21 October 2019

Dear \_\_\_\_\_\_ MP

**Environment Bill, Second Reading, Monday 28 October 2019**

As I’m sure you’re aware, the Government introduced a new Environment Bill recently after its announcement in the Queen’s Speech. The Bill’s second reading is now scheduled for Monday 28 October.

Cumbria Wildlife Trust has long called for an ambitious Act for nature’s recovery and the introduction of the first Environment Bill in over 20 years is very welcome.

The recent State of Nature Report revealed that one in seven species in the UK are at risk of extinction and 58% of species are in decline. We need new, pioneering legislation to protect and restore our natural world, ensuring wildlife populations recover and natural systems can soak up carbon to help tackle climate change.

The Environment Bill includes some important measures that will help turn the tide for our natural environment. We’re particularly pleased the Government have listened to our case for including provisions to enable the creation of Nature Recovery Networks through Local Nature Recovery Strategies. These will allow relevant authorities to identify opportunity areas where action needs to be taken so that nature can recover and allow environmental targets to be translated into real change on the ground.

However, there are some areas that require significant improvement, or gaps where important questions remain unanswered, including:

**Ensuring legally binding targets are fit for purpose** – While we’re pleased the Bill contains legally binding targets for improving biodiversity, any targets set will need to be comprehensive and proportionate to the scale of the environmental challenge we face. We believe there must be stronger guarantees to ensure long-term targets are met with action today, including greater legal force to meet interim targets.

**Strengthening the Office for Environmental Protection** – If the new environmental watchdog is to fulfil its vital function of holding government to account, its independence and enforcement powers must be strengthened. This means ensuring greater parliamentary oversight on appointments as well as having the power to fine government for breaches of environmental law.

**Non-regression** - The Bill contains a major omission – there is no provision for ‘non-regression’ on environmental standards. We believe this needs to change to ensure that our current environmental standards cannot be weakened.

The Wildlife Trusts are working with Greener UK, a group of 13 major environmental organisations, to analyse the Bill in depth and develop a briefing ahead of second reading, which I am pleased to enclose with this letter.

I hope that you’ll be able to attend and support the Bill’s second reading on Monday - and I hope that you would be willing to raise these issues on behalf of wildlife in *Cumbria*.

The need to reverse nature’s decline is more urgent than ever. Public concern over the environment has reached a record high and the demand for leadership and more action to halt the unprecedented decline of nature has never been greater.

This Environment Bill is a critical opportunity to tackle the environment emergency and we believe it should be the highest priority for all political parties.

With best wishes

Steve

Stephen Trotter

Chief Executive

Cumbria Wildlife Trust