May 2018

Thank you for your letter of 1st May with follow-up questions arising from the Environmental Audit Committee meeting on 18th April. I hope the answers below address your concerns.

Consultations

Over the coming year we will consult and engage on those commitments outlined in the 25 Year Environment Plan. Of particular note:

- On May 10th, we launched our Environmental Governance and Principles consultation. We are seeking comments on our proposals to create a new, independent body to hold government to account on environmental standards and a new comprehensive statutory policy statement on environmental principles after we leave the European Union. We will publish an ambitious Environmental Principles and Governance Bill in draft in the autumn, with introduction of the Bill early in the second session of this Parliament. We welcome comments from the Committee on our proposals.

- In July this year, we will set out for discussion initial thinking on our approach to developing indicators and metrics to measure progress towards the goals set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan.

Line of Sight

We are currently developing a comprehensive set of indicators and metrics to measure progress towards the goals set out in the 25 Year Environment Plan. We will engage with interested parties over the summer to canvas views on what this suite of indicators and metrics ought to cover. We will engage through a combination of publicly available briefing papers and targeted technical bilaterals with individual organisations and small groups of interested parties. We will also hold an event in the autumn with a wide range of interested parties to further refine proposals for the set of indicators and metrics. The outcome of this work will be published at a similar time to the first annual report to Parliament on the 25 Year Environment Plan in early 2019.

We are also analysing how the metrics relate to existing domestic and international commitments, including EU targets and Sustainable Development Goals. We will publish a comparative analysis at a similar time. We will continue to honour our wider
international reporting commitments and will provide the information and data as necessary to meet those obligations. As existing agreements progress, become open for renewal, or new instruments are proposed, we will work with the international community to secure commitments to global targets that are even more stretching.

We will report annually to parliament, ensuring that we are transparent about our progress and our achievements and that we can be held to account. The current policies in the plan however will not be enough to bring about the level of environmental improvement we all want to see. I recognise that there are other commitments in the plan on which firm timelines have not yet been finalised. We are striving to achieve a high level of ambition through the plan, and it is important that we get this right. This is why, along with our development of a robust set of indicators and metrics, an independent body to hold government to account and our annual reports to parliament, we will regularly review and refresh the policies contained in the plan. We will do this periodically throughout the 25 year period to capitalise on the opportunities presented to us through EU exit.

**Targets**

We have always made clear that our environmental standards should match or improve upon those of the EU. The European Union (Withdrawal) Bill will ensure that the body of existing EU environmental law continues to have effect in UK law after we leave the EU.

The targets for water in the 25 Year Plan are intended as a direct translation of the commitments of the Water Framework Directives (WFD). For example waters "close to their natural condition" is a reference to the criteria used to define what “Good Status" for water means in the Directive.

It has become clear over the course of the implementation of WFD that it will be very challenging for most Member States to achieve ‘good status’ for all waters (one of the Directive’s key objectives). This is due to the sheer pressure from human populations, industry and agriculture. When this Directive was introduced, it was accepted that some water bodies which have been modified for industrial or social purposes would never reach good status. These water bodies, which are set lower objectives based on technical feasibility or disproportionate costs, account for around one quarter of England’s waters. Mechanisms were built into the WFD to take a proportionate and flexible approach, making it one of the most progressive pieces of European legislation. The UK has applied the flexibilities as the Directive was designed to be used.

Even with these mechanisms recognised in WFD, we know that most EU Member States, including the UK, will realistically find it a challenge to meet the ambition of the Directive. It is likely that Member States and the EU Commission will need to consider extending the WFD deadline in some way or revising water quality objectives looking beyond 2027. Nevertheless we continue to work towards a cleaner and healthier water environment with initiatives such as our new farming rules for water launched in April 2018.
Improving our environment, however, takes time, money and combined effort. The Water Framework Directive has provided us with an excellent vehicle to implement the actions that are needed to improve our waters in the form of River Basin Management Plans. We will continue to use this mechanism, which the UK had a prominent role in shaping. In the longer term, the 25 Year Plan represents new ways to improve and manage our water. We believe that its principles of greater integration of water and land use management, and developing this even further through a natural capital approach, is the most likely way to make progress towards these ambitious water quality targets.

The current 2015 River Basin Management Plans confirmed over £3 billion investment in the water environment over six years. Over 1400 miles of surface water has been enhanced towards our target of nearly 5000 miles by 2021. This represents real progress on water quality and this work will continue in the next cycle of planning which is already underway. Water body status objectives will be reviewed and updated as part of the next 3rd cycle river basin management plans due in 2021.

Regarding air quality, the 25 Year Environment plan reaffirms our commitment, which we have enshrined in domestic legislation, to take action to reduce emissions of five main air pollutants. We aim to meet ambitious, internationally agreed emission limits by 2020, and further reductions by 2030. We will shortly publish our Clean Air Strategy for consultation which will set out comprehensive plans to meet these limits.

**Costings for Readiness Projects**

The Ministerial Direction I made on 18 January was to authorise planned building work for new services under six projects. The timing of the Direction was primarily to enable the first of those projects, a new national animal import system, to commence building in January. The other projects were not scheduled to start building until slightly later, but before the end of June. This date was used as a planning assumption for receiving Royal Assent to the EU Withdrawal Bill.

As at the end of March 2018, the expenditure to date was reported as £4.9m for the six projects as per the table below. This expenditure is still subject to final year-end audit verification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Projects covered by the Ministerial Direction</th>
<th>Scheduled to start (January 2018 position)</th>
<th>May 2018 update and estimated cost to end June (£m)</th>
<th>Spend to end March 2018 (£m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivery of a new national import control system for animals, animal products and high risk food and feed.</td>
<td>Jan-18</td>
<td>7.86</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery of new IT capability to enable registration and regulation of chemical substances placed on the UK market.</td>
<td>Feb-18</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery of systems for the licensing and marketing of veterinary medicines.</td>
<td>Feb-18</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of a new catch certificate system for UK fish and fish products being exported to the EU on exit.</td>
<td>Jan-18</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development of a UK system to manage the quota of fluorinated gases and ozone depleting substances required under the UN Montreal protocol.</td>
<td>Mar-18</td>
<td>0.0 (delays in determining cost estimates. Unlikely to start building before end June)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of data exchange arrangements to identify the movement of vessels in EU or third country waters.</td>
<td>Apr-18</td>
<td>0.0 (scoping work expected to continue to end-June)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>12.76</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Local Authorities**

Local authorities are key to delivering the 25 Year Environment Plan. Our aspiration is to develop 'local' natural capital plans across the 14 Defra Group areas. These plans will aim to better coordinate all environmental activities based around a shared sense of priorities. We are currently scoping who should own, design and deliver these plans. They will be aligned with the 25 Year Environment Plan (ensuring a clear line of sight to national government and the goals set out in the plan) but be particularly relevant to the local area or geographies within them.

**Young People**

Chapter 3 of the 25 Year Environment Plan sets out government’s commitments to help connect people with the environment, with a focus on children and young people. Our commitments include a £10 million programme to encourage children’s contact with nature. Funding will be provided for schools in our most disadvantaged areas to develop nature friendly grounds and a programme of visits to natural spaces. As we develop plans for a year of action for the environment in 2019, we will make sure there is a focus on children and young people. My department is already working with youth sector and environmental organisations including Step Up to Serve and the National Citizen Service to encourage more young people from all backgrounds to play their part in improving the environment, including through the 2019 #iwill campaign.

As we implement our commitment to make 2019 a year of action for the environment, we will be taking into account the views of young people. Defra has commissioned research that will include insights from young people on their attitudes to taking part in environmental volunteering projects. This research will inform our approach to the 2019 year of action as well as delivery of the 25 Year Environment Plan in the years to come. In addition, we are planning a citizen engagement project on what people value about the environment and their priorities. This will include seeking the views of young people.
Marine Cultural Heritage

Cultural Heritage is integrated within our approach to marine management, for example, in our work to bring forward the first set of marine plans for the English inshore and offshore regions. In the development of these plans the need to identify and conserve marine heritage assets is considered in conjunction with local stakeholders and relevant expert bodies.

The potential impact on marine heritage assets is also a consideration in the determination of applications for a marine licence, with Historic England providing specialist advice to the Marine Management Organisation on applications and any conditions to be applied to granted licences.

Geodiversity

Geodiversity is an important aspect of the 25 Year Environment Plan. It is explicitly referred to in the plan and geological interests are a key part of our Sites of Special Scientific Interest network. The plan sets out areas where geodiversity protections are currently in place:

“Some of England’s most beautiful landscapes and geodiversity are protected via a range of designations including National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs). Some landscapes are also internationally recognised through UNESCO World Heritage Site and Global Geoparks status (for example the Lake District, the Cornwall and West Devon mining landscape and the North Pennines). Collectively, they comprise some of our unique, most cherished and valuable natural assets.”

Domestic Wildlife Crime

Tackling wildlife crime is a priority of mine. Defra and the Home Office have committed £300,000 per year to the National Wildlife Crime Unit until 2019/20. In March this year the UK Task and Coordination Group responsible for setting UK wildlife crime priorities met to review their work programme for the next two years. The Group concluded that raptor persecution should remain one of the six UK priorities. My officials will continue to work with the RSPB and other wildlife organisations in tackling wildlife crime including raptor persecution.

Thank you again for your letter.

With every good wish,

Michael Gove