

Environmental Audit Committee

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Rt. Hon. Andrea Leadsom MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

28th February 2017

Dear Andrea,

I am writing about DEFRA's 25-year plan for the environment.

As you know, DEFRA's Single Departmental Plan stated that the 25-year plan for the environment would be developed and published by the end of 2016. This included a framework setting out the scope of the 25-year plan to be published in summer 2016.

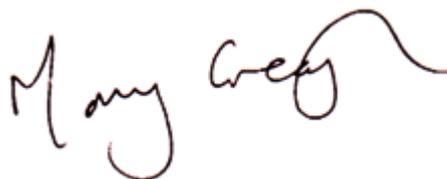
I welcome this important step by the Government towards taking a longer-term approach to protecting our environment. However, I am disappointed by the continuing delays in publication of the framework.

First, the framework was delayed from summer last year to the autumn following the Referendum, the change in Prime Minister and your appointment as Secretary of State. When you appeared before the Committee last October you said the framework would be consulted on "quite soon". You told the CLA in December that it would be "soon". In January this year you told the Oxford Farming Conference that green papers would be published, but gave no timescale. We are now nearly in March and the framework has still not been published and there is no indication of when it will be.

I recognise the pressures your Department faces as a result of preparations for leaving the European Union and existing budget cuts. Nonetheless, my Committee recommended that the framework for the plan should be published and consulted on before Article 50 is triggered, so as to inform the Government's negotiating position. This seems unlikely, raising the prospect of the Government entering crucial and time-limited negotiations with the EU without an agreed plan.

It is essential that the 25-year plan for the environment and its framework is not delayed further. Can you inform me of the dates you expect the framework and final plan to be published?

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mary Creagh', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Mary Creagh MP

Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee