



**Office for
Environmental
Protection**

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The Rt Hon Therese Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

1 September 2023

By email only

Amendments to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill

Dear Secretary of State,

Thank you for your letter and for taking the time to meet with me yesterday, along with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

You reiterated the Government's pledge not to weaken its commitment to the environment and its judgement that the proposed amendments to the Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill will not lead to any regression in environmental outcomes.

While there is much to welcome in the Bill, the amendments will (if enacted) allow increased pressures on the natural environment. Impacts will vary from one place to another and over time, with outcomes by no means certain. The Government and the OEP must each report annually regarding progress in improving the natural environment. Whether there is progress or regression in environmental outcomes can therefore be judged over time.

What is certain is that the proposed amendments would amount to regression in law.

This is contrary to statements made in each House of Parliament on behalf of the Government under section 20 of the Environment Act 2021. Under that section, the Government has stated its view that the Bill "*will not have the effect of reducing the level of protection provided for by existing environmental law*". Should the proposed amendments be adopted and form part of the Bill, this would no longer be accurate.

It therefore remains our view that, for there to be the transparency and accountability intended by the Environment Act, it will be important to revise these statements should the amendments be adopted.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G Stacey'.

Dame Glenys Stacey
Chair, Office for Environmental Protection