

Zac Goldsmith MP, Nature Check Launch Speech - Summary

Nature Check 2013 shows mixed reviews on the Government's delivery on its promises. For example, the British Government played a leading role in reforming the disastrous Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). The UK is ahead of the game compared to other countries in developing the tools to measure and value our natural capital, although the challenge now is to remove that concept from the abstract and ensure it impacts on decisions across departments of Government.

Although not a Government commitment, and so not in Nature Check, the plastic bag levy is symbolically important, as it's probably the most crazy example of our throwaway society. I am pleased that the Government has taken this step and is beginning the process of trying to phase out the use of plastic bags.

Finally, I am surprised and pleased in equal measure by the great steps being taken in Michael Gove's school food plan to improve the quality of food in schools as well as food education. In other areas however we have been sluggish. I am disappointed with the lack of progress for example in designating Marine Conservation Zones. Establishing an ecologically coherent network of protected areas should offer an easy win for the Government, not least because of the minimal cost and widespread support for the concept. Despite its work on natural capital, it is concerning that the Government's impact assessment in relation to MCZs measured only the costs, and not the benefits.

I note that the Government's progress on delivering the England Biodiversity Strategy received a red rating. I hope now the Government will proceed with a greater sense of urgency and that adequate funds will be provided.

There is a lot to be done, but we still do have time to deliver real gains before the next General Election. We can work to honour existing commitments, and we can do wonderful things with our partners in the overseas territories. We still have effective control over areas of great biodiversity around the world, and it would be relatively easy for Government to create a necklace of protected zones all over the world, with the support of local inhabitants. It would be an extraordinary legacy to leave.

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