



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

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Rt Hon Alistair Carmichael MP
Chair, Environment, Food and
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House of Commons
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Dear Alistair

Review of Defra's Regulatory Landscape: Publication

In October last year I commissioned the economist Dan Corry to conduct a review of Defra's regulatory landscape to examine opportunities to improve how regulations and regulators can drive economic growth while protecting the environment.

Today, I am publishing Dan Corry's report, 'Delivering economic growth and nature recovery', in full and I attach a copy to this letter. The report finds the current system for environmental regulation is outdated, inconsistent and highly complex – delivering for neither nature nor growth.

Dan Corry's essential report gives us a strong set of common-sense recommendations to streamline and modernise regulation and get Britain building. Nine key measures with the greatest impact for growth and nature recovery will be fast-tracked and work has already begun on:

- **Lead regulator:** A single, lead regulator for major infrastructure projects will end the merry-go-round of developers seeking planning approvals from multiple authorities who often disagree with each other - speeding up approvals and saving businesses millions in time and resource. This could include the recently approved Lower Thames Crossing, as well as future schemes like Heathrow expansion. Pilot projects trialling the approach will begin this year.
- **Revamping environmental guidance:** Rapidly reviewing the existing catalogue of compliance guidance, including on protecting bats, will identify opportunities to remove duplication, ambiguity or inconsistency. Natural England has already agreed to review and update their advice to Local Planning Authorities on bats to ensure there is clear, proportionate and accessible advice available.
- **Streamlined permits and guidance:** Speeding up work to update the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016 will allow regulators to make more sensible, risk-based decisions on which activities should be exempt from environmental permits, in some cases removing them altogether for low-risk and temporary projects. This will slash red tape for businesses, putting an end to delays that can slow down the decisions needed to get spades in the ground.

- **Planning permit portal:** Defra will convene the environmental regulators to commence work on upgrading their digital systems for planning advice, with the aim of establishing a single planning portal for all agencies. This will speed up planning applications, while building trust and transparency into the process.
- **New Defra Infrastructure Board:** This will accelerate the delivery of major infrastructure projects by facilitating greater collaboration and stronger oversight within Defra and its arm's-length bodies - unblocking barriers to development at an early stage.
- **More autonomy:** Trusted nature groups will benefit from new freedoms to carry out conservation and restoration work without needing to apply for multiple permissions at every step of a project. A pilot collaboration between Natural England and the National Trust will allow Europe's largest conservation charity to cut down on the high volume of applications for consents, permits and licences they must currently submit. This will eliminate bureaucratic hurdles, bringing their ambitious nature recovery programmes to life at scale, more quickly and easily than ever before.
- **Green finance boost:** A new Nature Market Accelerator will bring much needed coherence to nature markets, boosting investment into our natural habitats and driving growth. This will give businesses greater confidence to invest, unlocking a range of environmental benefits – from improved biodiversity to better water quality.
- **Strategic policy statements for regulators:** Clearer guidance and measurable objectives for all Defra's regulators, starting with Natural England and the Environment Agency, will drive performance improvements and focus delivery on government priorities. Progress will be closely monitored and reported on publicly – increasing transparency and accountability so the public can be confident that regulators are supporting, not blocking, development and nature restoration.
- **Rolling regulatory reform:** A continuous programme of reform will be established to pinpoint rapid actions, quick wins, and longer-term areas for improvements to regulation.

Today's announcement is the latest step I am taking, under the Plan for Change, to reform and rewire Defra and its arm's-length bodies to unleash economic growth and protect the environment.

Please feel free to reach out if you have any immediate questions or thoughts. We look forward to updating your committee on implementing this important work.

Sincerely,



THE RT HON STEVE REED OBE MP