



Environmental Improvement Plan 2025

Briefing Note from the Office for Environmental Protection

January 2026

This briefing note sets out our initial assessment of the EIP25, associated Environment Act 2021 target delivery plans and EIP25 monitoring framework. It is not an assessment of the effectiveness of the EIP25 in delivering environmental improvements. This will be provided in our future annual EIP progress reports.

How EIP25 compares with EIP23

Government describes the EIP25 as a strategic framework for improving the natural environment, as a long-term delivery plan and as a prioritised, systems-based plan that is clear on what, how and who will deliver environmental ambitions.

Our assessment of EIP25 is that it is an improvement on EIP23. It is a more coherent plan that presents government's approach to improving the natural environment more clearly and transparently. The EIP25 provides a strategic framework as well as more detailed information on how key targets will be delivered.

In September 2024, we provided government with advice on how the EIP might be improved. We can see in the EIP25 that much of the advice we provided has been taken on board.

We have previously called, and continue to call, on government to do more to show how its plans stack up to achieve its legal obligations. EIP25 details how actions are linked to targets and commitments and who is responsible for delivery. It also provides a clearer overview of the relationships between goal areas and actions by identifying key interlinkages through system connections. These indicate where action in one goal area will contribute to outcomes in another. The cross-cutting enablers, such as delivering local priorities more effectively, now also have associated commitments and actions. While this additional support for action is welcome, some commitments, such as those

on addressing barriers to sustainable choices across society, remain broad statements of intent with plans and further detail to follow.

The EIP25 now provides an annex detailing approaches to monitoring progress. This contains a qualitative assessment of the contribution of each commitment to delivering the outcomes of the relevant goal. This enables improved understanding of how plans are intended to stack up to achieve intended outcomes and is a valuable step towards addressing our recommendations. These qualitative assessments of contribution will need to be refined and made more quantitative, to provide assurance of sufficient progress. The contributions of the commitments for cross-cutting enablers to achieving outcomes have not been assessed. These are important, for example the commitment to mobilise private investment and finance to restore and protect nature in England is potentially a significant contributor and so it is important to factor this in.

The EIP25 provides delivery plans for Environment Act targets, which are welcome. It is intended that they will be refined over time in response to emerging evidence, which is understandable, though this means they often lack necessary detail, even where the need for action is urgent given that some deadlines are in 2030. For example, the delivery plan for legally-binding species targets points in turn to other delivery plans and states that delivering other interim targets will achieve the statutory species targets without providing the evidence showing how. This is a significant omission of important detail.

Other delivery plans have limited scope. Getting nature-friendly farming right remains the single biggest lever government can pull to make gains for nature on land and in water. It is the first of our key recommendations for improving progress with the EIP this year, and last. However, the farm wildlife target delivery plan limits its scope to agri-environment schemes, rather than incorporating the broader range of policies, regulations and advice that play a role in achieving the target. In addition, the delivery plan does not spell out how the lower and higher tiers of the schemes will contribute together. Getting the balance between higher and lower tiers is a major factor in achieving both high uptake and high ambition needed to deliver outcomes for species.

Achieving environmental improvements requires cross-government action. EIP25 details actions that will be taken across government as well as the governance arrangements and mechanisms such as the Environmental Principles Policy Statement Duty in place to ensure cross-government delivery. This is welcome. However, there remains a need to report on this activity transparently to enable public scrutiny and government accountability but this is not included in the EIP25 monitoring plan.

EIP25 now sets out government's approach to measuring progress including the use of a monitoring and evaluation framework to underpin the annual progress report (APR). This is a clear and welcome improvement on EIP23. Although the monitoring framework

still requires further development to address remaining gaps, such as for soil health, development needs are identified in the plan.

We have previously stated our view that government's Annual Progress Reports to date have only provided a partial overview of actions and plans rather than an assessment of progress. The development plans for APRs as outlined in EIP25 reflect our recommendations on more informative annual progress reporting. The commitment that the APR will now include government's response to the recommendations contained in our EIP progress report is also welcome. This will enable us to take this into account in our own annual assessment thereby improving the coherence of the two progress reports and enabling better scrutiny and accountability, including by Parliament and other stakeholders.

Ensuring the effectiveness of EIP25

EIP25 is a more coherent plan but it must also be a plan whose effective implementation delivers environmental improvements. We have consistently called for government to speed up and scale up its efforts to reflect the urgency of growing environmental challenges. While EIP25 now provides a clearer strategic framework for improving England's environment, much of the content and actions are comparable to EIP23. Indeed, in some areas such as the marine environment, there are fewer actions than before.

The new Environment Act interim targets are broadly welcome. The necessary revision of the previous set of interim targets, which is required in the course of revising the EIP, has resulted in higher ambition in some areas, lower in others and for some areas, whether there has been a change in ambition remains unclear. For example, the interim targets on habitat creation and restoration, and on air quality show increased ambition, whereas the interim targets on residual waste reduction reflect lower ambition as the targets are the same as before but with an extended deadline. It is not clear whether the EIP25 interim target on farm wildlife represents a reduction in ambition from its preceding EIP23 commitment to have 65–80% of landowners and farmers adopting nature-friendly farming on at least 10–15% of their land by 2030. It appears to be a step forward in clarifying the role of higher-tier schemes in stabilising and increasing species abundance but as highlighted above, there is limited clarity on how the packages of lower and higher tier schemes will work together and in conjunction with wider farming policies, regulations and advice.

Resources appear as stretched as ever, which will limit the impact of actions, particularly for higher tier agri-environment schemes. £500 million over 20 years for Landscape Recovery represents a particularly marked shortfall, relative to the potential for this scheme to deliver environmental improvements across multiple goal areas. Similarly, the £110 million funding commitment for Protected Landscapes actions is a

restatement of already committed spending so there are no additional resources for the already constrained public bodies responsible for their operation. Other commitments refer to maintaining current levels of resourcing and action, for example, those related to invasive non-native species, when it is clear that current levels of action are not delivering the scale and pace of change needed to meet targets and commitments. In many areas, the challenges are increasing and so business as usual will not suffice.

The EIP25 as part of the overall policy landscape

While EIP25 must inspire action and drive change across government, other important developments are needed to achieve environmental improvements. The illustrative plans for each EIP25 goal identify other core strategies and plans, however, this is not comprehensive and some key plans are missing.

Government has previously stated that EIP25 was to take the place of a dedicated chemicals strategy. It was also intended to be the future delivery mechanism for waste management. In our view it does not do either in enough detail. It does not replace a UK chemicals strategy. It does not set out further waste management policies even though it acknowledges they are needed to meet the targets. For both chemicals and waste, the forthcoming Circular Economy Strategy is essential to achieving ambitions.

The EIP25 needs to be considered alongside other important developments such as the long-awaited Land Use Framework, a new Farming Roadmap, Food Strategy, Circular Economy Strategy and a UK Marine Strategy, all alongside significant planning and water sector reform. All are needed sooner rather than later. There is now a real opportunity for all of these reforms to complement the revised EIP, to provide coherence from the strategic policy level through to local decision making.

How the OEP will monitor progress with EIP25

The EIP25 was published on 1 December 2025. This was not during the reporting period for our 2024/2025 progress report or in time for us to consider it in our assessment of future prospects. In our 2024/2025 progress report, published in January 2026, we have indicated what government has said about EIP25 and what it will deliver. Our next report on progress during the annual reporting period April 2025 to March 2026, will assess the early implementation of EIP25 and see if it is indeed the much-needed driver of change across government to meet targets and commitments and improve environmental outcomes.

As we have consistently said, the most important thing now is effective implementation of EIP25. Delivering all that is planned would improve substantially the chances of government achieving its environmental ambitions.