



Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

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Dame Glenys Stacey
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22 August 2024

Dear Dame Glenys,

Thank you for your letters of 8 July welcoming my ministerial colleagues and me to our new roles. It is a great privilege to have joined Defra as Secretary of State. It was good to have a first meeting with you on 31 July. I am pleased that you have also met with Minister Creagh, and that a meeting is being arranged for you with Minister Hardy.

As you know, I believe that the Office for Environmental Protection plays a critical role in holding government and other public authorities to account for the implementation of environmental law. The work of the OEP will be important to all of my priorities for Defra, in particular to clean up rivers, lakes and seas, and ensure nature's recovery.

You raised a number of important matters in your letters: environmental targets and Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP), biodiversity, nature and species abundance, planning, and water. We look forward to working further with you on all of these issues.

In relation to water, my officials will continue to engage constructively with the OEP regarding the Combined Sewer Overflow investigation. This is in alignment with our ongoing work to deliver sustainable improvements as we reset the water sector. I also welcome the OEP's report on the Implementation of the Water Framework Directive Regulations and River Basin Management Planning (published 9 May). The Government is considering the conclusions and recommendations in the report, which will be part of our considerations for reform on water in the coming weeks and months, and will provide a detailed response in September.

In relation to nature's recovery, as you will be aware I announced our intention to undertake a rapid statutory review of the EIP to ensure it is fit for purpose. My intention is this review will inform an update of the EIP.

As you know, we are committed to the 13 legally binding environmental targets set under the Environment Act 2021. I plan to work in partnership with civil society, communities and business to restore and protect our natural world and deliver these targets and significantly improve the natural environment.

Consequently, I would like to request your advice on reviewing and updating the EIP, under the provision of section 30(1)(b) of the Environment Act 2021. I understand from your letter you assess the EIP and targets to be broadly sound. I would welcome your views on how to streamline the content of the EIP to focus on delivering the Environment Act targets and what can be done to implement commitments effectively to improve our natural environment.

We are already considering the detailed recommendations you made in your January 2024 Annual Progress Report for the individual policy level, which you will not need to repeat.

Given the rapid nature of this review, I would like your formal advice, by 12th September 2024, on:

- What recommendation does the OEP have for prioritising actions that have the biggest impact on significantly improving the natural environment and delivering the EA targets within a refreshed Environmental Improvement Plan? What recommendations does the OEP have for re-prioritising actions with less significant impact?
- What recommendation does OEP have for highlighting risks and inter-dependencies within the plan? Particularly on the interdependency between statutory targets and the domestic implementation of other commitments, such as 30x30.

My officials will engage with you on our plans for the review and seek your views.

The work of the OEP is vital in supporting the environmental outcomes we both wish to see. I look forward to considering your advice carefully. Thank you.

Sincerely,



THE RT HON STEVE REED OBE MP