



Environmental Audit Committee

Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

Sent by e-mail only

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Dear Secretary of State —

Progress on implementation of policies on environmental protection

I am writing to congratulate you on your appointment as Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, a Department where you have previously served with distinction as a Minister. As you start this new role I hope you would find it constructive and helpful if I were to draw to your attention a number of areas in which the Environmental Audit Committee has a specific interest and where the policy process appears to be held up by delays in your Department.

The deadline for establishing air, water and biodiversity targets under the Environment Act 2021

We understand that the Government has been through a period of uncertainty over the last few months and that this has delayed work within Departments. Nevertheless we were concerned to see that the Government failed to meet the statutory deadline of 31st October for laying a statutory instrument under the provisions of the Environment Act 2021 with new long term targets for air quality, water, biodiversity and species abundance and resource efficiency and waste reduction.

As you will know, the Committee has been actively considering many of these issues since its establishment for the current Parliament. For example, during its recent inquiry into Water quality in rivers the Committee found that freshwater eco-systems were on the frontline in the extinction crisis, and called for a step change in action on water quality from the Government, industry and regulators.



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Your Department's role in setting a strong strategic direction for regulators and the industry via targets in the Environment Act is fundamental to achieving this. The dire state of rivers in England requires urgent action, and the delay in establishing a new statutory target does not augur well for the current administration's resolve to tackle this issue.

We hope that the full suite of statutory targets can be published before the opening of the second stage of COP15, the United Nations biodiversity summit, which is to take place in Montréal next month.

The Department's proposed consultations on waste streams

In February 2019 our predecessor Committee published its report on Fixing Fashion: clothing consumption and sustainability. In that report the Committee warned that, in the absence of effective policies to deal with textile waste, over 300,000 tonnes of textiles were being thrown into household black bins every year and sent to landfill or incinerators. The Government rejected many of the recommendations in that report, but it did add textiles to a list of five priority waste streams to tackle.

DEFRA's Waste Prevention Programme for England consultation, published in March 2021, confirmed that the Department would seek to complete consultations for two material streams by 2022: textiles and fishing gear. The consultation on textiles was supposed to consider a possible Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme for textiles and the introduction of requirements for product design, labelling and consumer information, e.g. for durability, recyclability and recycled content. Neither consultation has yet materialised.

A culture of delay in the Department

We understand that certain environmental groups have made formal representations to your Department on the time taken to make progress on certain significant policy matters. In that letter, which was copied to the Office for Environmental Protection, they warn that "delay is at risk of becoming the default culture in DEFRA". Sadly, this is a characterisation that we recognise.



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In addition to the initiatives outlined above, there is a long list of further policies where your Department takes the lead for the Government and where progress appears to have stalled:

- the Extended Producer Responsibility scheme for packaging (now delayed until 2024);
- the Environmental Principles Policy Statement;
- the Chemicals Strategy and UK REACH;
- River Basin Management Plans; and
- the National Action Plan for Pesticides.

Added to this list is the proposed deposit return scheme for drinks containers in England, on which Ministers first consulted in 2019. I shall be writing to you separately about the design of this scheme.

In view of what appears to be endemic delay in making progress on important environmental policies, the Committee has asked me to request, by return, a clear timetable giving the dates by when each of the documents listed in this letter are now expected to be issued.

Given the public interest in this matter, the Committee plans to publish both this letter and your response, which it looks forward to receiving. A copy of this letter goes to the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP
Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee