

Briefing

Local Group Briefing: Environment Bill

Introduction

Friends of the Earth are campaigning for a strong Environment Bill in 2019, following [Prime Minister Theresa May's announcement](#) earlier this year. A strong Environment Bill would not only safeguard, but also extend our environmental protections after Brexit. As it will cover almost all environmental issues, from clean air to nature to plastics, the Environment Bill is the perfect opportunity to take advantage of the government's narrative of a positive future for our environment.

We've written this briefing to outline what we're calling for and to help you when meeting with your MP. **Please arrange to meet with your MP about the Environment Bill, preferably before November.** This is to make sure they have time to influence Environment Secretary Michael Gove before his proposals for the Bill are published. It's not an issue if you can only meet later in the year, or even in the new year, as it is still useful for MPs to be calling for a stronger Bill once the draft has been released.

What should I ask my MP to do?

When you meet with your MP please explain why we need a strong Environment Bill to get them on our side. Please also **request that they write to Environment Secretary Michael Gove** asking for a robust Environment Bill that addresses the issues outlined in this briefing.

As the Environment Bill will cover a range of environmental issues, you can also make this ask part of a meeting on another issue you are campaigning on, such as plastics, nature or clean air. We'll send a briefing on how to make the meeting more exciting over in the next few weeks.

For now, **think about inviting your MP to meet at a local nature site, EU protected area or green space** and organizing the meeting with another local environmental or campaigning group. We can help you link up with other local groups if that would be useful. You don't have to be at the nature site for the whole meeting, but the setting could make it more exciting, interesting and memorable than their usual meetings. Importantly, it will also give the Environment Bill a local context. You can also start thinking about how to get others in your community to put pressure on your MP to support a strong Environment Bill and how you can get MP commitments in the local media.

Background to the Environment Bill

In July 2018 [Theresa May announced a new Environment Bill](#) with the aim of ‘setting out what we are doing to improve the environment for the next generation’. It will also outline how the government plans to achieve their promise to leave the environment in a better state than they found it; including by developing the 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YEP) into legislation. The proposed Environmental Principles and Governance Bill, which will set out how the government will replace EU environmental enforcement mechanisms post-Brexit, is also likely to be encompassed by the Environment Bill.

This means at the moment the Environment Bill is likely to cover:

- How environmental principles will underpin future UK policy making post-Brexit
- Plans for an environmental watchdog to replace EU enforcement mechanisms after exit day
- Environmental goals and how progress towards this will be measured

We’re expecting the Environmental Principles and Governance proposals in late October or early November, and the wider Environment Bill proposals in the new year.

The Environment Bill could shape UK environment policy for years to come. This means we need to get it right. We think this is also a crucial opportunity to push for higher ambition than currently outlined in the 25 YEP and lobby for further action to improve the outlook for our environment in the UK after Brexit.

Friends of the Earth is campaigning to make sure the Environment Bill:

- Has ambitious goals for the improvement of our natural environment
- Requires the Environment Secretary to bring forward clear, evidenced, ambitious, and achievable targets to meet those goals
- Guarantees a strong, independent environmental watchdog
- Ensures EU environmental principles are faithfully transferred into UK law so they can continue to underpin UK policy making
- Requires all parts of government to act in ways that support and improve the environment, and makes sure future government can’t roll back protections.

What are we calling for in the Environment Bill?

The Environment Bill should include the following content:

A responsibility for all parts of government, from local to national, to act in ways that protect and improve our environment. This would help to embed environmental action into work across government and help us hold all levels of government to account.

A set of objectives and goals that are at least as strong as (or stronger than) existing legal obligations. These would give the government a focus on what needs achieving. The bill should require the Environment Secretary to develop legally binding and time-bound SMART targets in secondary legislation for:

Local group briefing: Environment Bill

- A healthy environment, including clean air and water, healthy soils, and diverse wildlife
- Minimizing our impact on the environment
- Access to nature and environmental justice for all

The Secretary of State should publish how the targets will be met and report to parliament annually on progress. All parts of government should be required to contribute towards achieving these objectives and targets.

Environmental rights in UK law. This should include rights to environmental information, decision making, and access to the justice system relating to environmental matters. This will allow civil society to challenge decisions that conflict with environmental law and to shape the future of our environment.

A 'non-regression principle' that prevents any backwards steps being taken in the adoption, alteration and implementation of environmental laws. This would ensure that changes to environmental protections could only make them stronger.

A responsibility for the UK government to co-operate with relevant actors, including devolved nations, on cross-boundary and international environmental issues.

A requirement for independent and transparent impact assessments to be carried out before, during and after the trade negotiation process. This would ensure that environmental impacts are properly considered when making future trade deals, especially with regions with lower environmental and food standards than the UK.

A strong, independent environmental watchdog with the expertise and resources to do the job properly. This includes the power to initiate legal proceedings and sanctions if necessary, including fines and binding notices. Without the ability to issue fines and take institutions, including the government, to court, polluters will not be discouraged from ceasing environmentally destructive behaviour. The remit of the environmental watchdog must cover all domestic environmental law, including climate change which is excluded in the current proposals.

A list of all EU environmental principles and a separate policy statement outlining how they can be applied. This will make sure future policy making is environmentally sound and guarantee that none of the current EU principles can be dropped. All public authorities must apply the principles and must be subject to the environmental watchdog's powers.

The future relationship with the EU

You might also want to bring up the Brexit negotiations with your MP ahead of any parliamentary vote on the deal - because [no deal or a poor deal could be a massive threat to any kind of 'Green Brexit'](#).

Local group briefing: Environment Bill

We need to secure a good agreement with the European Union on the UK-EU future relationship, including an enforceable commitment to non-regression in relation to environmental standards. Ideally we also need a commitment to ongoing alignment, as well as commitments to continued cooperation on environment and climate. If your MP would like to work more with us around the Brexit negotiations or any other aspect of Brexit, please let us know by emailing Shaan Jindal on shaan.jindal@foe.co.uk.

Already planning a meeting with your MP?

If you're already scheduled to meet your MP about another issue – like plastics, clean air or pesticides – don't forget to mention that the Environment Act aims to tackle all of these issues too. We need to show MPs that we need a new law that sets ambitious goals for improving the environment across the board – from cleaning up the air in our cities, to protecting bees and healthy seas. Setting ambitious goals in the Environment Act will ensure politicians have to meet them. So whatever the topic of your meeting, give your MP a copy of the full [Greener UK Environment Act briefing](#) (expected in late September) after the meeting – or follow up with one by email. And ask them to write to Michael Gove in support of a strong and ambitious act that can tackle the big environmental issues we're facing.

Further information

We're working on Brexit as part of the Greener UK coalition. **For more detail please read Greener UK's [Environment Bill paper \(March 2018\)](#) and look out for an updated briefing (expected late September 2018) [here](#).** We also have more information on our [website](#), including a series of [Brexit and environment FAQs](#) and an [independent report](#) on the Environmental Risks of Brexit. If you have any questions please email Shaan Jindal on shaan.jindal@foe.co.uk.