

Ongoing uncertainty around UK environmental protection, with serious risks around air quality and chemicals, concludes first assessment of Brexit environment impact

On the anniversary of the EU referendum, Greener UK, a coalition of 13 major environmental organisations, publishes the first assessment under its comprehensive Brexit Risk Tracker, which will be regularly updated to reflect the risks to environmental policy throughout the Brexit process.

Most UK environmental protections stem from EU law. The Greener UK coalition's[1] Risk Tracker[2] traffic light rating system shows, based on analysis of the UK government's actions and commitments, which policy areas are more secure (green), and which are most at risk (red) from Brexit.

- **Red: air quality** The government is in breach of EU air quality regulations, with UK schoolchildren in worst hit areas being [kept inside](#) at playtime on some days. The government's latest plan has been [widely criticised](#) for not doing enough, and there is a risk that limits could be weakened after Brexit, to make it easier for the government to meet its legal requirements.
- **Red: chemicals** The EU system for regulating hazardous chemicals (REACH) is the most advanced in the world, recently banning problematic substances in products as diverse as till receipts and waterproof coats. The government has not committed to staying within REACH, and the minister responsible [has said](#) the UK should not follow the EU in banning certain chemicals,[3] while the minister responsible for pesticides is reported to have [called for weaker controls](#).
- **Green: climate & energy** The government has [indicated](#) its ambition to keep the UK in the EU's internal energy market, which would make it easier for the UK to decarbonise while keeping energy prices down. In addition, the UK has a strong domestic Climate Change Act.
- **Amber: all other policy areas** The amber ratings mostly reflect the general positive statements from government but a lack of reassurance on how all EU environmental law will be properly transposed into domestic law. There are also concerns about whether there will be adequate enforcement mechanisms after Brexit. The Repeal Bill will be responsible for all of these issues and will be the first key test of the government's resolve.[4]

Amy Mount, head of the Greener UK unit at Green Alliance, said:

"This is a pivotal parliament to determine the sort of country we want to live in as we leave the EU. The Conservative manifesto rightly set the bar high with its commitment to leave our environment in a better state and to be a world leader in environmental protection, and the government has also expressed its commitment that the body of EU environmental law will continue to have effect in domestic law. We are running this risk tracker to help the government live up to those ambitions, by highlighting the areas of greatest concern and celebrating any progress made.

"As well as the risks we've highlighted with this analysis, Brexit brings opportunities, particularly in agriculture, where subsidies could be better focused on public benefits, including nature conservation, flood management and reducing carbon emissions. We hope future updates of the tracker will show the red and amber ratings switch to green."

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Contact

Amy Mount, head of Greener UK unit, Green Alliance

amount@green-alliance.org.uk 020 7630 4515

Notes

[1] The [Greener UK](#) coalition formed in response to the EU referendum, united in the belief that leaving the EU is a pivotal moment to restore and enhance the UK's environment. It brings together 13 major environmental organisations, including the RSPB, National Trust, Wildlife Trusts, and WWF. Its [manifesto](#) for a Greener UK was launched in February.

[2] The Risk Tracker will be updated with new ratings on a quarterly basis to reflect the government's latest commitments and actions. See the Tracker: <http://greeneruk.org/RiskTracker/>

[3] Remarks made by Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at Defra, to the [Environmental Audit Committee](#) on Tuesday 7 March 2017, Question 201.

[4] The Greener UK Repeal Bill briefing, updated last Friday, sets out what the Repeal Bill must do to ensure a continued high level of environmental protection:
<http://greeneruk.org/resources/GRBill%20Briefing.pdf>