

Dear John,

Permanent Lords Committee on Climate & Biodiversity

We are writing in response to your invitation to provide input to the Liaison Committee as it considers the appropriate balance of committees following the UK's withdrawal from the EU. We believe this review offers a rare and critical opportunity for the House to show distinctive, and much-needed, global and domestic leadership via the establishment of a permanent climate and biodiversity/ecology committee.

As you know, earlier in the year colleagues from across the House gave their support to a proposal for a special inquiry on the 'Net Zero Roadmap' in the run up to the United Nations COP26 climate summit. Feedback suggested that the topic is of a scale that would be challenging to manage within the limits of a special inquiry. We have found, however, a growing appetite for the House to engage on what many see as the defining – and extremely urgent – issue of our time. This is demonstrated by the high number of interventions on climate and biodiversity issues in the House this year, the diversity of Peers raising these issues and the growth of the now 120-strong membership of the Peers for the Planet group. We have sought to reflect this breadth of interest and concern in the names of Members supporting this proposal.

We have prepared a short note on the case for a permanent climate and biodiversity committee, attached, and would be grateful if Liaison Committee Members could consider this proposal in place of a more limited special inquiry. The note highlights the opportunity for the House to demonstrate its unique expertise, value and relevance to the citizens it serves, as well as the risks of failing to address the gap in scrutiny which has been highlighted by the Institute for Government, and which is all the more concerning when weighed against growing public and business concern about the climate and biodiversity crises.

The specific focus of a permanent committee would be for committee members themselves to determine, but might, for example, include the adequacy and resilience of net zero, and/or net biodiversity gain, roadmaps domestically. It might review the roles of diverse public and private stakeholders in mitigation, adaptation and behaviour change, including organisations such as the Committee on Climate Change, whose Chair and Deputy Chair are signatories of this proposal, and the proposed Office for Environmental Protection. It could consider international developments, as well as domestic ones.

We would be happy to discuss our proposal further.

Yours sincerely,

House of Lords leadership and scrutiny on climate and biodiversity

Since our statutory net zero 2050 emissions target was passed in June 2019 there has been limited formal Parliamentary scrutiny of the roadmap needed to meet that target, in terms of mitigation, adaptation and behaviour change, despite the significant implications for the economy. At the same time, there is increasing public concern about global biodiversity loss and ecological crisis. The case for a permanent Lords committee to address these challenges is compelling:

- **Accountability:** Parliament and the public need to be satisfied on the adequacy and resilience of the Government's response to these crises and its ability to deliver the action required. They need to be assured that decisions are based on firm evidence; that associated (and dynamic) risks are considered; that solutions are adequately funded (including, where necessary, over a period of years), and that the costs will be fairly distributed. There is also a need to examine UK planning and preparedness for climate change, including emergencies like flooding and drought.
- **Leadership:** The House of Lords has an unprecedented opportunity to play – and be seen to play – a critical leadership role on these defining issues of our time. Historically the UK has led global efforts in this field and a permanent committee would build on this. Its work would benefit the UK but could also attract significant global stakeholders and offer blueprints for other countries to emulate in their own net zero/nature policies and roadmaps prior to, and in the years following, COP 26 (and other key international moments such as the CBD, G20, G7 etc).
- **Policy coherence and the scrutiny gap:** Achieving net zero and biodiversity targets requires consideration of systems-level issues, policy synergies and trade-offs. Yet there is incoherence in how these issues are being prioritised within departments, by public bodies, regionally and between UK nations. Policy discussion is siloed within 'traditional climate fields' (i.e. energy and environment) and/or sector-specific fields (e.g. finance, transport, housing) and the Parliamentary system reflects this problem: While ad hoc topic inquiries are possible in the Lords, there is no committee able to take the systems architecture view required. In the Commons, committees are, by definition, focused on specific Departmental responsibilities. A cross-departmental climate/ecology focus would complement rather than compete with the House of Commons. The Institute of Government recently concluded that "*Parliamentary scrutiny of government performance on climate change is weak*" and recommended a dedicated net zero committee to hold government to account.
- **House strengths; expertise and continuity:** Peers have extraordinary breadth and depth of knowledge and experience in areas where a climate/ecology lens is essential to prevent climate and ecological crises, including physical/behavioural science, technology, business, innovation, health, education, finance, defence and security, diplomacy, public service and politics itself. Members' diversity, longevity and convening power are valuable for these urgent, cross-cutting, long-term, challenges, that range from local to global in nature. A permanent committee would provide continuity and expertise across the next critical decade and could focus at different times on particular aspects of what is, as we know, a very broad set of issues.
- **Reputation:** A climate change and biodiversity committee would resonate strongly beyond the Westminster bubble and demonstrate the value and relevance of the House to citizens. The subject matter needs to invite diverse opinions, including from all parts of the UK, from underrepresented groups and younger generations. Conversely, a perceived failure to address these issues could attract public criticism given their importance to voters.
- **Political, cross-party cooperation:** The UK has, to date, avoided the worst of partisan division characteristic of climate policy in other countries, but this cannot be

taken for granted: As the challenge to meet net zero becomes harder, Parliamentarians need to ensure there are cross- party, collaborative scrutiny mechanisms/fora in place. Where changes to policy are difficult but necessary, political support and external validation for government will be valuable.

- **Engaging a wide group of Peers:** Engagement on the floor of the House in recent months shows that this is a topic which many Peers care deeply about and wish to participate in.

This submission is supported by:

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