



Separation Anxiety: Challenges for the Environment from Brexit

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It's an honour to have been asked to present the Burntwood Lecture this year, and to follow in the footsteps of such an illustrious parade of former speakers.

Many of your previous guests have been eminent scientists or fearless campaigners; I stand here tonight to deliver this lecture as a politician. That's not inappropriate, however: Lord Burntwood, the IES' first Chairman, whose name the lecture commemorates, was himself a member of parliament and a minister in Clement Attlee's Labour government. But more importantly, it's not inappropriate because the great challenge of our time, the subject on which I've been asked to speak, is itself primarily political: Brexit.

How the United Kingdom manages its withdrawal from the European Union will shape this country's future for decades. In the absence of any clarity from the government over what it sees as the final destination of this process, I hope I can enlist everyone here in helping me to draw up the broad approach the UK should adopt in dealing with environmental policy post-Brexit. I'm going to tell you what I think, and I hope you'll respond at the end with thoughts of your own.

There are two competing visions for the future of the UK outside the EU. One – hinted at by some of the supporters of the Leave side during the referendum, but never fully articulated – is of a country free of the kind of burdensome regulations they liked to pretend emanated from Brussels; a fleet-footed, buccaneering, free-trading nation spotting openings in the global marketplace and exploiting them ruthlessly.

This vision implies a deregulated low-cost low-tax low-value economy with clear implications for environmental policy. In May this year, for example, George Eustice, the farming minister, attacked – quotes 'spirit-crushing' EU directives, including, explicitly, the birds and habitats directives and went on to criticise the use of the precautionary principle as the basis of EU legislation, a criticism echoed by many of his colleagues. You may remember that this kind of approach echoes Conservative ministers' attempts, during the coalition government, to water down or scrap environmental regulations through such initiatives as the Red Tape Challenge and the balance of competences review – attempts which, happily, Liberal Democrat ministers ensured came to nothing.

This deregulatory approach to Britain's economy outside the EU is doomed to fail because the UK will never be able to compete at the bottom of the market with poorer countries – in eastern Europe, or Asia or Africa – with lower levels of regulation and cheaper labour costs; and those countries will in any case find it increasingly more difficult to compete

on this basis as automation gradually replaces low-skilled jobs. But any attempt to pursue this goal could do significant damage to Britain's natural environment and to the reputation of British products. Remember that it wasn't all that long ago – the 1980s – that Britain was known as the 'dirty man of Europe' – with good reason, given its record on issues such as acid rain or bathing water quality. And you only need to look at the current government's attempts to water down the EU's approach to the regulation of neonicotinoids or to air pollution, or to avoid implementing the Ambient Air Quality Directive to realise that the threat of environmental standards falling after Brexit is a very real one.

The other vision for Britain's future is the polar opposite: a country committed to the highest environmental standards for its own air, water and countryside, because it recognises that these are key determinants of its citizens' quality of life, essential natural assets that underpin its society and economy. This vision is of a country committed to the highest environmental standards for its industries and for the products and services it makes and sells to the world, because it understands that the global markets now opening up around us are demanding low-carbon and resource-efficient products and services. This vision is of a country open to the world outside, fully engaged and participating in international environmental initiatives and regimes, including in particular those on the governance of shared resources such as the seas and the atmosphere.

This vision is, clearly, the more desirable option – not just for its innate qualities but for the UK's ability to compete and prosper in the future. Now, you might argue that the best way to achieve this particular vision is for Britain to remain a member of the EU – and I wouldn't disagree. But we lost that argument and now have to face the consequences. And that includes tackling the reasons why 52 per cent of those who voted chose to leave the EU. I doubt that almost any of them had environmental policy in mind when they voted to leave, but they nevertheless rejected the UK's current social and economic model because it failed to deliver the kind of life they wanted. So the framework of law and policy outside the EU that we have to construct to deliver environmental outcomes needs to play its role in addressing that disenchantment. I'll come back to this later.

I suspect everyone in this room would share with me the desire for that second kind of vision. And I suspect that you will also share with me the belief that the existing EU legislative and policy set-up for the protection of the natural environment is one of the best – possibly the best – of such frameworks anywhere in the world; not in every single respect, but certainly overall. It follows, then, that our aim for UK environmental policy post-Brexit should be to adopt or mirror as much EU legislation as possible, and also to improve on it where possible.

I will consider this in the rest of my lecture under four headings:

1. Incorporating EU legislation into UK law;
2. Establishing systems for compliance and enforcement;
3. Joining EU frameworks; and
4. Improving on EU policies.

1. Incorporating legislation into UK law

First, as many EU environmental regulations, policies and strategies as possible should be incorporated wholesale into UK regulations, policies and strategies. As I have just argued, this is important not just to maintain existing standards of environmental protection, but also so that British products can be sold in to European markets, the destination for almost half of the UK's exports. To do this, British products will of course need to comply with EU product standards – on vehicle fuel efficiency, appliance energy efficiency, chemical contents, safety standards etc.

Clearly, if the UK is to retain full access to the European Single Market common product standards will be a requirement; but even if we do not, the EU will in any case remain Britain's largest export market by far, and it is inconceivable that we should wish to abandon standards which enable our exporters to trade with our nearest neighbours. And in any case, whatever Brexiteers may claim, there is no universal clamour from industry to water down environmental standards.

British companies exhibit no desire to develop segmented product lines, manufacturing products to different standards depending on the market they're destined for: they want to create single types of products that they can export to any number of markets. Companies want the certainty that standards will remain high, which will enable them to schedule their future investments and plan their future strategies in the knowledge that the goalposts will not be shifting. If industry expects the regulatory environment to change, the result will be less certainty, lower levels of investment and growth, and slower rates of improvement in environmental outcomes.

And on top of all that, we will need to adhere to many EU standards to achieve our own domestic policy goals. For example, as the Committee on Climate Change pointed out in October, the new EU vehicle fuel efficiency standards expected to be in place after 2020 will be a key instrument in cutting UK carbon emissions, covering around a quarter of the reductions required across the economy by 2030. If the UK has weaker standards than the EU it will reduce opportunities for UK manufacturers and lead to inefficient products with higher running costs and emissions being dumped on the UK market.

Let me be clear. High regulatory standards should not be considered as burdensome red tape, but a requirement that is essential to meet climate change & environmental policy goals whilst at the same time creating a level playing field for our businesses to trade and grow. We will need to shout that message loud and clear – given the Govt's repeated undermining of the case for regulation – as the process of incorporating EU legislation gets under way.

This incorporation of EU legislation is, of course, the aim of the government's rather counter-intuitively-named Great Repeal Bill. Given that an estimated 25 per cent of all EU legislation deals with environmental protection, this will be an enormous task – I was tempted to say a titanic task, but the Foreign Secretary has already made that adjective uniquely his own in the context of Brexit.

This process poses a number of challenges. To illustrate them I'll choose what is probably the largest and most complex piece of EU environmental legislation: the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals regulation, or REACH. REACH requires companies to collect information on the properties and uses of the chemicals they manufacture or import and register them with the European Chemicals Agency in Helsinki.

This is a dynamic area of law with new substances regularly becoming subject to authorisation or restriction; the Agency is staffed with experts with a range of backgrounds from all round the EU. Companies based outside the EU cannot participate directly in all aspects of REACH, facing the UK with the choice of reaching some kind of cooperation agreement with the European Chemicals Agency or of establishing its own regulatory body, at significant cost, replicating the extensive expertise present in its European counterpart. We have to know which option the government intends to pursue before we can meaningfully debate the Great Repeal Bill.

We could of course choose to abandon REACH, but that would mean that our own consumers would lose a rigorous, if complicated, framework for the protection of their own health and safety. And chemicals from the UK exported to the EU would still have to be registered, this time by the importer, and unscrupulous manufacturers in the EU might be encouraged to dump products that failed to meet EU standards on the UK market.

Multiply that set of issues by the number of regulations to be covered by the Bill – many of which contain roles for EU institutions – and you begin to see why many observers regard the two-year timetable for completing the Article 50 process as pure fantasy – at least if it begins as early as March next year – and the estimates of the direct cost of Brexit produced by the Chancellor in his autumn statement last month as highly optimistic.

The second problem is whether the government will take the opportunity of the Great Repeal Bill to lower environment standards. Ministers have assured us that they won't, but I am not reassured by performances such as those of environment minister Thérèse Coffey and minister for exiting the European Union Robin Walker at the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee in September. They were asked seven times if the government would retain EU air quality limits following Brexit. Neither made the commitment. Remember that this comes against a long history of UK governments opposing air quality standards. For example, during the recent review of the Ambient Air Quality Directive the government was quite open about its desire to lower standards for nitrogen dioxide to avoid infraction proceedings.

And of course everyone will know that thanks to the courage and persistence of the lawyers at Client Earth, the government has finally been forced to comply with the Directive and produce a strategy by July next year. This record gives me no confidence at all that air quality standards will be maintained through the Great Repeal Bill.

In this context, I note that the government has only committed to incorporating EU regulations into UK law – quotes – 'wherever practical'. Clearly, by itself that's not unreasonable: practicality is an important test, and many EU regulations will not be able to be

incorporated exactly as they are. But while it may be necessary, it will not be sufficient.

I believe we should call on the government to add a second requirement: that any adjustments to EU environmental laws needed to fit the realities of post-Brexit UK must provide the same or a higher level of environmental protection as those in the original regulations.

The third problem with the process of transposing EU law into UK legislation is what happens after the Great Repeal Bill becomes law. Will EU regulations, once transposed into UK law, be treated as primary or secondary legislation? Secondary legislation, or statutory instruments, can be changed relatively easily by ministers, with far less parliamentary scrutiny than is afforded primary legislation, or bills. In incorporating EU environmental legislation, will the Great Repeal Bill simply create a whole new range of statutory instruments which the government will subsequently be able to amend with limited parliamentary debate, or will it create new primary legislation which will afford greater status to the laws in question and be debated and scrutinised, when amended, in far more detail? Clearly our preference should be for the latter.

The fourth problem is that of keeping pace with EU legislative change. Once the Article 50 process is under way, it can be assumed that any new EU regulations agreed will not be implemented in the UK. But we know already of several coming down the track in 2018 or 2019 – for example, regulations governing the recycling and recovery of waste, which are important not just for domestic purposes but because the UK is a major exporter of waste for treatment elsewhere in the EU. It will be important for the government to keep up with this pace of change and ensure that the Great Repeal Bill incorporates EU law not only as it was when the process started, but as it will be when it finishes.

The fifth problem is the role of the European Court of Justice. Clearly, the Great Repeal Bill will include the provision that the ECJ no longer has jurisdiction over the EU. But ECJ case law has been important in many cases determined in UK courts, and a decision simply to not recognise ECJ jurisprudence will have major impacts on the interpretation of UK law. ECJ case law should be incorporated in the UK's court system.

And the final problem, at least for this section of my lecture, is the impact of the removal of the overall framework provided by EU policy, such as, for example, successive environmental action plans, or the Birds and Habitats Directives. As I'm sure you're aware, unlike EU regulations, which take effect throughout the EU without the need for implementing legislation – and which the Great Repeal Bill will therefore need to transpose into UK law – directives generally set minimum standards, which member states may choose to exceed, and are transposed through domestic law. So in one sense EU directives are already fully embedded in UK law. But leaving the EU will divorce these British laws from their parent European frameworks – which are generally dynamic regimes which continue to evolve and develop. And we will lose contact with overarching strategies such as the seventh environmental action plan or the circular economy package. The government must make it a priority to set out clear strategic frameworks to replace those we will lose through Brexit.

On the climate change side, of course we already have the 2008 Climate Change Act, but

we also know that current government policies are on track to deliver at best only a half of the reductions in greenhouse gas emissions required to meet the targets of the fifth carbon budget. So the content of the government's industrial strategy, and more particularly of whatever document they publish next year to replace the coalition government's 2011 Carbon Plan, will be hugely important. In this context I am encouraged by the government's ratification of the Paris Agreement last month, by its decision to adopt the fifth carbon budget as recommended by the Committee on Climate Change, and by the clear commitment displayed by BEIS and Defra ministers so far. I am less encouraged when looking at the rest of the government; for example, I found it simply astonishing that in his statement on Heathrow in October, the Secretary of State for Transport made no mention whatsoever of the probable impacts on climate policy. As the Committee on Climate Change put it a couple of weeks ago, 'Using the government's publications, it is not possible to assess whether the investment makes sense when emissions conform to the planning assumption.' I am also less encouraged by the absence from the National Infrastructure Plan of any commitment to explicit decarbonisation. Though I really shouldn't be surprised. The Govt earlier this year refused an amendment I proposed to the Housing & Planning Act which would have reinstated the zero carbon homes standards for all future housebuilding. The reason DCLG gave for not accepting this – was that such an approach would increase costs for homebuilders! The government must accept that the task of meeting climate targets needs to be met by all government departments and agencies working together: it cannot be something left to BEIS and Defra and forgotten about, or actively opposed, by everyone else.

On the protection of the natural environment, we need an equivalent structure to that provided by the Climate Change Act: a new long-term strategy for the protection of habitats, land, water and air, including hard targets and duties underpinned by legislation and overseen by a statutory body – most obviously, the Natural Capital Committee, which should be made permanent. Again I am encouraged by the government's intention to produce a 25-year plan for the natural environment. It remains to be seen how effective this will be. If it does not set ambitious targets for the UK's stock of natural capital and biodiversity, it will be judged a failure. If it does not place a duty on all government departments and public bodies to implement it, it will be judged a failure. And if it is not underpinned by legislation, with a body to help deliver progress and hold the government to account, it will be judged a failure.

Alongside both these pillars of environmental policy, we need a clear commitment and strategy to the circular economy: to reduce the consumption of natural resources and the production of waste that characterises our current economic model. My party fought the last election on the promise to pass a Resource Efficiency and Zero Waste Act which would, among other things, task the Natural Capital Committee with producing a 'Stern report' on resource use, identifying resources being used unsustainably and recommending legally binding targets for reducing their net consumption. The EU's circular economy package is a good start in this area, and we need to see this kind of approach given a much higher profile in UK policy post-Brexit.

2. Establishing systems for compliance and enforcement

That's quite enough of the challenges the Great Repeal Bill and its aftermath will bring us. I turn now to my second area for action: the need to establish robust systems for compliance

and enforcement. For it is not enough simply to have good regulations and laws: they must be effectively enforced.

The problem with Brexit is obvious: we will lose the compliance framework provided by the European Commission and the European Court of Justice. In the context of UK policy, this has proved its worth time and time again. We know, for example, that the recycling targets finally adopted by the UK government were driven by the threat of infraction, and the sums of money that the UK was going to be fined were at the heart of that process. And as Alan Andrews from Client Earth stated in evidence to a House of Lords committee last month, and I quote: 'During the course of this last round of litigation against the Government it was revealed that the main driver behind their new air quality plan was not the Supreme Court order from the UK in 2015, but the threat of being infringed by the Commission. They aimed to comply based on when they thought the Commission might move to issuing fines.' About thirty environmental cases brought by the Commission against the UK have resulted in a judgment against the government.

What replaces this? If the UK joins the European Free Trade Association, which is one option which retains access to the Single Market, there is an EFTA Court, which operates somewhat like the ECJ – but without any power to issue fines, so its impact is clearly limited.

Andrea Leadsom, the Secretary of State for the Environment, has asserted that UK courts will be able to deal with any matters concerning the enforcement of environmental legislation, and clearly this will be important. But, as the quote from Client Earth shows, it was the fines threatened by the European Commission rather than judicial review through the Supreme Court that acted as the main driver of government action over air quality.

And in any case, who will initiate action through the court? Therese Coffey has suggested that this will be individuals and organisations, perhaps like Client Earth. But this can be an enormously costly process, as I know from my time as Chief Executive of CPRE, and the likelihood of this happening if left up to NGOs to initiate will be far less than the situation pre-Brexit, with the European Commission systematically monitoring and taking action against non-complying member states.

There are a number of steps we can take to improve enforcement and compliance. First, as I argued earlier, we should transfer ECJ case law over into the UK system so that it benefits from decisions which have guaranteed individuals' rights to enforce, hold governments to account, access information and so on. Second, we should fully implement the provisions of the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. Currently this is implemented through EU legislation; we need it transposed into UK law, perhaps through an Environmental Rights Act. Third, we need effective enforcement agencies armed not just with powers of inspection but also powers to issue fines and penalties. Bodies such as the Environment Agency and Health and Safety Executive do a good job with limited resources, but at present their powers are too limited.

Above the level of day-to-day enforcement of laws and regulations, we need a body which scrutinises government actions against environmental targets. I think there is a strong

argument for an Office of Environmental Responsibility, modelled on the independent Office for Budget Responsibility, to work with government departments to help them draw up business plans and sustainable development strategies; to scrutinise and query departments' key decisions and activities; to undertake independent analysis of the government's environmental performance; and to assess and advise government on the impact of significant new (and existing) policies. As I argued earlier, environmental objectives need to be embedded across government, and this is one mechanism which could help achieve that.

3. Joining EU frameworks

Now let me turn to my third main area, the desirability of joining, where possible, relevant EU frameworks and organisations. Self-evidently, the UK's decision to leave the EU does not mean that it can stop cooperating with other nations in the management of shared resources, in tackling transboundary pollution and in regulating cross-border trade.

This applies in a number of fairly obvious areas. Let me start with the Common Fisheries Policy, which of course will cease to apply after Brexit. Although the CFP has a poor history, recent reforms have started to deliver more sustainable fisheries, incorporating the principle of maximum sustainable yield and banning discards. The complexity of the transition to any new arrangements post-Brexit will be huge, and there is a real risk to fish stocks if negotiations are prolonged without a new deal: stocks could be fished out in EU waters before they reach our own. Furthermore, since 80 per cent of the British catch is exported, any attempt to increase the UK catch outside the CFP could well lead to export markets being closed against us. To the maximum extent possible, the UK should continue to be associated with, and undertake the responsibilities of, the CFP in reducing the environmental burden of industrial-scale fishing.

Like fish, pollution knows no borders: 50 per cent of the air pollution experienced in the UK originates from abroad, and a fair proportion of the pollution we generate affects our neighbours. There is an international framework outside the EU – the Gothenburg Protocol to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution – but it deals primarily with information-sharing and the exchange of scientific information. Effective controls on air pollution come through EU Directives, such as those on Ambient Air Quality, Industrial Emissions and National Emissions Ceilings. Recently revised, the NEC Directive not only sets emissions ceilings for sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds and ammonia, but also establishes a clean air forum to allow for the sharing of best practice and scientific information. Rather than trying to set up new structures, we should continue after Brexit to engage fully in these institutions and frameworks, if that should prove possible.

Turning to climate change, the major question is the UK's continued participation in the EU Emissions Trading Scheme, the world's largest emissions trading system. If the UK remains part of the Single Market, it would be possible to remain part of the ETS too, though without voting rights – the position Norway finds itself in now. If the UK does not retain access to the Single Market, I would argue nevertheless for it to remain part of the ETS. About a third of the UK's annual greenhouse gas emissions are currently covered by the ETS, and UK companies are responsible for about 11 per cent of total emissions within the ETS. That

enables British companies to sell and buy permits with other companies in the EU, which – since there are cheaper options for reducing emissions in several other EU member states compared to the UK – allows for more cost-effective reductions in emissions, and lower costs to industry. I certainly accept that thanks to the over-allocation of permits, the ETS is far less effective than it should be, but the basic concept is sound and the UK should not abandon it.

On energy policy, increasing interconnectivity with continental Europe clearly makes more and more sense as UK electricity generation becomes increasingly to depend on wind and solar PV. On cloudy windless days the more we can import power from Europe the less we will need expensive backup diesel generators; on sunny windy days the more we will be able to export to other countries. In any Brexit scenario, cooperation with the EU internal energy market will be essential. Again if it should prove possible, the UK should remain a member of the EU Energy Union. Similarly, we should mirror or improve on the targets included in the EU's 2030 Climate and Energy Package: investors in low-carbon energy badly need to be reassured of the UK's commitment to decarbonisation and renewable energy.

One of the most depressing features of the aftermath of the referendum is the way in which European scientific researchers have already started to disassociate themselves from their UK colleagues in case it jeopardises their ability to access EU research funding, which often require, cross-border collaboration. You will know this much better than I. Even if it is not possible to negotiate continued access to research funding – and contributions to it too, of course – it would be worthwhile trying to negotiate some kind of arrangement where this collaboration could continue even if the British component is funded separately. I do not know whether that will be possible, but I note that some non-EU states, including Israel and Switzerland, currently participate in EU research programmes such as Horizon 2020. This is not just about money: more importantly, perhaps, it is about retaining the spirit of cooperation and the culture of open collaboration in our efforts to tackle global challenges.

4. Improving on EU policies

Now I want to be more optimistic – turning, in the final section of the lecture, to the opportunities Brexit gives us to improve environmental policy. Because EU policies, of course, are not perfect.

You won't find it hard to guess the main topic under this heading: the Common Agricultural Policy. Like the CFP, the CAP has not had a good record: it has created excessive pressures on the environment from its support for agricultural production and input use. But, also like the CFP, its recent reforms have improved it somewhat, and it can also claim credit for helping to maintain more traditional low-input and high-nature-value farms. Payments for environmental management on farmland have grown sharply. Nonetheless, considerable distance remains between the present model and a truly 'green' agriculture policy, and there are major concerns about the current 'greening' provisions.

The UK's departure presents a major opportunity for the government to reshape the country's land management and agricultural policy. I believe that future policy, and the financial support allied to it, must focus on rewarding farmers for the public goods that they provide, producing healthy food and protecting the natural capital of farmed landscapes through

building healthy soils, carbon storage, clean water and flood prevention.

There is no doubt that there will be political pressure to divert the £3 billion pa that our farmers currently receive away from agriculture— who can forget the Brexit bus and its infamous promise of £350 million a week for the NHS? By allying a new agricultural and land management policy to the provision of public goods, political will to maintain farm support, which is critical to many farm businesses, particularly in environmentally sensitive areas, could be secured. Making the case for public support to improve our health – providing safe food, access to the countryside and building up the natural resources like water we all rely on. The consultation the government has promised in the next few months on its food and farming policy must dovetail with the government's proposed 25-year environment plan. And an Independent Commission should be set up to consider views – of all stakeholders including the public - and then provide recommendations to the Govt.

A Commission would be able to consider the competing demands in the national interest and make good on the reality that DEFRA just doesn't have sufficient resources to undertake this pivotal task alone.

Alongside the creation of a new land management and agriculture policy for the UK – or, more accurately, for its component nations – there will be other opportunities from Brexit. The removal of EU state-aid requirements could allow us to simplify the UK policy mix on climate change, particularly in fiscal policy. The combination of the ETS, the carbon price floor, the climate change levy, and the various levies added to electricity bills to fund the government's policy objectives – and the mixture of exemptions and partial exemptions for particular industrial sectors – have led to a confusing and very uneven mix of pricing with some perverse outcomes. For example, due to the implicit carbon prices arising from all those instruments, electricity is in effect more expensive than gas, which is ridiculous given the pace of decarbonisation of power generation. I might also add the need to scrap the government's ludicrous decision last year to end the exemption of renewable sources of energy from the climate change levy – which, as Friends of the Earth put it, was rather like applying alcohol duties to apple juice.

Similarly, in the area of tax policy, Brexit could remove the pressure on the UK, from the European Commission, to end its lower rate of VAT for energy-saving equipment. In the area of policy on heat, the EU is currently focused too much on renewable heat, which has the effect, among others, of artificially boosting the use of biomass, which can be low-carbon but is not automatically so. If the focus was instead on low-carbon heat, it should open up other options, such as the use of waste heat or hydrogen. And I am sure there are other areas too where we can to improve on some EU policies which affect the environment.

Conclusion

So there are a few crumbs of comfort to be garnered from Brexit. But in most respects, as I have argued, the best outcomes for UK environmental policy will follow from us adopting EU law and standards, and joining EU frameworks and institutions wherever possible – together with establishing robust systems for enforcement and compliance, and creating our own UK policy framework, centred on tackling climate change, protecting nature in all its forms

and reducing the use and wastage of natural resources, all implemented by a government structure in which environmental policy is mainstreamed through all departments and agencies rather than being left to BEIS and Defra and a few others to manage.

I hope you agree with my proposals, in principle if not in detail, and I look forward to hearing your responses. But I want to make one last point before I finish.

It should be clear that achieving this aim – this vision of a government and society and economy fully committed to environmental goals – will require an immense amount of persuasion. There will be many voices in favour of the first vision I set out – of a deregulated cheap-labour economy which devalues nature and despoils the environment – though of course they wouldn't describe it that way – and they need countering with argument and facts and passion.

In many ways the environmental movement in the UK – by which I include all of us who care about the natural environment – has had it relatively easy in recent years. The EU framework has been, mostly, a good one, and much of the argument and lobbying has taken place at a fairly technocratic level and mostly in Brussels, far away from public view. It was too easy, during the referendum, for the Leave campaign to paint all regulations emanating from Brussels as absurdly bureaucratic, or costly, or somehow un-British. At the same time the Remain campaign almost entirely failed to paint a positive picture of the EU, despite the fact that a substantial majority of people agree with the principle that countries need to cooperate in tackling environmental problems.

We won't be able to rely, after Brexit, on the EU winning our battles for us. We will have to fight for every piece of environmental legislation, and demonstrate why it matters, not just for middle-class liberals like myself – and, probably, most of you – but for ordinary men and women, for the 52 per cent as well as the 48 per cent. We need to show how an ambitious climate policy is good for jobs and growth and prosperity across the country, through new renewable energy industries and electric car plants and home insulation, through stewardship of the land, through the revival of areas devastated by the end of traditional industries where there are no jobs and no hope. We need to show why protecting nature is good for people's health and the economy. We need to show why cutting waste and sharing resources makes people's lives better.

I and my colleagues in Parliament will try to do all that. But we need your help. Scientists & practitioners like yourselves will have a crucial role to play, alongside businesses and campaigning NGOs and community groups and individual citizens.

We need to take environmental arguments out of the technocratic closet and make them popular. We need to make sure that the government – any government – can't ignore the public desire for a better environment and a better life. And we need to win these arguments, for our children's and our country's future.

End