

# A FRESH DIRECTION

Next steps for the UK towards a  
new environmental vision for Europe

May 2024

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ∞ **With elections due in the UK and the EU within the next year, this is the moment for both bodies to move forward from current positions and build up a more cooperative and considered strategy with regard to the environment and climate, well ahead of the scheduled review of the Trade & Cooperation Agreement in 2026.**
- ∞ **Without more commitment to cooperation, there will be a lost opportunity to maximise combined environmental impact and coherence of approach at the international level and a risk of lower effectiveness and higher costs at the domestic level. The UK can pursue a more cooperative approach without abandoning its own priorities.**
- ∞ **Both communication channels and trust have suffered since Brexit, affecting both officials and elected representatives. Given the geopolitical background and internal preoccupations in the EU, the UK needs to be ready to shoulder what might seem more than its share of the effort required to rekindle a new relationship, with both environmental and economic benefits. This of course is part of the challenge.**
- ∞ **An early step would be for a new government to commission a review of what a more ambitious approach to environmental cooperation might look like. Amongst other things, the need to respond to the challenge of the US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and explore joint initiatives to increase environmental investment on this side of the Atlantic should be considered.**
- ∞ **The scope for initiatives across a range of issues and themes is wide but the various strands need to be held together by more of a common understanding, an investment in trust and, where needed, stronger institutional links. Amongst the avenues to be taken forward (particularly on the UK side), are:**
  1. **The UK should maintain its autonomy but adopt a default position that it will generally align with EU environmental regulation, particularly where there are cross border and trade considerations, unless there are strong reasons not to.**

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2. To set out new principles for alignment of environmental product standards with those in the EU, without sacrificing regulatory autonomy.
3. Formally link the UK-EU Emissions Trading Schemes & Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanisms, underlining joint climate ambition and determination, increasing regulatory certainty for business working across Europe and removing the risk of additional costs to British exporters.
4. Build on the existing UK critical minerals strategy but introduce robust targets on sourcing and reuse of critical raw materials, complementing those introduced by the EU and put in place steps to work together with the EU to ensure Europe's supply of Critical Raw Materials.
5. Following on from the decision to rejoin Horizon Europe and the Copernicus science and research programme, bridge a widening gap between UK/EU technical and scientific experts on environmental data and information by taking steps towards full membership of the European Environment Agency and Eionet. Linked to this, align with EU controls on hazardous chemicals and seek a close working relationship with the European Chemicals Agency.
6. The UK should increase the priority given to cooperation on international environmental issues, including joint positions and sharing longer term perspectives and plans.
7. The UK and EU should develop a new and efficient forum for exchange on the environment, with clear added value for officials on both sides and capacity to address operational issues and flag future developments.

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