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The Rt Hon Steve Reed OBE MP
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Building
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By email only

4 August 2025

Dear Secretary of State,

Thank you for your letter of 23 July, for your kind remarks about my tenure, and for your recognition of the important role played by the OEP.

The main body of your letter relates to expectations of the OEP, as you seek to meet your ambitions for the environment and how it is regulated. I am pleased that you welcome our engagement in the Corry review. As you know, the OEP has a good number of seasoned regulators, and we will always support government and its arm's length bodies as they seek to regulate effectively. We welcome efforts to do so. We are all for innovation and trialling new approaches, but I quite understand any concern that with our remit, we might not be.

We are bound by our remit, and our principal statutory objective: to contribute to environmental protection and improvement of the natural environment. In that context, we want to see environmental laws and regulations designed and used in the most effective way, with better outcomes for the environment. We know that the choices made in designing, administering, enforcing and resourcing the law can all work for or against the outcomes you aim for.

Where we see opportunity for laws to be designed or used more effectively, including innovative and novel approaches that could deliver more for the environment, we will support that – as we did the recent proposed Government amendments to the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, which make your intended “win-win” for nature and the economy a more likely prospect. Where appropriate, we may formally recommend change. But equally, where we identify what we believe to be serious risks to environmental outcomes, including those we deem to be serious failures of a public authority to comply with environmental law, or where implementation is ineffective, then we will make those plain, as we should.

We speak with individual public authorities about our approach and will always be open to challenge and willing to listen. And we abide by our published strategy and approach to prioritisation and determination of when matters are serious and justify OEP intervention.

Thank you for supporting efforts to improve ways of working between the OEP and Defra. We generally enjoy good working relationships with government departments and others we oversee, but our main dealings are with Defra, where the relationship has been difficult at times, for example, in getting information to inform our annual assessment of government's

progress in protecting and enhancing the environment. We value and respect the culture of no surprises that you mention, and I am confident we play our part in that. In that spirit, I was pleased to have the opportunity to speak with Minister Creagh recently about the refreshed EIP.

You have our detailed EIP advice in response to your earlier request; we stressed the importance of detailed delivery plans, a coherent suite of targets and interim targets, and positioning the EIP as the driver of cross-government co-ordination to protect and improve the environment. I appreciate at least some of the complexities and interdependencies, as you work to refresh the EIP. No doubt there are still matters to settle, but I trust the OEP will have sight of the refreshed EIP as soon as possible, ideally several weeks before its publication, which I understand to mean around now. We would prefer to see a version that is still subject to change, rather than not see a version in sufficient time.

I suggest this, as I want our initial assessment of the new plan to be accurate, informed, and as constructive as possible, and I recognise that there will be keen public interest in our evaluation, given that Defra's internal analysis of the poor prospects of meeting targets has been made public. We have not been engaged as yet on your plans or any revised targets; our views have not been sought, as you had committed when requesting our formal advice in August last year. That leaves us with little to go on, ahead of its publication.

I look forward to continuing to work constructively with you and your colleagues for the remainder of my term. This is due to conclude in January, shortly after the publication and launch of our fourth annual statutory report on progress in improving the natural environment in England. I would be delighted were there sufficient evidence in the steps you have taken to speed up and scale up action as we have recommended, and in the refreshed EIP, for the OEP to report favourably on progress, and on improved prospects of the significant environmental improvements that are so urgently needed.

Yours sincerely,



Dame Glenys Stacey
Chair of the Office for Environmental Protection



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