

Environmental groups call on the Prime Minister to intervene as ten green policies are scrapped

Within the first three months of the new government ten different environmental policies have been watered down or scrapped, according to analysis by a group of leading UK environment organisations.

These range from support for renewable energy technology and tax exemptions for low carbon vehicles, which have existed for over a decade, to privatisation of the Green Investment Bank and the scrapping of the Green Deal, the establishment of both being achievements celebrated by the last Conservative-led government.

Protection for the natural environment has also been weakened with a u-turn on a ban on fracking in protected areas. And the UK has cited an ‘emergency’ to exempt itself from an EU-wide ban on neonicotinoids.

Environmental leaders have called on the Prime Minister, as a matter of urgency, to clarify his government’s approach to environmental protection and climate security in what is a vital year for action on climate change.

In a public letter to the Prime Minister, written in response to the findings, the heads of the UK’s leading environmental groups said:

“We welcomed the Conservative manifesto commitment to ‘being the first generation to leave the natural environment of England in a better state than that in which we found it’. Unfortunately, ten green policies which could have helped you to achieve these goals have been cancelled or weakened in the past three months. These policies were developed over many years, often with cross party backing, and with the support and involvement of many businesses and charities. Only one of these decisions, to end subsidies for onshore wind, was a commitment from your manifesto. We have, as yet, seen no positive new measures introduced to restore the health of our environment or grow the low carbon economy.”

Responses to the analysis:

Shaun Spiers, chief executive, CPRE, said:

“The Government’s commitment to neighbourhood planning and making better use of brownfield land is very welcome, but its overall record on the environment has been woeful. The Prime Minister clearly cares about the countryside and the wider environment, and recognises that strong environmental policies support a strong economy. He must now assert himself and ensure that his government lives up to its promises rather than taking decisions that we all regret in the long run.”

Stephanie Hilborne OBE, chief executive, The Wildlife Trusts, said:

“This list of recent policy reversals is shocking, and shows disregard for the health and wellbeing of current and future generations, as well as for the environment we all depend on. The Prime Minister should reset the government’s path as a matter of urgency, by reinstating these policies and bringing in truly visionary legislation like a Nature and Wellbeing Act.”



National Trust



Craig Bennett, chief executive, Friends of the Earth, said:

“This all out attack on green policies undermines UK efforts to tackle climate change ahead of global talks in Paris, and sets back our renewables industry when other countries are speeding towards clean energy and green jobs.

“Over-turning the science-led ban on toxic pesticides may be illegal as well as irresponsible at a time when bees need protection.”

Dame Helen Ghosh, director-general, National Trust, said:

“We are keen to play our part in meeting the big environmental challenges of today – climate change and the catastrophic decline in wildlife and habitats. We see their impact day by day in our places. But Government has to play its role in setting the right regulatory and fiscal framework – and the recent shift in policy positions is worrying.”

David Nussbaum, chief executive, WWF UK, said:

“This watering down of environmental commitments is short-sighted and short termist. As the world races ahead to develop new green technologies the government’s international standing is at risk unless the Prime Minister takes up the reins of his government and shows he is serious about establishing a long term framework for investment in renewables and positioning the UK as a leader in protecting the environment. Thankfully – so early in this new parliament – he still has the opportunity to do so.”

Mike Clarke, chief executive, RSPB, said:

“The Conservative manifesto made a moving statement that our moors and meadows, wildlife and nature, air and water are a crucial part of our national identity and make our country what it is. For this to be credible, we will need to see a long term plan for the natural environment matched by actions across government, not a legacy of empty rhetoric.”

John Sauven, executive director, Greenpeace UK, said:

"Since the election, we have been moving from the ‘greenest government ever’ to the ‘greyest government ever’. This is not the mandate this government put to the country in the general election. And it will be a hard sell to the international community at the climate talks in Paris at the end of the year. Without any real domestic action to tackle climate change this government will lose any credibility to influence others.”

Stephen Joseph, chief executive, Campaign for Better Transport, said:

"The changes announced by the Chancellor to vehicle excise duty have largely removed the financial incentive to buy a more efficient and less polluting car and fly in the face of the government's environmental commitments."

Analysis of changed policies:

Policy	Origin	Status	Date of change
Zero Carbon Homes 2016	Dec 2006 Building a greener future	Cancelled	July 2015 Productivity Plan
Zero Carbon Buildings 2019	November 2008 Zero carbon for new non-domestic buildings	Cancelled	July 2015 Productivity plan
Green Deal	January 2013	Cancelled	July 2015
Climate Change Levy exemption for zero carbon energy	July 2000 Finance Act 2000	Cancelled	July 2015 Summer Budget
Solar support via Renewables Obligation	April 2002	Cancelled	July 2015
Onshore wind support via the Renewable Obligation and contracts for difference (CfDs)	Renewable Obligation: April 2002 CfDs: February 2015	Cancelled	RO: July 2015 CfDs: July 2015
Public ownership of the Green Investment Bank	October 2010	To be privatised	June 2015
Differential Vehicle Excise duty	March 2001	Weakened	July 2015 Summer Budget
Preventing shale gas exploration in protected areas	January 2015	Reversed	July 2015
Neonicotinoid ban	April 2013 (EU wide)	Reversed in key areas	July 2015

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