

15th May 2020

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about the Environment Bill.

The Environment Bill will place environmental ambition and accountability at the heart of Government. I am pleased that legislative measures will be introduced to address the biggest environmental priorities of our age, ensuring we can deliver on the commitment to leave the natural world in a better condition than we found it.

The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) will have the power to take public bodies to an upper tribunal if there are breaches of the law. I believe it is important that the OEP is independent and fully transparent in order to effectively hold the Government to account on its targets. I am therefore pleased by assurances from Ministers that the OEP will be operationally independent from Government, including from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. This means that Ministers will not be able to set its programme of activity or influence its decision-making.

The Bill will give the Secretary of State the power to set long-term, legally binding environmental targets on air quality, water, biodiversity, and resource efficiency and waste reduction that will be reviewed every five years. There will then be a published environmental improvement plan that will also be reviewed every five years, and a progress report will be published annually. I welcome the fact that the OEP will hold this and every future Government to account on these targets, and will report on the progress made to improve the natural environment.

I am also aware that if the Secretary wanted to lower or change a target, they would have to lay before Parliament, and publish, a statement as to why they had reached their decision. It would then be up to Members of Parliament to scrutinise this decision, before voting on a Statutory Instrument to change any necessary legislation.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Alok Sharma MP