



Office for
Environmental
Protection

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The Rt Hon Ranil Jayawardena MP
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street London
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Dear Secretary of State,

6 October 2022

Environmental Targets' Statutory Deadline

We very much welcome your early and unequivocal public statements on the need for a strong environment alongside a strong economy. The two are inextricably linked. With Defra's clear focus on the environment, food, and growth, and with developments afoot across government, there are inevitable tensions, however, and a risk that the environment suffers as a consequence.

I do hope we meet soon so that I can hear more of your priorities, but meanwhile there is a pressing issue for your consideration.

You will already be aware that in introducing the Environment Act 2021, the Government made the case for a system of environmental governance based on statutory environmental principles and long-term environmental targets, and an Environmental Improvement Plan, all supported by an independent Office for Environmental Protection.

In our view, government is more likely to achieve its stated ambitions for a strong environment and address the priority issues if these key elements of environmental governance work together and do so as quickly as possible.

Statutory targets and the next iteration of the Environmental Improvement Plan are due soon, and so there is a rare and timely opportunity to use those mechanisms to be clear about government's environmental priorities, and planned actions, starting with the statutory targets that are due (by law) by 31 October 2022. This is the pressing issue that leads me to write today.

In my earlier correspondence I indicated that we see the timely introduction of these targets as being particularly important given the urgency and pace

needed to address environmental priorities. We see the opportunity you now have as the new Secretary of State to set the right targets as soon as is possible.

I refer to 'the right targets'. You will of course wish to consider whether the proposed targets reflect government's environmental priorities well enough and show sufficient ambition. It seems to us that it is especially important that they do, given that the push for growth will inevitably put new pressures on the environment. I do hope you find the detailed advice we have already given on the proposed targets helpful, as you review matters.

Given the deadline is set in law, our advice is that every effort is made to meet the statutory deadline with a good set of ambitious targets focused on government's priorities for the environment. Alongside the push for growth, we think it essential that government's stewardship of the environment is unwavering and seen to be so.

You will no doubt recognise that failing to meet the deadline will undermine the recently enacted environmental governance framework. It will also likely erode trust at such a sensitive time, and delay the urgent measures needed to drive environmental improvement.

If for exceptional reasons the statutory deadline is to be missed, however, we advise that government is transparent about that immediately as it becomes clear, and sets the earliest possible longstop date for compliance, so as to mitigate the impact on trust. In that scenario, in our view government should also assess potential impacts of delay on the environment, identify appropriate mitigations, and undertake robust planning to get back on track.

There is a strong relationship of course between the statutory targets and the next iteration of the Environmental Improvement Plan, due in January 2023. Delay in settling targets may well result in a deeply regrettable delay to the plan. There is much at stake. I look forward to us meeting before 31 October and hearing of your plans.

Yours sincerely,



Dame Glenys Stacey
Chair of the Office for Environmental Protection



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