



# Environmental Audit Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy  
1 Victoria Street  
London SW1H 0ET

By email

02 April 2020

## **Preparation for the COP26 climate conference**

Dear Secretary of State,

May I congratulate you on your role as President of COP26. The Government and UNFCCC decision to postpone COP26 is a sad but unfortunate necessity to protect public health in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet there remains much that the Government can do to ensure that the climate crisis remains a top priority of governments around the world and that emissions peak in 2020.

My Committee held an evidence session on preparations for COP26 prior to the House rising for the Easter recess, hearing from experts who have been involved in past COPs. We had hoped to hear from yourself and other Ministers in a later session, but circumstances mean this will not be able to take place in the short term. Therefore, I am writing to raise some of the issues from the session and would be grateful if you could respond in writing.

At the launch of COP26 in February, the Prime Minister stressed that the UK would do everything it could to support China in its biodiversity COP and emphasised that there should be a shared agenda to repair the natural world and address climate change. He also confirmed that he has engaged with Prime Minister Modi of India and President Trump to intensify activity in the run up to Glasgow. Since then the global COVID-19 pandemic has dominated political capacity to move forward other agendas in the UK and around the world.

We appreciate that the outbreak of COVID-19 will put added strain on the Government at this time, but can you explain how the different Government departments involved are working to deliver COP26 and how you are mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on these plans? How will the Government make use of the extra time to prepare for COP26 following its postponement?

The postponement of the Comprehensive Spending Review removes a key plank in the Government's anticipated programme of ambitious domestic events to display international leadership in the run-up to COP26. Does this signal a rethink within HMG of what it will be

feasible to achieve, given the significant diversion of resources and Government capacity to restrict the impact of COVID-19 on the British people and economy?

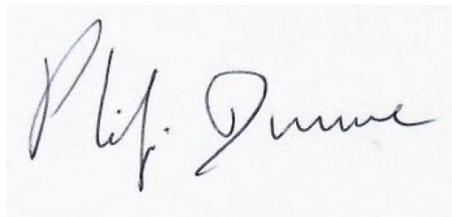
Under the Paris Agreement a number of commitments are due to be delivered in 2020, including the enhancement of Governments' nationally determined contributions, the invitation to provide long-term strategies, the pathways to decarbonisation to net zero in 2050 and the promise of having mobilised \$100 billion per year for the poorest countries to help them green their economies and to adapt to climate impacts. We heard that the success of the Paris COP rested on France's embassies being tasked with setting objectives and creating alliances for COP as their number one priority for two years in the run up to the conference. The UK's embassies will now have the added task of COVID-19 to deal with and a shorter lead in time than France, but what progress has been made through the UK's diplomatic channels to build alliances and resolve the objectives for COP26, as they will need to be agreed this year? Since Chile retains the COP Presidency until COP26 begins, what meetings have you had with the Chilean Government and the Italian Government, our joint hosts, to discuss diplomatic arrangements?

Dr Katherine Kramer from Christian Aid and Melanie Coath from RSPB emphasised to us the importance of the links between the biodiversity COP in Kunming, China and COP26 so that the ecological and climate crises can be considered in tandem. The relationship between the UK Government and the Chinese Government will be crucial to build an ambitious coalition that will push forward both agendas with similar coalitions in 2020. Whilst the Biodiversity COP may also be postponed, what meetings have taken place with the Chinese Government and what plans are there to deliver ambitious outcomes for both COPs? The UK is also due to host a joint science meeting of the IPCC on climate change and the IPBES on biodiversity in May. Since this meeting will not be able to take place in person, what alternative arrangements are being considered?

We also heard in our session that the Government had shown international leadership by not only committing to a net zero target by 2050, but by producing the analytical work on how to get there. We welcome this climate leadership and hope you will be sharing the work the UK has developed on pathways to net zero with other nations. We are also looking forward to the UK continuing this leadership throughout its year of climate action and inspiring others through the publication of an ambitious Nationally Determined Contribution. We will follow up on your progress later in the year and look forward to the setting of a new date for COP26 in 2021.

I would be grateful for a response by 30 April 2020.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Philip Dunne". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'P' and 'D'.

**Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP**  
**Chairman of the Environmental Audit Committee**

CC. John Glen MP, Economic Secretary to the Treasury

Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park, Minister of State in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs