



Environmental Audit Committee

Rt Hon Emma Reynolds MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Sent by email only

18 March 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

Thank you for attending the Committee's meeting on 10 March to discuss the environmental protection policies of your department. Committee members appreciated your readiness to answer questions on this issue.

There were a number of points, set out below, where I thought it would be helpful if you could write back to the Committee to provide more detail and set out your thinking. I would appreciate if you could supply this information, as set out below. Citations are given with reference to the relevant question numbers in the published transcript of the hearing.ⁱ

- 1. You said you would reflect on making oral statements to the House on major environmental policies and reports, such as the Environment Improvement Plan (EIP) and the annual Office for Environment (OEP) Progress Report. Can you confirm that after reflection you will commit to making oral statements on these and other major policy announcements related to the environment and nature? [Q6]**
- 2. The Director General (Environment Group) said that she would get back to us with the details on the Terms of Reference for the cross-Government Environment Improvement Plan Delivery Board. We think that this is imperative for us to understand how the EIP is being implemented and**

understood across government. Please can you confirm that you will be supplying this to us? [Q9]

- 3. You committed to reflecting on an action plan to help departments that might need advice to follow the Environment Principle Policy Statement (EPPS). We think the EPPS and its application are fundamental to protecting and restoring nature. Please can you tell us how you have reflected on this and what actions you will take as a result? [Q20]**
- 4. You said you would consider setting out specific climate adaptation measures and targets so the whole adaptation programme can be scrutinised. Please can you share with us what progress you have made on this and when we might expect measures and targets? [Q27]**
- 5. You said you would look at improving the OEP's access to Defra data. It is imperative if the OEP is to carry out its work it has access to authoritative, wide-ranging and timely data. We see this as an urgent action. Please can you set out what steps you will take and by when? [Q33]**
- 6. You said you would come back to the Committee on how you might further speed up your department's response to the OEP's Progress Report. We appreciate that you have already made some progress on this. However, we believe that you can go further, which would greatly improve accountability and scrutiny. Please can you set out how you plan to do this and by when? [Q41]**
- 7. You committed to writing to the Committee to set out more details on the different actions in the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI). We would appreciate specific details on how this will support nature-friendly farming and nature restoration, and particularly species-rich grassland. We look forward to seeing this detail. [Q43]**
- 8. The Director General (Environment Group) said that she would get back to us with details of any records listing the number of deep peat or peatland sites that are being taken over for wind farms and the impact that this has had on them. Please can you supply us with this information? [Q60]**
- 9. You said you would come back to us on the merits of introducing a CO2 calculator, as the Scottish Government has done, which can estimate how**

different actions will impact on carbon release. We believe this could make a major contribution to policy making by identifying possible contradictory and perverse outcomes. Please can you share with us your thoughts and, if you agree, when such a tool might be introduced? [Q65]

- 10. You committed to telling us whether you agreed with the OEP's assessment that the Environment Agency (EA) did not comply with environment law in relation to the regulation of network combined sewer overflows (CSOs). Please can you set out your clear view on this? If you agree that the EA did not comply, can you set out what actions you intend to take? [Q67]**
- 11. The Director General for Strategy and Water agreed to supply the data that underpins your department's estimate that the £11 billion investment in improvements to CSOs, will in aggregate, reduce total spills by around 45%. He also said he would confirm whether this data is based on data supplied by the water companies and/or regulators. It would be helpful, if the data is supplied from multiple sources, that you can clarify who supplied which parts of the data. Please can you supply this data? [Q70]**
- 12. During the session we asked whether you would confirm when operator self-monitoring on environmental incidents across the water industry will end and which categories of incident will end first? We would greatly appreciate your clarity on this issue. [Q77]**
- 13. Please can you send the Committee your department's analysis of the costs of taking the water companies back into public ownership and other relevant assessments, as agreed by the Director General for Strategy and Water and yourself? [Q80-81]**
- 14. We raised a question regarding the Joint Nature Conservation Committee's (JNCC) Quinquennial report on species protection which recommended updating which species are protected under the Wildlife Act 1981. Please can you provide more detail on your reasoning where you did not accept the JNCC's recommendations and why you think your approach to nature restoration and recovery and biodiversity is preferable? [Q51-52]**

Thank you again for your willingness to appear before us to discuss these matters. It would be very helpful to the Committee to have a response to the points raised above not later than **18 April**.

Given the substantial public interest in the matters under consideration the Committee has decided to publish this letter on its website, and I anticipate that the Committee will wish to publish any response.

A copy of this letter goes to the Chair of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Toby Perkins'.

Mr Toby Perkins MP
Chair, Environmental Audit Committee

ⁱ The transcript of the evidence session is published at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/17315/pdf/>.