

News release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 27 NOVEMBER 2012

GOVERNMENT FAILING IN AMBITION TO BE 'GREENEST EVER'

The Coalition Government is failing on its own commitments to Britain's natural environment: that's the public's view from a survey organised by Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link), a coalition of 39 leading environmental charities.

Of those surveyed, less than a quarter (23%) think the Government is doing enough to protect our landscapes and wildlife – on land and at sea.

The poll also finds that 84% of people think that the natural environment boosts their quality of life, with 81% wanting to see the natural environment and its wildlife protected at all costs. Only 17 per cent of people agreed that this is the 'greenest government ever.'

The survey, conducted by ComRes and published today [27 November, 2012], shows that the public concurs with the arguments put forward in Link's new report, *Nature Check 2012*, also published today, which tracks the Government's progress since 2011 against 20 of its own major commitments to the natural environment. *Nature Check 2012* finds that, while some progress has been made, the Government needs to do much more to secure a healthy and thriving natural environment.

Nature Check 2012 is Link's second assessment of the Coalition Government's progress and the 'traffic-light' assessment shows the Coalition achieving 'green' on just two of its 20 commitments (protection of whales and of elephants). Of the remaining 18, the Government is failing on four (red), and making moderate, but insufficient, progress on 14 (amber). Link believes there is room for massive improvement.

A number of red-flagged commitments have turned to amber in this latest assessment, but without renewed political will, leadership and concerted action on key recommendations, the Government is in danger of slipping backwards on matters of critical concern for UK quality of life.



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"Bringing voluntary organisations in the UK together to protect and enhance wildlife and landscape, and to further the quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the countryside"

Chair: Paul de Zylva, Director: Dr Elaine King

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The lack of action on protecting and designating marine conservation sites is a major cause for concern as it is leading to further degradation of this precious natural habitat and the wildlife it contains. The Government's handling of badgers and bovine TB, flood management and the use of wild animals in circuses are also areas where Link feels the Government is failing.

Dr Elaine King, Director of Link, said: "The Government is keen to demonstrate leadership on the financial crisis. But leadership from David Cameron to combat the loss of our natural capital is clearly lacking and the public feels that his Government is not doing enough to protect it. The Government lags behind public opinion on the environment, as the attempt to sell off our forests demonstrated. It needs to catch up. A healthy environment – and the public benefits it brings – is a critical part of everyone's quality of life, not an optional add-on.

"The Government's continued use of rhetoric that promotes growth over the environment is a worrying sign that the fragile progress made so far may not last. We want to see the Government recognise the value of nature and ensure that all departments recognise that the natural environment underpins sustainable growth.

"Our poll shows that only a third of the British public believe that the natural environment is less important than economic growth."

Nature Check 2012 recommends that the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister bring the Coalition Government together to achieve their ambitions for the natural environment, by using the Natural Environment White Paper, *The Natural Choice*, as a strategic driver for policy-making across Government.

The report will be presented to the Environment Secretary, Owen Paterson, at a parliamentary reception on 27 November.

Dr King concluded: "Owen Paterson acted swiftly and positively to address the Ash Dieback crisis, and engaged well with NGOs on the issue. We look forward to welcoming more positive action of this kind from Mr. Paterson. The next crisis in his in-tray is the loss of farmland wildlife and we need his determination to find ways of increasing the vital funding for farmers to put nature back into our countryside."

Ends

For further information and to arrange an interview, please contact:

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Photographs:

To access a selection of images of relevant to this press release, please click on the hyperlink: <https://www.rspb-images.com/respages/storysetsignon.aspx?key=9a60984b-397f-457b-b27d-644ac8c919b4>.

And then enter the following user name and password, when prompted.

User Name: Naturecheck

Password: RSPB November 2012

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<https://www.ifawimages.com/media-portal/>.

Editor's notes:

1. Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together 39 voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation and protection of wildlife, countryside and the marine environment. Our members practise and advocate environmentally sensitive land management, and encourage respect for and enjoyment of natural landscapes and features, the historic environment and biodiversity. Taken together our members have the support of over eight million people in the UK and manage over 750,000 hectares of land. For further information, see www.wcl.org.uk
2. The survey was carried out by ComRes, who interviewed 2,055 adults in Great Britain online from 16th to 18th November 2012. Data were weighted to be representative of all British adults aged 18+. ComRes is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Full data tables are available at www.comres.co.uk, or from Kate Hand, kate@wcl.org.uk, or on 020 7820 8600.
3. The ComRes survey found that that the British public is generally very positive about the countryside: 93 per cent agree that it is a national treasure. The majority of people feel that it improves the quality of their lives (84%), or believe that the natural environment and its wildlife should be protected at all costs (81%). Additionally, only a third (33%) believe that the natural environment is less important than economic growth, with 58% disagreeing.

While the natural environment is seen as important and valuable, few people think that the Government is doing enough to protect our landscapes and wildlife (23%), and less than a third (29%) think that the Government is taking the natural environment into consideration when making decisions. Only a small minority agree that the Coalition is the 'greenest Government ever' (17%), with 55% disagreeing.

4. *Nature Check 2012* makes three key recommendations:

- Consistently use appropriate expertise and effective stakeholder engagement to make the best decisions for people and the environment;
- Implement programmes with appropriate monitoring, use of evidence, funding, environmental governance and political support;
- Reinvigorate the message of *The Natural Choice*, the Government's Natural Environment White Paper, using it to drive policy-making across Government. (*The Natural Choice* is the Government's White Paper on the Natural Environment in England, it was published in July 2011 <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/natural/whitepaper/>).

5. The full list of ratings for the commitments assessed in Nature Check 2012 are:

2011	2012	Commitment
		We will introduce measures to protect wildlife and promote green spaces and wildlife corridors in order to halt the loss of habitats and restore biodiversity.
N/A		The Government will ensure that compliance with the Habitats and Wild Birds Directives does not lead to unnecessary costs and delays to development, while continuing to support the Directives' objectives.
N/A		We are committed to introducing the right of coastal access under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.
		We will make the case at EU negotiations for significant reform to deliver a smaller, simpler, greener Common Agricultural Policy.
		We will reform the water industry to enhance competition and improve conservation.
		We will take forward the findings of the Pitt Review to improve our flood defences, and prevent unnecessary building in areas of high flood risk.
		We will review the direction of forestry and woodland policy in England.
		We will introduce measures to make the import or possession of illegal timber a criminal offence.
		We will introduce a carefully managed and science-led policy of badger control in areas with high and persistent levels of bovine tuberculosis.
		We will publish and present to Parliament a simple and consolidated national planning framework covering all forms of development and setting out national economic, environmental and social priorities.
		We will create a presumption in favour of sustainable development in the planning system.
		We will maintain the Green Belt, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and other environmental protections, and create a new designation – similar to SSSIs – to protect green areas of particular importance to local communities.
		We will radically reform the planning system to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live.
		We will take forward the Marine and Coastal Access Act and ensure that its conservation measures are implemented effectively.
		We will negotiate reform of the EU Common Fisheries Policy to support sustainable fish stocks, a prosperous fishing industry and a healthy marine environment.
		We will oppose the resumption of commercial whaling.
		We will press for a ban on ivory sales.
		We will tackle the smuggling and illegal trade on wildlife through our new Border Police Force.
N/A		[We] will seek to introduce primary legislation at the earliest opportunity to... ban travelling circuses from using performing wild animals.
N/A		We will promote high standards of farm animal welfare.