



Department
for Environment
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To all MPs with constituencies
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To all MPs in England, and Peers

Final Environmental Targets under the Environment Act 2021

I am writing to confirm our suite of final legally binding environmental targets to meet our obligations under the Environment Act 2021 (the Act) which apply to England only, following on from the consultation earlier this year.

This government is committed to leaving the environment in a better state than we found it and today we are announcing an ambitious suite of targets to restore and protect our environment which will deliver on that commitment.

The suite of targets that we consulted on was the result of significant scientific evidence collection and development over preceding years that included input from evidence partners and independent experts, supported by over 800 pages of published evidence. We have full confidence in the final suite of targets, which represents the robust analysis already undertaken.

After careful consideration of consultation responses, which in the main wanted government to set even more ambitious targets, we have largely decided to proceed with the targets unchanged from the consultation. A key requirement of the Environment Act 2021 is to develop deliverable targets that will help us improve the state of the environment on land and at sea.

We are setting stretching targets to tackle some of the biggest pressures facing our environment and they will not be easy to achieve. They will ensure progress on clean air, clean and plentiful water, less waste and more sustainable use of our resources, a step change in tree planting, a better marine environment, and a more diverse, resilient and healthy natural environment.

Our apex target will halt and then reverse the decline in nature. From barn owls to butterflies, hedgehogs to red squirrels, nature has been in free fall for centuries. **We have pledged to halt that decline by 2030 and then help nature to recover.** We have listened to feedback from external partners, including the Office for Environmental Protection, and have amended the target baseline, to clarify our intent. This is a large task but we have already started: we have created or restored plant and wildlife habitats the size of Dorset,

we are investing more than £750 million in the environment in England through our Nature for Climate Fund, and we have launched 22 pioneering projects to find new ways to restore nature.

We want to see nature flourish in our seas as well as on land, which is why we have established a network of marine protected areas across 130,000 square miles of English waters. These protect the range of species and habitats in our seas, including cold-water coral reefs with starfish, anemones and sponges; blue mussel beds supporting sea snails and crabs; and deep-water mud habitats with cockles and sea urchins. Now they have been designated, we need to increase the protections for these valuable marine environments to help them recover, so **we are setting a target to ensure that 70% will be in a favourable condition by 2042.**

We will continue to improve air quality with our target to reduce concentrations of PM_{2.5} and while the levels of major air pollutants are at the lowest level since records began, we want to go further, reducing population exposure year on year. We have a target of 10 µg/m³ and we need to achieve this across the country. We do not believe that we can achieve this level by 2030 but can do so by 2040. While parts of England are already below 10 µg/m³, our second target will require continuous improvement in reducing exposure of PM_{2.5} to the population.

Improving the quality and quantity of water in our environment is a government priority. We are cleaning up our waterways, from precious chalk streams to bathing waters and beaches. Our targets focus on the major pressures on our water environment across agriculture, wastewater treatment works and metal mine pollution, which is a particular issue for former industrial areas. Our water demand target will also increase resilience of supply and leave more water in our environment for nature to recover. Water companies will be required to upgrade over 2000 wastewater treatment works of which around 400 will need to meet the strictest limit for phosphorus discharges.

Agricultural pollution impacts 40% of our water bodies and so we are committed to our ambitious proposals to tackle it. While the timeline will be challenging for farmers and landowners, I will be using the Environmental Land Management scheme and a geographic focus to help deliver this. This will further support farmers to manage and get the most out of their nutrients. This is alongside the Catchment Sensitive Farming programme, for which we have doubled the annual budget to £30 million, meaning that 100% of England's farmers will be able to access advice. Furthermore, we recently opened our £13 million Slurry Infrastructure Grant to support the sector to enhance their storage capacity.

We want to make more of our precious resources. Our Resources and Waste Strategy sets out how we want to move towards a circular economy, by minimising waste and promoting resource efficiency. We have therefore set a stretching target to halve 'residual' waste (waste that is sent to landfill, put through incineration or used in energy recovery in the UK or overseas) by 2042. This is an intentionally broad target, which will include the most environmentally harmful materials like plastics, rather than banning a single type of material and risk producers moving to a different, more harmful material.

Finally, planting more trees is critical for achieving Net Zero and provision of habitat. In the 25 Year Environment Plan we said we would plant achieve 12% woodland cover by 2060, and in the consultation we proposed a target of 17.5% by 2050, including trees outside woodland, as well as woodland. I have carefully considered this target, and the current delivery record affected by delays stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the


legal requirement in the Act for the target to be considered achievable. Therefore we have decided to take forward a target of 16.5% of England to be trees and woodland by 2050. This will deliver an increase in tree cover equivalent to the size of Cheshire. This is still a very stretching target and it will be challenging to achieve, but it is key for our Net Zero Strategy and to deliver our manifesto commitment to plant 75,000 acres of trees across the UK.

In the consultation we heard calls for additional targets. We believe that this is the best suite of targets either because there are already existing legal requirements or because the existing proposals will require such broad ranging actions in themselves.

These targets are stretching and will be challenging for us to meet, whether that is through Government, through business or indeed at home in our individual lives through choices we make. In turn this will support action to tackle climate change, restore our natural capital and protect our much-loved landscapes and green spaces.

The associated papers are being placed in the Library of the House. We will set out more detail about our plans to deliver them in our Environment Improvement Plan: which will be published by 31 January 2023, as required by law.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tina Clegg". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping flourish at the end.

