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Date: 09 December 2022

Trudy Harrison MP
Minister for Natural Environment and Land Use
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street London
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Dear Minister Harrison,

Environment Act Targets

Thank you for your letter received on 2 December 2022, in which you respond on behalf of the Secretary of State to matters raised in my letter of 28 October 2022.

We welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to aim to set targets under the Environment Act by the end of this year. As you will know, we have concerns around the negative effects that could result from delays, in particular should the date when targets are set slip further. We are concerned about risks to the ambition set out in the targets themselves, and the potential for knock on effects for the review and revision of the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) and for the review of the targets, both due by 31 January 2023.

As we set out in our first EIP progress report (*Taking Stock*, May 2022) the EIP revision is government's opportunity to provide strong leadership and ensure ambitious targets are underpinned by effective strategy, clear policy and credible delivery mechanisms.

The targets and EIP reviews will need to provide assurance, to Parliament and others, that meeting the targets and implementing the revised EIP will significantly improve the natural environment. They will also need to provide assurance over how this improvement is to be delivered.

The revised EIP must include interim targets making an appropriate contribution towards meeting the long-term targets. In our view these interim targets ought to be set so as to drive bold, early action. The revised EIP will also need to set out, in sufficient detail to provide the required assurance, the measures proposed to deliver the Government's ambitions. This should include sufficient

explanation in quantitative or qualitative terms, for Parliament, the OEP and others to understand how government proposes to meet both the interim and the long-term targets.

Given the timeframes now involved, your offer of keeping in touch regarding both the targets and the EIP / targets review is appreciated. Our understanding is that the latest date by which the targets regulations can be laid (within this calendar year) would be ahead of the parliamentary Christmas recess dates (21 December 2022 to 8 January 2023). We will look to review our position if they have not been laid before this date, and welcome transparency around progress in the run up to 21 December.

As you have set out, we appreciate that there are some stages, notably the parliamentary process, and securing cross-government agreement, that will be (to a certain extent) beyond the department's direct control. However, we also note your assurance that HM Government remains committed to the Environment Act 2021. We would therefore urge those involved in these processes to ensure they happen in a timely way, so as not to further delay setting the targets. Delay cannot be allowed to undermine ambition or the need to demonstrate, in the revised EIP, government's commitments for delivery. Both are so urgently needed to halt and reverse negative environmental trends.

Should we be able to bring any further influence to bear in expediting these processes we would be happy to do so and welcome your thoughts on how we might best support you here.

Thank you for the updates in relation to the other statutory deadlines I highlighted in my letter of 28 October. We will follow up separately on these.

Yours sincerely



Dame Glenys Stacey

Chair of the Office for Environmental Protection



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