
BREXIT: ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS COULD BE ERODED WARN PEERS

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Upholding environmental standards after Brexit will be hard, peers have said, warning of "worrying complacency" in government about the risks ahead.

An enforcement system similar to that provided by EU regulators and courts is needed to maintain existing protections, a Lords EU committee said.

The UK, it added, will need to find new ways to shape EU policies and remain an influential voice on climate change.

Ministers insist that standards will be maintained and even improved.

But they have also said that leaving the EU is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get rid of red tape holding farmers and others back.

Under a process known as the Great Repeal Bill, all existing EU laws - including 40 years' worth of environmental regulations and directives - will be converted into domestic law before the government decides which to keep and which to jettison.

After Brexit: What happens next for the UK's farmers?

Brexit talks to be on 'humongous scale'

Peers said the process - which will take place in parallel to the official Brexit negotiations over the next two years - would be "immensely complex".

Publishing an assessment of the impact of Brexit on environmental standards, the cross-party committee said the European Commission, the EU's executive branch, and the European Court of Justice had played a vital role in enforcing the "patchwork quilt" of EU laws and regulations over recent decades.

'Inextricably linked'

Without such a backstop, it was worried standards risk being eroded.

"The government seems to be worryingly complacent about the loss of this enforcement regime," the report claimed.

"Whether it is a question of migratory birds, managing our oceans or air pollution, the environment transcends political boundaries and the UK's environment and Europe's will remain inextricably

linked," said its chair, Lib Dem peer Lord Teverson.

"The bottom line is that if the UK fails to honour environmental law, it will end up in court... We are not convinced that the government has yet found a way to deliver the continuity of environmental protection that we all want to achieve."

[Image of the Cotswolds from 2011] Image copyrightGETTY IMAGES

It said an independent enforcement mechanism would still be needed, underpinned by a system of judicial oversight, to ensure central government, businesses and households live up to their environmental obligations.

Even if the UK left the single market, businesses would still have to comply with basic environmental obligations if they wanted to trade with the EU, it argued.

'Bureaucracy'

The committee is pressing the government to clarify whether funding for scientific research and sustainable infrastructure currently available through the European Investment Bank will continue after the UK leaves the EU.

It also suggested that after Brexit, the UK would have to align itself with other like-minded countries outside the EU to ensure it remained an advocate for global action to tackle the effects of climate change.

"The UK has been a world leader but in leaving the EU, we lose our strongest allies," the report said.

Environment Secretary Andrea Leadsom has said Brexit is a chance to do away with needless bureaucracy, such as rules on how many crops farmers must plant each year, while upholding environmental and animal welfare standards.

Her department has launched a consultation on a 25-year plan for the environment, focused on developing policies "tailored to the needs of the UK, our species and our habitats", including wildlife protections and sensitive management of farmland.

Responding to the report, a Defra spokesman said: "Our ambition is to be the first generation to leave the environment in a better state than we found it.

"We are committed to building on our long history of wildlife and environmental protection and securing the best deal for Britain as we leave the EU."

Kaynak/Source: