningfully if you are making the progress that you intend to and, if



that progress is not being made, to allow a change of direction and change of focus in a timely way. That point of about coherence is absolutely critical and, as I said, we are engaging closely with DEFRA teams, who have been incredibly open to talking to us about that.

- Q56 **Chair:** That is encouraging to hear, but this is the first such review; you are new, and the Department is used to being regulated by the EU, where I imagine the intensity of the regulation was somewhat remoter, if I can put it politely. I imagine that it will have found it quite constructive having somebody marking its homework, because it has not happened before. Is that a fair characterisation?

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** That is our absolute intention. It is a stark read, isn't it? It is not pleasant to see such a universally difficult story. There are very few things that we could point to where we could see noticeable improvement. But it is a baseline for Government as they have established their new five-year plan. That is the starting point against the goals in the last plan. It is something to measure progress against of itself, isn't it?

- Q57 **Chair:** Are there any areas where measurement is better than others, or any that are particularly poor?

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** There are some tables here where you can see. On clean air we only have a couple of things missing. Clean air is not looking so bad. With others, there are a few gaps, but the gaps are big. On thriving plants and wildlife, for example, there are measures, but there are big gaps as well—around habitat, for example. I would not say any particular area strikes me. On minimising waste, we just do not have a measure in terms of headline indicators of progress.

There are some notable gaps that we have highlighted. We have already had a chance to speak to DEFRA's chief scientist about these gaps and about the frequency with which one might measure depending on the nature of the target. We will continue to have those discussions. I think it is helpful. We are trying to get to a point where we can agree how the gaps are filled. If we can have a common quality standard for the data and the collation, we will be in a happier position, both in DEFRA and here. But we didn't exist two years ago; these gaps were not necessarily obvious in the way that they now are.

- Q58 **Chair:** Since you mentioned it, have you had any clarity as to how DEFRA is measuring against targets on air? There is some criticism that the formula is not transparent.

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** DEFRA has been investing for several years now in something called the outcome indicator framework, which we welcome. There are to be 66 indicators and the majority of those are now in, but not all of them; some of those are missing. The issue with the outcome indicator framework is that the data, as I understand it—as I am advised—is extremely good in terms of the standards applied but it does not necessarily exactly match what you are trying to measure in order to



be absolutely certain whether you are on the right trajectory to meet your target and whether you need to make any adjustments.

There is another larger-scale programme of investment as well, looking at wider ecosystems. That is very useful of itself, particularly, for example, in marine, but it is not directly relevant to the plan.

For us, the priorities that we wish to press for with DEFRA are to fill the gaps that will enable Government and the OEP to report sufficiently reliably about progress. Progress year on year is difficult but trends are not difficult. If the data is up to date we can at least identify the trends.

**Q59 Caroline Lucas:** Very quickly on air pollution, have you had any conversations about the PM<sub>2.5</sub> target? I know that is slightly to the side of what you are talking about just now, but you will know that there is a bit of a controversy about whether it is possible to meet the PM<sub>2.5</sub> target by 2030 or 2040. Would you have expected DEFRA to have at least published its modelling, which it says is telling it that it cannot meet the 2030 target?

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** To answer your first question—have we had any conversations?—yes, we have. Our advice to the Secretary of State last year was to aim for 2030 and not 2040. I think we were unusual in accepting the level of particulate. Our argument was that in most parts of the country that will be fairly readily attainable by then, although there is obviously London and perhaps other hotspots where we would expect to see some sort of special measures applied. The Secretary of State at the time was very clear that she was not going to move from 2040 to 2030 but her intention was to kick-start activity where possible in relation to air quality.

I have to say, and it comes out in our report, that we have been pretty impressed with the coherence of strategy and approach in relation to air quality. You do see local authorities very much knowing what their role is and a good number of them delivering. There is a coherence there that we would like to see in other areas. But there is not, as far as I am advised, follow through in the interim target. The interim target is okay for the trajectory and it is credible but it does not look particularly challenging. That is a bit of a disappointment.

What we really want to see now is the fulsome delivery plan that will go with it. We are expecting a DEFRA-wide delivery plan in May, I think—certainly within the coming months—and that is what we will be scrutinising to see whether what is proposed can deliver what it can when it can.

**Q60 Caroline Lucas:** Have you seen the modelling that suggests to the Secretary of State that—

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** No.

**Q61 Anna McMorris:** The environmental improvement plan, published last



week, has been interesting, with some differing views from the sector and so on. What are your initial reactions to the plan?

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** First and foremost, it was delivered on 31 January, so that was welcome. We very much welcome the central apex goal in the plan in relation to improving nature and stopping biodiversity decline by 2030. We think that is admirable. That is the first point that I would make.

Secondly, there is a long, long list of actions in the plan, all of them welcome in one way or another, but it is rather difficult to see the wood for the trees. Some of the targets are laudably ambitious and one then questions whether the 68 actions for any one of them, for example, are going to add up to be enough. We are doing that work now to see. We are slightly concerned about whether what is planned and by when will get Government to where they need to get to by 2030.

There are certainly better arrangements for overall governance. We have that delivery board across Departments at director level, and a sub-group now specifically monitoring compliance with EPPS, but we still think that governance could be strengthened more. You really want to hard-wire it up to the top to make things happen, and we do not see that hard-wiring at the moment, but I am sure that the Secretary of State will be thinking carefully about how you can concretise the plan across Government. Certainly, political buy-in, leadership and governance will be so important.

We welcome very much the delivery plans—each goal has a delivery section, and we advised that and welcome it—but at the moment those are not fully fleshed-out delivery plans. They are a list of things, and that is not what a delivery plan is. We are very much hoping to see a credible delivery plan from DEFRA when it comes in.

The interim targets are broadly credible. Certainly they are on the trajectory for the long-term targets that are set. We did not see any particular issues with that.

We still have concerns about data and particularly about monitoring and evaluation. You really have to be on top of monitoring and evaluation if you are to achieve these 2030 goals, for example, and we do not quite see how that is going to be developed at the moment, but that is a further discussion with DEFRA.

I will stop there because you might want to pick up one of those things.

Q62 **Anna McMorris:** Thank you; that is really useful. You were very critical of the Government's progress on the delivery of their 25-year plan, and you have made other recommendations in previous monitoring reports. To what extent does this plan pick up on what you were advising, and would you go any further? You have touched on some areas where it is lacking, but on what areas have they picked up on your



recommendations?

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** We did make specific recommendations back in May 2020, and again very recently in producing our first actual report. We have had a look at the eight specific things that we suggested for a good plan last time we reported and how many had been picked up, and about four of them have.

Q63 **Anna McMorris:** Which four? You have here things like “actions for the whole of government”, you have “clear use of robust and current data”, you have “a unifying overall delivery plan and one for each goal area”. Is that one? That seems to be quite a critical one.

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** If we go through those eight attributes, the first thing that we asked was that the vision should be translated into plans for delivery, and I think that gets a tick. We are getting there. Secondly, on clear governance—I have commented on governance before—we are some way there, but there is further to go, so that is probably a neutral position. It does not get full marks, let’s put it that way.

On the delivery plans, as you say, there is not an overall delivery plan but there are sections in each goal area that at least list the actions, so it goes part of the way but more is needed. We recommended ambitious interim targets. The interim targets are credible. They vary in ambition but overall they are credible in terms of making headway to the long-term target, so that gets a tick.

On clear and robust data, the plan does show which indicators will be used to measure specific targets so that we can see at least what the Government will be relying on in the OIP, but some are not directly linked in that way, and I have said before that they do not necessarily measure the right things. There is ample room for improvement there and we will see how far we can get.

We recommended an evaluation framework as well. I think goal 9, on biosecurity, recognises an opportunity to build an evaluation framework, but otherwise we do not see much mention of it, which is unfortunate. On diagnosis and understanding, we keep banging this drum, but to make improvements you have to know where you stand. I would argue that our last report is helpful to Government in that respect.

The EIP '23 does not dwell on improved understanding, but we know that there is a very big investment in the natural capital eco assessment, which you may know about, which is looking at wider ecosystems, including marine, and we have the OIP being further developed as well, but we need to nudge that. Also, from my perspective, I would like to see prioritised those areas that will really tell the Secretary of State how they are doing on these critical targets. It is about prioritisation in that.

Overall, there is a lot to be pleased about in the plan but there is a lot of room for improvement as well.



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Q64 **Anna McMorris:** So you would summarise by saying that you think that the Government and the Secretary of State are listening to you as a regulator.

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** Forgive me, but we are not a regulator; we are an oversight body, which is something slightly different.

**Anna McMorris:** Sorry—an oversight body.

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** Most definitely the Secretary of State is listening. We have evidence of influence, for example, in relation to the final suite of statutory targets. I met with the Secretary of State three days after her appointment. She had our advice before her. I know that she is very keen to know what we advise. Obviously the Secretary of State then makes her decisions, but I can see some of our advice reflected in this plan, most definitely.

Q65 **Dr Offord:** What do you see as your role? You just mentioned that you are not a regulator, but how do you see your ability to enhance environmental performance?

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** That is a very interesting question and I expect Natalie will have something to say about it as well. You know that we were created because we left the European Union. Very broadly, we are there to fill a governance gap that was created, because now we do not have to account to the EU. We know our role by statute is to report on Government's progress, to give advice when requested and when the law changes, and also to deal with complaints if we regard them as serious and a priority.

The key for me is to make sure that with the limited resources we have, we apply ourselves to those areas of activity where we can make the most difference to the environment. That might be protecting the environment or improving the environment. We are always looking for opportunities to get more bang for our bucks, if you like, in order to do that. At the moment there are several areas that you will know we have an interest in because we think that we can make a difference. One is water, where we have our investigation going. Another is in relation to REUL, the retained EU law Bill, and the levelling-up Bill, where we think we can assist the Government in making good decisions there, should those Bills go through and become Acts of Parliament. It is indicative of the way in which we think in order to find those opportunities to make the most difference.

**Natalie Prosser:** I very much see the OEP as a key enabler of the effectiveness of the whole system. We are here to help the whole system of regulation, policymaking and law work more effectively. We do that across all of our functions. We operate as a check and balance, as an independent scrutineer. We enable increased accountability through our analysis, and that very much is enabling, not just in terms of our own holding to account but to inform Committees such as these and



Parliament as well with our independent advice and scrutiny. That allows proper scrutiny and accountability to work more effectively.

We are able to bring scrutiny into difficult areas independently. We have talked before about how there is a really high ambition for environmental improvement. There is no lack of ambition. Whether a policy initiative succeeds or fails comes down to how it is delivered and implemented. We have a really strong ability to delve into that. We have a programme at the moment on water, looking at the efficacy of the current regulatory system under the current regime, and that should bring to light key information either to improve the current system or to inform reform.

Crucially, we have a whole-system oversight. We can look across the entirety of environmental issues, particularly where they have key interdependencies, and we are enabled to draw connections between those issues, all of which, to go back to my first point, enables the whole system to work more effectively. We have seen early evidence that that is working well and it is very much our focus.

**Q66 Dr Offord:** You both mentioned the water industry. This Committee has expressed its concern about the performance of the water companies. I certainly know the Chair's view, which I share. We have regulators of the water industry, and they do not seem to be working. Do you believe the regulators need greater powers, particularly in regard to compliance and enforcement activity? As I said, you both mentioned the water industry. I deliberately didn't, because I understand you have an inquiry, but it is not working at the moment.

**Natalie Prosser:** My chair reminds me that I always have to declare my interest in water. The Committee will know that I enjoy swimming in it at every available opportunity, so I will declare that early.

Water is, of course, one of our priority areas of focus for this financial year. It is likely to continue to be into the next year. The Committee will be aware that we have a live investigation into the roles of Ofwat, the Environment Agency and DEFRA, particularly in the context of regulation of CSOs. That is a live investigation, so I cannot comment too much, but I will note that the reason we are conducting an investigation is that we have identified a point of tension between the roles of those three bodies. Our intent is to help resolve that point of tension, which, if done successfully, should improve the regulation of that particular aspect of the water system.

But—this is unavoidable if you look at our report—we are not seeing progress in relation to our waters. That is why we also have, in parallel, our thematic piece of work looking at the functioning of the regulatory system itself, particularly in the context of the water framework directive regulations. We are coming at it from two angles.

Both those pieces of work will delve quite deeply into the functioning of the regulatory system itself. I will have to reserve my position on what



we find, but the purpose of both focuses is to improve how things are or to inform reform. Reform is not a matter for us—that is a matter for DEFRA and Parliament more broadly—but we hope that our focus will help unpick why it is that our regulation of water is not delivering the outcomes that Government want. I do not know what the answer is yet, but I am hoping that, within the next few months, certainly in terms of our thematic work, we should be able to report.

I cannot tell you exactly when our investigation will conclude. If we are able to get to a position of common understanding with all the parties, it may conclude sooner, but with all investigations there is always a possibility that it will need to proceed into more formal action. My general counsel will advise me to reserve our position on that. Either way, I hope our work will allow us to take a step forward in understanding why our regulatory system is not delivering the outcomes that everybody wants to see in our water environment.

**Dr Offord:** I think that probably covers it, because it can apply to different sectors as well. Thank you.

**Q67 Claudia Webbe:** What is your experience of receiving and handling complaints from the public about regulators—particularly those that are allegedly not complying with their duties to enforce environmental law?

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** You will have seen, as we saw, the National Audit Office's report on environmental compliance in May last year. There are some very helpful tables in there about changes in the pattern and trends over time. In dealing with our complaints—and, indeed, general inquiries as well, because we have had over 500 general inquiries—we do find, at least, that the lead oversight bodies and regulators, Natural England and the Environment Agency, are very responsive to us. We do not have a difficulty in getting the information that we need in a sensible timeframe and so on.

Quite a lot of these complaints we have to bat off initially because they have not gone through the complaints procedure of the Environment Agency or Natural England, so they are referred back and go through there. I suspect that you are interested specifically in whether we have had any complaints that we have taken forward that relate to enforcement activity not being undertaken. Is that your point?

**Q68 Claudia Webbe:** I am going to get there, but the Committee would like to hear how the public are experiencing the complaints process. It is concerning that people have had to be batted backwards. That tells us something about whether people have the right information in the first place, and what your agency does to help people to have the right information so that they are not batted back and, in a sense, put off from pursuing their complaint.

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** I recollect that we discussed this the last time I appeared before you. We have put an awful lot of effort into our website,



which is our major vehicle for complaints to come; indeed, it is the first thing that you see when you get on the website: “I want to make a complaint.” We have a good amount of plain English guidance on there. Our staff bend over backwards to assist people. We simply do not bat them off; we spend quite a lot of time, not just with complaints but with general inquiries, to make sure that we work with the individual to identify what the issue is, which public body, of many, might be the right one to be aiming at, and then how to do that. We are trying to actively signpost people to where they need to go rather than simply saying, “It’s not us.”

**Natalie Prosser:** We do do that. Complainants can contact us through a whole variety of different media. We have people manning the phones as well so that if a complainant wants to talk to us they are able to do that. We have signposted complainants. They do have to exhaust a public body’s complaints system first—that is in line with all good, proper administration—but we do not leave them unguided; we explain to them that they need to do that. Sometimes complaints are simply not qualifying for us; they do not relate to matters of environment law. We do signpost members of the public to the correct body to whom they wish to complain.

We are now developing metrics on that signposting. Imminently we will be able to report on how we have assisted members of the public to get their complaint to the right forum when we are not the right forum. We have had complainants who we have referred back to public authorities go through the public authority process and then come back to us at the OEP when that has happened.

It is important to stress that we will focus on strategically significant complaints. Although we will signpost and assist members of the public, the threshold to meet for us to take a complaint forward remains quite high. That is in line with our role as a strategic oversight body.

Q69 **Claudia Webbe:** I think we will have to cut it short, but since you touched on enforcement, I wonder whether you could explore that a bit more and tell us what criteria determine whether you are able or willing to take enforcement action in response to such complaints.

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** We have published our enforcement strategy and policy; it is there available for you to see. Like many other bodies of our type, we look to resolve matters without taking formal enforcement proceedings as a first step, and we have some success in that regard, because that is a cheaper, more effective way of doing it and people do not get into concretised positions with lawyers standing behind them if we are doing that. However, we will resort to investigation where we need to, as we have done already. Where that would lead to us finding, say, a breach of the law, we will consider enforcement proceedings at that stage.



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It is early days for us. Our statutory enforcement policy has only been in place for seven months or so; in a year's time, we will see how we are getting on with that. But we are certainly investigating issues where we believe that we can make the most difference. You will know from our statutory provisions that we are not to take forward every single complaint; we are to be not a serial nit-picker but a strategic litigator. That requires us to ensure, before we take a complaint forward, that the complaint is on a matter that is serious, and not only that, that it is to be given priority. Again, we have some criteria for deciding those two things—the two tests—but they do allow, necessarily, for quite a large amount of judgment.

Q70 **Claudia Webbe:** Thank you very much. I wonder, Chair, if we could ask Dame Glenys and Natalie if they could provide the Committee with how many inquiries—they have said 500—how many complaints and how many enforcements have happened already, and how many have not been able to be taken forward.

**Chair:** That would be very helpful, if you could summarise the activity that you have and have not been able to do.

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** Would you like us to do that now?

**Chair:** No, I am afraid we are going to have to ask you to conclude now, but if you could drop us a line, we would appreciate that.

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** We will drop you a note, absolutely.

**Chair:** I am going to bring this panel to an end. Thank you very much indeed, Dame Glenys and Natalie Prosser from the Office for Environmental Protection. We look forward to catching up with you again later in year.

**Dame Glenys Stacey:** I was going to say in response to your colleague's question about what our role is that it occurs to me to mention that we see our relationship with Parliament as very significant. We would always wish to assist Parliament and parliamentarians. Whenever we have data or information we are very keen to establish very strong and constructive relationships with the democratic body.

**Chair:** We very much appreciate that; thank you very much indeed. We will take you up on it.