



Environmental Audit Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon George Eustice MP

Secretary of State

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

By Email

24 July 2020

Dear George,

Follow-up from our one-off evidence session on 18 June

On behalf of the Committee, thank you again for appearing before us last month. As well as issues regarding the future of chemicals regulation, about which I have separately written to you, I wanted to follow-up on a series of other issues that were raised in the session where we would appreciate further clarification.

Water regulation

As discussed during the session, there is currently a requirement on water and sewerage companies to classify Combined Sewer Overflows as either unsatisfactory, substandard or satisfactory. To the Committee's knowledge no water company had publicly provided a comprehensive classification of its overflows. One of the reasons given for this is that there is currently no obligation on water companies to follow either the Environmental Agency or the Ofwat guidance on this matter. As committed by you during the session, please could you explain what the Department is doing to enforce its own regulation on classifying Combined Sewer Overflows?

In April, the Committee wrote to Parliamentary Under-Secretary Rebecca Pow on the issue of water supply and demand management. Water supply was identified as one of the five priority risks by the Committee on Climate Change in the last Climate Change Risk Assessment. Given this, it is imperative that water supplies are conserved and protected. As asked by Shailesh Vara during the session, what quantity of water is estimated to leak in underground pipes and importantly, what measures have been taken to ensure that those leaks are detected and dealt with?

Environmental metrics

In the session we touched on the NAO's 2019 report into the Government's environmental metrics. The NAO found that the environmental metrics used by Defra did not sufficiently cover or align with its environmental objectives. The report also emphasised the importance of the 25-Year Environment Plan being owned across Government. In its report the NAO revealed that no Department other than Defra was on the implementation board that oversees progress on the 25-Year plan. As asked during the session, do other departments now sit on the implementation board? The NAO report also found that although an inter-ministerial group for

Environment and Clean Growth had been set up, at the time of publication, the group had never met. How many times has the inter-ministerial group met since January 2019?

Recycling targets

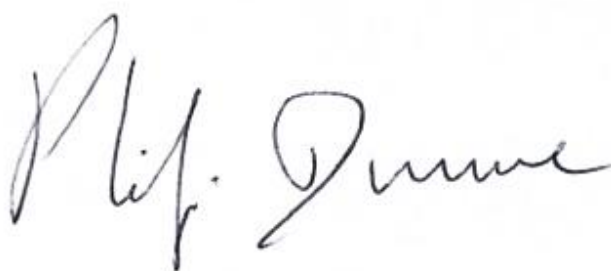
Given the implications COVID-19 initially had on recycling and fly-tipping the Committee were interested to understand the Government's progress in meeting its recycling targets. Has the Government met the 2020 target of recycling 50% of household waste, and if not, why has the target not yet been met? How does the Government intend to make recycling consistent across local authorities and what plans does it have to strengthen powers of local authorities to enforce compulsory recycling?

Climate Change adaption monitoring

Lastly, we were surprised to hear that you were unaware of the requirements under the Climate Change Act for organisations to report on how well they are preparing for the impacts of climate change. The Government needs to do much more to encourage others to report on climate change adaption actions given that local authorities, healthcare and housing sectors are not reporting voluntarily and will be significantly impacted by climate change whilst having a substantial opportunity to adapt. The Government has previously stated it aims "to put adaptation and resilience at the heart of everything we do". The Committee would welcome leadership from you in ensuring this happens.

I would be grateful for a response to the questions posed above by 28 August.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip Dunne', written in a cursive style.

Philip Dunne MP
Chairman of the Environmental Audit Committee