



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

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Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP
Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee
House of Commons
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23 January 2023

Dear Philip,

Thank you for your letter of 22 November in your capacity as the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, raising concerns about the delivery of the Government's environmental pledges. I apologise for the late reply.

As your letter suggests, the challenges that we face are broad and significant. I am determined that we will address these issues with urgency. I am conscious of the changes in administration in 2022 but I am determined to get a grip.

We have now laid the Statutory Instruments setting out the suite of environmental final targets under the Environment Act 2021. They are proceeding for approval by Parliament, and we will set out more detail about our plans to deliver them in our Environmental Improvement Plan: which will be published by 31 January 2023.

Regarding the implementation of DEFRA's other workstreams you mention, I know there will be further news on these shortly. After publication of the Environment Improvement Plan, I intend to undertake a series of deep dives on priority issues so we can get on and deliver.

Yours sincerely,

ANNEX A: PROGRESS UPDATE ON DEFRA WORK COMMITMENTS

The Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) has requested details of progress towards a number of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) public commitments. We are pleased to supply the details below, on the understanding that work is continuing at pace and we therefore anticipate further developments.

Proposed consultations on waste streams

In August 2021 DEFRA launched a research project to develop policy options on textile waste, including using Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), followed by a cost benefit analysis of the options. Engagement took place through workshops, interviews and focus groups from October 2021 to January 2022. We expect to publish the summary of responses and the final programme in early 2023.

Extended Producer Responsibility scheme for packaging

The UK Government and Devolved Administrations Government published its response to the 2021 consultation on Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging (pEPR) in March 2022. This confirmed that pEPR will be introduced on a phased basis from 2024. Minister Pow recently met with representatives of packaging producers to discuss their concerns and next steps. The Government has committed to continue to work closely with interested partners to co-design delivery of pEPR.

End-of-life fishing and aquaculture gear (EoLFG)

Fishing gear was recognised as a priority waste stream in Defra's 2018 Resources & Waste Strategy. Work to date suggests that an alternative to EPR could address environmental impacts of fishing and aquaculture gear, driving innovation whilst being less burdensome to administrations. A shortlist of policy options will be produced by the end of 2023. These options will be proportionate to waste levels, value for money, achievable within current resource and suited to tackle the UK's unique EoLFG challenges.

Environmental Principles policy statement

Feedback from Parliamentary scrutiny and from the Office for Environmental Protection on the draft statement has now been considered. DEFRA has engaged informally across Government to discuss plans for finalising the policy statement and implementing the duty. We hope to agree the final policy statement in the coming weeks, and to publish it in early 2023.

Once the final policy statement is laid before Parliament and published there will be an implementation period to allow departments to prepare for the duty before it comes into force. We are working closely with departments to support them in planning for implementing the duty to have due regard to the policy statement.

The duty to have due regard to the policy statement will contribute to the improvement of environmental protection and to sustainable development, by placing environmental considerations at the heart of policymaking across government.

Chemicals Strategy

DEFRA has been working with other Government departments and the Devolved Administrations to develop the strategy and continues to develop policy across several priority areas. Most recently, we have engaged with stakeholders through a series of collaborative external stakeholder workshops.

UK REACH

DEFRA announced last December that it would explore an alternative transition registration (ATR) model arrangement for UK REACH. Working closely with the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency, good progress has been made on developing the ATR model. Stakeholders have been told informally that DEFRA is working towards a deadline of consulting in 2023 and legislating in 2024, if the decision is taken to proceed with the new model. This remains on track.

From July to September, there was a consultation on extending the existing deadlines for the transition to UK REACH, so companies do not incur unnecessary costs while work to develop an alternative approach is completed. The response to the consultation document was published on 29 November 2022.

River Basin Management Plans

River basin management planning is an ongoing, continuous process, with the RBMPs updated every six years. There are no gaps in the process. The second cycle (2015) plans remain in place until the third cycle plans are published and implemented. The revised, proposed RBMPs were submitted to ministers on 21 October 2022 and at the same time made public, as required by the regulations. The Environment Agency published the final plans in December 2022.

National Action Plan for Pesticides

In 2021 the government consulted on a draft National Action Plan (NAP) for the Sustainable Use of Pesticides and received 38,500 responses. This set out proposals to minimise the risks and impacts of pesticides to human health and the environment and included proposals to improve the pesticides regulatory system. Officials have since worked through the consultation responses and used this input alongside discussion with our stakeholders to develop an updated set of proposals. The revised NAP is expected to be published in the first half of 2023.