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Sir Mark Hendrick MP
House of Commons
London
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19/12 March 2019

Dear Mark,

Thank you for your email of 26 February to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituents about the Environment Bill. I am replying as the Minister responsible for this policy area.

On 19 December 2018 the Government published the draft Environment (Principles and Governance) clauses; these draft clauses will be critical to our new Environment Bill. The clauses set out how we will create a pioneering new system of green governance, establishing an Office for Environmental Protection (OEP), to ensure we succeed in leaving the environment in a better condition than we found it.


The draft clauses propose that the OEP will be a non-departmental public body accountable to Parliament in a similar way to independent bodies such as the Equalities and Human Right Commission, the Committee on Climate Change and the Information Commissioners Office. The Chair of the OEP will go through a select committee pre-appointment hearing and the draft clauses require the OEP to lay key documents before Parliament including the OEP strategy and annual reports. The body will independently set its own work programme and Ministers have no powers to intervene in the OEP's work.

The Government's 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YEP) sets out how, over a generation, we will replenish depleted soils, rid seas and rivers of the rubbish affecting our planet, cut greenhouse gas emissions, cleanse our air of toxic pollutants and develop cleaner, more sustainable energy sources. As part of the 25 YEP, the Government committed to creating or restoring 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat as part of a Nature Recovery Network and will develop a new strategy for nature which will help us protect our most important wildlife sites and species.

The draft clauses also introduce a set of environmental principles that will be used to guide future Government policy making and place the 25 YEP on a statutory footing. These measures are only part of a broader intended Environment Bill, which will include ambitious legislative measures to take direct action to address the biggest environmental priorities of our age: air quality, nature recovery, waste and resource efficiency, and water resource management. The draft clauses are currently going through pre-legislative scrutiny by the House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and Environmental Audit Committee; we look forward to their report before introducing the Environment Bill early in the second Session of this Parliament.

On your last point, we will not weaken environmental protection when we leave the EU, but will instead maintain, and even enhance, our already high environmental standards. The Environment Bill is another key step towards achieving a Green Brexit. The EU (Withdrawal) Act will ensure existing EU environmental law continues to have effect in UK law after the UK leaves the EU.

Yours sincerely,



DR THERESE COFFEY MP