

Environmental Audit Committee

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Rt Hon David Davis MP
Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union

20 July 2016

Dear David,

Congratulations on your appointment as the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union.

There are few areas of Government policy where the decision to leave the European Union will have a more widespread impact than the environment. Britain's membership of the EU has been crucial to the improvement of UK air quality, the cleaning up of water pollution, the management of waste, and the protection of biodiversity. It has given us a platform on which we can show global leadership in tackling climate change. My Committee's inquiry into EU and UK Environmental Policy found that the overwhelming view of the sector was that membership of the EU had been positive for the UK environment. In particular, the Government only began to address air pollution following court action based on EU air quality limits and we are concerned that the Government may now deprioritise this issue.

Environmental protection is central to inter-generational fairness, to our health and standard of living. The most recent ONS figures show that the low carbon and renewable energy economy alone was worth £46.2bn in 2014, supporting nearly quarter of a million jobs. Businesses and investors will be looking for stability at this time. It is crucial that the Government demonstrates its commitment to environmental protection at an early stage in the exit negotiations. My Committee believes the Government should, as a minimum, commit to maintaining in law the existing level of environmental protection currently guaranteed by EU law. We would like to know what enforcement mechanisms and changes to regulatory regimes are planned.

The Committee would like to hear oral evidence from you and the new Minister for the Environment during the House's September sitting on how the Government intends to approach these issues during the exit negotiations. The Committee is particularly concerned and wishes to seek reassurance about the Government's plans for the large proportion of UK environmental law that originated from the EU level, the Government's approach to ongoing negotiations around EU measures such as the Circular Economy Package and how the Government intends to maintain the benefits of transnational cooperation on environmental issues such as climate change.

The Committee intends to publish this letter and may publish any reply. I am writing in similar terms to the Minister for the Environment.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Mary Creagh". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping flourish at the end of the name.

Mary Creagh MP, Chair