Michael Gove

Michael Gove 'deeply regrets' Trump's approach to Paris climate agreement

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In first speech since cabinet return, environment secretary says he hopes US president will have a change of heart

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Jessica Elgot
Political reporter

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Michael Gove has also pledged to deliver a 'green Brexit'. Photograph: Dominic Lipinski/PA

Michael Gove has said he "deeply regrets" Donald Trump's approach to the Paris agreement on climate change and hopes the president will have a change of heart, in his first speech since returning to the cabinet.

The environment secretary said international cooperation was crucial to resolve the problem of climate change, adding: "The world's second-biggest generator of carbon emissions can't simply walk out of the room when the heat is on."

Gove also said the government was not prepared to compromise on environmental standards, sustainability or animal welfare to secure a trade deal.

Instead, Britain would compete on quality and not take part in a "race to the bottom" to win new trading relationships, he said. "Of course it's important we explore new trading opportunities, with the United States and other nations across the world but it must not be, and the cabinet is agreed on this, at the risk of dropping any environmental standards whatsoever."

Organisations such as Friends of the Earth have previously warned of the dangers of pursuing a speedy trade deal with the US based on unacceptable compromises, when the US has long pushed a general dilution of health and environment regulation. Hormone-treated beef and poultry processed with chlorine are two common symbols used by activists of of lower US food safety standards.

In the speech at the WWF, Gove also pledged to deliver a "green Brexit", although critics have pointed out that the Queen's speech contained no planned environmental legislation. He also said farmers must prove they deserve future subsidies after the UK leaves the European Union.



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Gove described himself as an environmentalist in his speech in Woking, Surrey, on Friday morning. "Leaving the EU gives us a once in a lifetime opportunity to reform how we care for our land, our rivers and our seas, how we recast our ambition for our country's environment, and the planet. In short, it means delivering a green Brexit."

In the speech, he criticised the common agricultural policy, which "puts resources in the hands of the already wealthy, and encourages patterns of land use which are wasteful of natural resources".

The government has promised to keep overall subsidies to farmers at the same level until 2022, but Gove said the subsidies would have to be earned.

"There are very good reasons why we should provide support for agriculture," he said. "Seventy per cent of our land is farmed - beautiful landscape has not happened by accident but has been actively managed."

However, Gove also said subsidies must benefit the environment: "I want to ensure we go on generously supporting farmers for many more years to come. But that support can only be argued for against other competing public goods if the environmental benefits of that spending are clear."

Stewart Stevenson, an MSP for the Scottish National party and a member of Holyrood's rural economy committee, said the speech was "an unambiguous Tory threat to continued agricultural support funding after 2022 - that is the stark post-Brexit reality which the UK government is now proposing for our rural communities".

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Gove also laid down a marker for his views on climate change. "We've seen climate change threaten both fragile natural habitats and developing human societies, we've allowed extractive and exploitative political systems to lay waste to natural resources and we've placed species of plants and animals in new and mortal danger while gambling with the future health of the whole world."

"I am an environmentalist first because I care about the fate of fellow animals, I draw inspiration from nature and I believe we need beauty in our lives as much as we need food and shelter."

Gove also confirmed the government would push ahead on its planned ban on plastic microbeads in beauty products by the end of the year. Last year the government launched a consultation on banning microbeads in personal care products such as exfoliators and body scrubs, which Gove said had "a devastating effect on marine life".

About eight million tonnes of plastic are discarded into the world's oceans every year and Gove said the microbead ban would be an important step. "We are responding to that consultation today and we will introduce legislation to implement that ban later this year," he said.

Gove, a prominent Brexiter, said he could understand why leaving the EU could be "a moment of profound concern" but said Brexit was not an opportunity to water-down environmental standards. "I have no intention of weakening the environmental protections we have put in place while in the EU," he said.

Caroline Lucas, the Green party co-leader, expressed scepticism about Gove's environmentalist credentials. "Gove's overture to the environment might make him sound like a keen defender of nature but his government's actions suggest that protecting our natural world is a long way from the top of their priority list," she said.

"There is an environment-shaped hole in the government's Brexit plans. They failed to announce any kind of environmental protection bill in the Queen's speech, and we still don't know how they will transfer enforcement powers from EU institutions to the UK."

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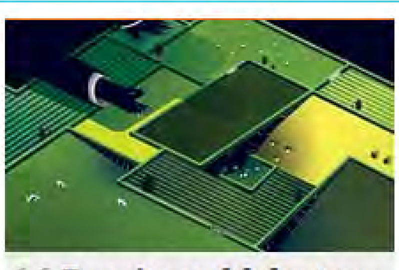


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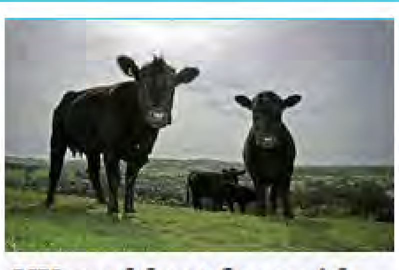
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