

# RESETTING OUR SHARED ENVIRONMENT:

How working with the EU can improve UK climate and nature standards and support economic growth

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**The Institute for European Environmental Policy UK (IEEP UK) has been an analyst, contributor and commentator on UK and European environmental policy development for close to five decades.** As part of our [continuing research](#) of UK-EU dynamics on the environment since Brexit, we believe due to the longstanding interwoven nature of this policy and shared ambitions that it offers great potential for close collaboration, and aligning with those higher standards that have been applied in the EU in the last five years might be one of the quickest routes to improve the UK's environment and create attractive conditions for more investment in industry.

## Opportunities from the UK-EU Reset

The announcements from the 19 May Summit provide a lot of hope for action on the environment. Headline commitments around the intention to link Emissions Trading Schemes and for a veterinary agreement that would see the UK align with higher standards including for pesticides are helpful. The [agreement also raises the possibility](#) that the UK could work with European agencies that the UK left when we departed the EU, including the European Environment Agency (EEA) and Chemicals Agency (ECHA) amongst others. Formalising a closer working relationship with these and other bodies would be welcome, specifically:

**RECOMMENDATION 1** the UK should seek to [rejoin the European Environment Agency](#), a pan-European body (not an EU agency) and its sister Eionet network to improve the quality and consistency of the UK's environmental data and collaborative working on solutions to the cross-continental environmental challenges we face.

## Opportunities to support economic growth

IEEP UK's [latest research](#) shows that in some areas where the UK and its four nations are diverging from EU policy, selective re-alignment would provide a realistic and meaningful milestone for improving UK standards. With the Government's desire for economic growth, alignment on many of these areas of policy would support this by removing trade barriers. The Government is planning major strategies or policy in the next two years on the following areas, and could choose to incorporate alignment with a range of EU standards:

**Circular Economy** – in the last five years, the EU has developed a raft of new legislation including on ecodesign, buildings, critical raw materials and batteries. [Our research shows](#) UK businesses are calling for the UK to align with many of these to remove trade barriers.

**RECOMMENDATION 2** The Government's forthcoming Circular Economy Strategy (likely in Spring 2026) is an opportunity to state an intention to raise levels of ambition to at least the level of the EU if not go beyond, which would need to be followed by legislation.

**Deforestation** – the UK's Environment Act in 2021 committed to legislation to tackle illegal deforestation in UK supply chains (Forest Risk Commodity regulations) which four years on has still not been tabled, meaning the UK lags behind the EU's equivalent Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). This delay may provide an opportunity to align, and more clarity on EU standards as they develop.

**RECOMMENDATION 3** the UK Government could announce at the Brazil COP in November its commitment to legislate on deforestation and align with the EUDR.

**Chemicals** – since Brexit the EU has been more active in restricting chemicals that are harmful to human health and the environment than the UK, partly due to a lack of capacity in our regulatory bodies. Aligning with the EU's regulatory system (REACH) would save costs for UK taxpayers and businesses.

**RECOMMENDATION 4** Parliamentarians should test Government plans to use the recently passed Product Regulation and Metrology Act, and whether they intend to use this or other mechanisms to achieve alignment with, and access to stronger chemicals standards and processes.

## Opportunities in other forthcoming Government plans

**Air Quality** – to date Air Quality is one of a handful of issues where UK standards have regressed since Brexit. Recent EU legislation sets lower caps for harmful pollutants which cause chronic (cardiovascular and respiratory) disease whilst also contributing to climate change.

**RECOMMENDATION 5** The Government has committed to an Air Quality Strategy in 2027, through which it could align with stronger EU emissions standards, however it would need new legislation to make these legally binding.

**Water/sewage** – The EU has updated its main water/sewage laws and is requiring pharmaceutical and cosmetics companies to pay some of the cost of cleaning up damage caused by micropollutants to water bodies. Dealing with pollution before it enters the water is much cheaper to the taxpayer and better for the environment too.

**RECOMMENDATION 6** The Government should build on a recommendation in the Cunliffe review in its promised consultation and legislative response in autumn 2025, and include similar Extended Producer Responsibility schemes in the UK to help pay for the damage caused to our watercourses and consider whether other sectors should be included. This would go a long way to more fully implementing the 'Polluter Pays' principle.

## What can Parliamentarians do?

We would be keen to discuss further with you the opportunities to influence Government plans, through any connections you have, through Parliamentary Questions and moreover to raising the profile of these important issues during these windows of opportunity.

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**The Institute for European Environmental Policy UK (IEEP UK)** is a sustainability think tank with over 45 years of experience. As part of the broader IEEP family, we are committed to advancing evidence-based research, analysis and policy insights in the UK and its interaction with policy in the EU and globally.

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