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The Rt Hon George Howarth MP  
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**From Rory Stewart OBE MP**  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs

Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 31 May on behalf of a number of your constituents about the EU Habitats and Wild Birds Directives. These Directives clearly have a role to play in protecting biodiversity in the UK and the EU and I understand the strength of support that they have from the UK public.

As your constituents are aware, the European Commission is undertaking a review of the Habitats and Wild Birds Directives to ensure that they are fit for purpose. This is part of a wider exercise the European Commission is carrying out which is assessing European legislation in many areas. Reviewing a policy is an essential part of the process of ensuring that it is working properly and effectively.

The fitness check of the EU Nature Directives was discussed at a meeting of EU Environment Ministers in Brussels on 16 December 2015. Member States noted the importance of the EU Nature Directives and the need to retain them in their current form to provide certainty and avoid any diminishing of standards. Since then, we have continued to encourage the European Commission to focus on improving the implementation of the Directives rather than reopening them.

I can reassure you that the UK Government is engaging with the Commission to ensure these Directives continue to provide protection for our most important species and habitats while also ensuring they can be effectively implemented. We now await the publication of the Commission's fitness check.

*Rory Stewart*