

6. PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT AND IMPROVING ANIMAL WELFARE

Environment Bill

“My Ministers remain committed to protecting and improving the environment for future generations. For the first time, environmental principles will be enshrined in law. Measures will be introduced to improve air and water quality, tackle plastic pollution and restore habitats so plants and wildlife can thrive. Legislation will also create new legally-binding environmental improvement targets. A new, world-leading independent regulator will be established in statute to scrutinise environmental policy and law, investigate complaints and take enforcement action.”

The purpose of the Bill is to:

- Transform our domestic environmental governance based on environmental principles; codify a comprehensive framework for legally binding targets; and the establishment of a new Office for Environmental Protection.
- Increase local powers to tackle sources of air pollution.
- Improve biodiversity by working with developers.
- Extend producer responsibility, ensure a consistent approach to recycling and introduce deposit return schemes.
- Introduce charges for specified single use plastic items.
- Secure long-term, resilient water and wastewater services, including through powers to direct water companies to work together to meet current and future demand.

The main benefits of the Bill would be:

- Improving and protecting the environment with new domestic governance, including a world-leading environmental watchdog.
- Improving air quality by fighting air pollution so that we have cleaner air to breathe.
- Ensuring we can manage our precious water resources in a changing climate.

The main elements of the Bill are:

- Establishing new long term domestic environmental governance based on: environmental principles; a comprehensive framework for legally-binding targets, a long-term plan to deliver environmental improvements; and, a new Office for Environmental Protection.
- Improving air quality by increasing local powers to address sources of air pollution, enabling local authorities to tackle emissions from burning coal and wood, and bringing forward powers for Government to mandate recalls of vehicles when they do not meet relevant legal emission standards.
- Restoring and enhancing nature by implementing mandatory biodiversity protections into the planning system, ensuring new houses aren't built at the expense of nature. We will improve protection for our natural habitats through Local Nature Recovery Strategies and give communities a greater say in the protection of local trees.
- Preserving our stock of material resources by minimising waste, promoting resource efficiency and moving towards a circular economy. These measures include extended producer responsibility, a consistent approach to recycling, tackling waste crime, introducing deposit return schemes and more effective litter enforcement.
- Introducing charges for specified single use plastic items. This will build on the success of the carrier bag charge and incentivise consumers to choose other, more sustainable ways of taking shopping home.

- Managing water sustainably through more effective legislation to secure long-term, resilient water and wastewater services. This will include powers to direct water companies to work together to meet current and future demand for water, making planning more robust, and ensuring we are better able to maintain water supplies.

Territorial extent and application

- Most of the Bill would extend and apply to England, with a small number of provisions extending to Northern Ireland only. Around half of the Bill's provisions extend and apply to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- Environmental policy is a largely devolved matter (subject to a small number of areas that are reserved).

Key facts

- On June 5 2019 YouGov poll the British public placed climate change among the most important three issues facing the country (Brexit first, Healthcare second).
- The Government is already taking strong action to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it, as set out in our 25-year Environment Plan. We are the first major economy to legislate to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, and will be hosting the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP26) in 2020.
- In 2015 the Government introduced a 5p charge on single use carrier bags (reducing sales of single use bags in the big supermarkets by 90 per cent);
- In 2019 we introduced a ban on microbeads in cosmetic and personal care products; plastic straws, drink stirrers, and plastic stemmed cotton buds in England (coming into force April 2020), following overwhelming public support.
- Emissions of nitrogen oxides have fallen by over a quarter since 2010.
- Published in January, our Clean Air Strategy has been praised by the World Health Organisation as “an example for the rest of the world to follow” and aims to halve the harm to human health from air pollution in the UK by 2030.
- We have pledged to plant 11 million new trees and one million urban trees.
- We have strengthened protections for ancient woodlands, veteran trees and other irreplaceable habitats in the revised national planning policy framework and provided almost £6 million to the new Northern Forest.