



# Environmental Audit Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP  
Minister of State for Europe and the Americas  
Foreign and Commonwealth Office  
By email

15 March 2019

RE: Government response to the Committee's Report on The Changing Arctic, HC 842

Dear Sir Alan,

Thank you for providing a response to our report, The Changing Arctic, HC 842. There are several points in your response which my Committee would like to raise with you.

The response states that the Committee's assertion that the Government encourages oil and gas exploration in the Arctic is "baseless". However, the UK's Arctic strategy says "Even as it moves to decarbonise its economy, projections show the world will continue to rely on oil and gas for decades to come. Supplying this demand will require exploration of new potential resources, with the Arctic, with its significant hydrocarbon reserves, potentially playing a major role." In our view this indicates a tacit acceptance of such activity. The response also states that "although providing support for exports, the Government does not seek to direct where UK businesses invest: such decisions are matters for companies' commercial judgement". The failure to disincentivise UK companies from oil and gas exploration in the Arctic is incompatible with the Government's commitment to the Paris Climate Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals and is in stark contrast to efforts such as those of the Canadian Government to impose an indefinite moratorium on new rights to drill in Canadian Arctic waters. We would be grateful if you could set out what action the Government will take to encourage an end to oil and gas exploration in the Arctic.

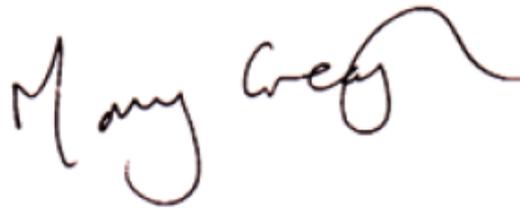
On Arctic research, we are pleased that the Government has committed to contribute the results from the Polar Amplification Model Intercomparison Project to the Climate Change Risk Assessment evidence cycle from 2020 onwards. The response also sets out the Government's commitment to ensure that UK bids to the Horizon 2020 research funding programme will continue to be funded even in the event of no deal. However, it fails to provide any reassurance that the Government will support Arctic research post 2020 once the Horizon programme has come to an end. What support will the Government provide for Arctic research post 2020?

Our report highlighted that the UK has a specific responsibility to address plastic pollution in the Arctic. The response reiterates the Government's commitment to introducing a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles but fails to explain how the Government will address the issue of plastic pollution in the Arctic specifically.

Lastly, while we welcome the Government's commitment to incorporate more of the Sustainable Development Goals into its Arctic policy, the current policy is unlikely to be substantially revised in the next few years. We would therefore be grateful if you could set out what action the Government will be taking to promote the SDGs in the Arctic in the short term.

I would be grateful if you could provide a response by Friday 29 March. We will be publishing this letter alongside the Government response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Mary Creagh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping flourish at the end.

**Mary Creagh MP**

**Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee**