

“The Green Economy Equation that the new Government cannot afford to get wrong”

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Insight from Gavin Graveson, [Veolia](#) Senior Executive Vice President Northern Europe

Whoever wins the next election will be forming a government facing huge challenges. Two key issues, often pitted against one another, are economic growth and protecting the environment. But without solving this equation, the new government can't put the UK on the path to prosperity.

The climate crisis and cost of living crisis should be tackled together. Green policy isn't a zero sum game. There are growth opportunities across the vital water, waste and energy sectors – if the right policy frameworks are in place. We cannot afford to delay and the new Government must prioritise actions that enable investment in infrastructure to decarbonise, depollute and regenerate resources at scale.

Firstly, the energy transition isn't simply about reaching net zero. It's also about building a resilient, domestic supply so we can produce low carbon, local heat and electricity in a cost efficient way to homes and businesses. Cumbersome planning systems and stifling red tape need to be simplified so green infrastructure projects can take months, rather than the years that is currently the norm for both planning and for grid connections. This will start powering sustainable growth.

Secondly, the resource sector is still waiting for clarity on the Government's Resources and Waste Strategy announced in 2018. That's six years of uncertainty that is hindering progress on national recycling rates and undermining the confidence for businesses like Veolia to invest.

The Government must keep it simple and deliverable. An efficient and effective Extended Producer

Responsibility Scheme will give producers value for money and more recyclable materials back into the value chain. A fair Emissions Trading Scheme will incentivise decarbonisation without encouraging backwards steps like a return to landfill. An escalating Plastic Packaging Tax will signal to producers that it is costly to use virgin materials that damage the planet and will make recyclable packaging made from recycled content a staple on our shelves.

Finally, the unacceptable levels of pollution and low levels of water resilience is not only an affront to the environment, but also our quality of life and is detrimental to our health. Over half of British people surveyed recently by Veolia and Elabe said they felt exposed and vulnerable to a health risk due to pollution and climate change. A sustainable, clean supply of water is a resource we cannot afford to take for granted.

Investment and innovation has to start now. Veolia has decontamination solutions on the market today but without a transparent public tender framework for works, the water industry will continue to be murky.

We need resilient water resources to safeguard drinking water supplies in the face of climate change and the ecological health of our rivers, lakes and seas must be a priority. Public trust will be hard to win back, but the new Government must increase the transparency of monitoring and reporting water quality and open up the market to more competitive solutions. UK citizens deserve a long term strategy on water resilience, addressing both quality and quantity.

Energy, waste and water are all critical sectors with positive growth, investment and environmental potential. But the mantra of “efficient and effective” must be applied to government legislation to unlock investment, create jobs and enable a profitable, sustainable economy. Whatever the colour of the new government, green must be high on their priority list.