SSA comment
The Environment Bill

*Introduced by Defra, 30.1.20*

Just a fortnight after the Agriculture Bill acknowledged soil’s importance for delivering a range of environmental services, it is extremely disappointing to see it so comprehensively overlooked in yesterday’s Environment Bill.

Whilst equivalent environmental indicators – air, water and biodiversity - have dedicated chapters laying out targets, frameworks for meaningful action and obligations on responsible parties, soil health does not even get a mention. This discrepancy showcases the attitude to soil in a nutshell.

Decades of underinvestment in education, enforcement and above all nationwide monitoring means we lack even a rudimentary, baseline understanding of the state of, in particular, England’s soils from which to set realistic targets – or a plan of action to achieve them.

It puts the Environment Bill entirely out of step with the Agriculture Bill, but also the 25 Year Plan for the Environment which looks to deliver sustainably managed soils by 2030. Given that this Plan is now on a statutory footing – where are the steps needed to translate this aspiration into something concrete?

We do not expect the government to correct what is a multi-generational failure overnight, but we did expect the Bill to at least address this. We need to see an acknowledgement of soil’s importance in the first instance, alongside an understanding of the component policies needed to remedy the situation and a roadmap for putting them in to place.

Instead, while the Bill promises a *step-change in environmental protection and recovery*, when it comes to soil it represents just another missed opportunity.

We urge the government and MPs to correct this situation during Second Reading and will be proposing amendments to this effect.

Matthew Orman, SSA Director, 30.1.20

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The Sustainable Soils Alliance (SSA) was launched in 2017 to address the current crisis in our soils. Its aim is to restore soils to health within one generation by galvanising the communities of scientists, innovators, policymakers and land managers already active in this area, harnessing their activities and providing them with a sense of common purpose. We ultimately want to see soil get the same focus, investment and attention that other natural capital ‘elements’, water and air, have received in recent years.

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