

Wildlife and Countryside Link response to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Biodiversity's inquiry into the implementation of the Natural Environment White Paper and *Biodiversity 2020*

1. Introduction

- 1.1. Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this timely inquiry into the implementation of the Natural Environment White Paper, *The Natural Choice*, and *Biodiversity 2020*. Link has been actively engaged in the formation and implementation of both papers, and strongly supports their objectives and vision. In 2011 we published our position on the outcomes that the Natural Environment White Paper and the revised England Biodiversity Strategy (*Biodiversity 2020*) should achieve¹, as well as a critique of *Biodiversity 2020* once it was published.²
- 1.2. In November 2012 we published our second Nature Check assessment, which looks across the board at the commitments the Coalition Government have made to the natural environment. *Nature Check 2012* includes an extensive discussion on the implementation of both *The Natural Choice* and *Biodiversity 2020*, and the comments in this response are drawn from *Nature Check 2012*.

2. Progress on implementation of the White Paper and biodiversity strategy

- 2.1. We recognise that Defra has made progress on delivering *The Natural Choice*, and welcome the establishment of the Natural Capital Committee and the Ecosystem Markets Task Force, as well as the 12 Nature Improvement Areas (NIAs) and the Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs). We also welcome the fact that Defra has commissioned a second round of work of the National Ecosystem Assessment and establishing the Ecosystems Knowledge Network.
- 2.2. However, we have yet to see quantifiable improvements in biodiversity in the quality of our countryside; NIAs and LNPs must now prove that voluntary landscape-scale action can deliver quantifiable reverses in the loss of biodiversity. We continue to face rapid decline in many priority species and the implementation of these strategies must start to deliver real results, and soon. We need to see evidence that the success of these initiatives will be assessed against actual biodiversity gain.
- 2.3. In order to improve implementation, and thus delivery, the following barriers must be addressed:
 - 2.3.1. a lack of commitment to and alignment with *The Natural Choice* and *Biodiversity 2020* by central government, statutory agencies and local government;
 - 2.3.2. a lack of profile around *Biodiversity 2020*, which means that the information and incentives necessary for the vital engagement by local authorities, NGOs and businesses at a local level is not in place;
 - 2.3.3. insufficient focus on species recovery; insufficient focus on addressing invasive non-native species (INNS);
 - 2.3.4. the absence of a short-, medium- and long-term funding strategy.

¹ Link (2011) *Wildlife and Countryside Link position on the England Biodiversity Strategy Review*, www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Link_position_on_EBS_Review_170211_final_updated_07_April.pdf.

² Link (2011) *Implementing Biodiversity2020: A strategy for England's wildlife and ecosystem services: a report from Wildlife and Countryside Link*, http://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/2011/Biodiversity_2020_critique_09Dec11.pdf.

3. **Cross-government** commitment to, responsibility for, and delivery against both *The Natural Choice* and *Biodiversity 2020* is not sufficiently in evidence.
 - 3.1. The National Planning Policy Framework demonstrates alignment with *The Natural Choice*, by stating that ‘pursuing sustainable development involves moving from a net loss of biodiversity to achieving net gains for nature’, which gives biodiversity a far higher profile than it had within Planning Policy Statement 1, and suggests some joined up thinking between the NPPF and *Biodiversity 2020*.³
 - 3.2. However, only 14 of the 28 commitments in *The Natural Choice* led by departments other than Defra have been completed. As the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee has noted, ‘the Government must do more to ensure that all Whitehall departments fully value nature’s benefits’, and must ‘publish a timetabled action plan for delivering each of the White Paper’s commitments.’⁴ As regards *Biodiversity 2020*, it is still not clear how its outcomes will be delivered and what role non-Defra departments will play.
 - 3.3. The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy must support *The Natural Choice* and *Biodiversity 2020* by prioritising the delivery of environmental public goods, such as biodiversity, beautiful and diverse landscapes, soil, water and adaptation to, and mitigation of, climate change. Natural England has estimated that the status of more than half of all priority species in England could be improved using agri-environment options.
 - 3.4. The catchment based approach outlined in the Water White Paper, *Water for Life*, has the potential to achieve the Government’s ambitions to improve water quality, halt biodiversity loss, support healthy, functioning ecosystems and establish coherent ecological networks. But it currently falls short of the integrated framework necessary. To remedy this, the catchment pilots need to be given a clear remit and status, be allowed to follow novel approaches, have clear indicators of the environmental improvements they have achieved, and be integrated with River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs), Nature Improvement Areas and approaches to flood risk management.
 - 3.5. We also need to see greater alignment between *Biodiversity 2020* and flooding policies, including a focus on recommendation 27 of the Pitt Review, to work with partners to establish a programme through Catchment Flood Management Plans and Shoreline Management Plans to achieve greater working with natural processes.⁵
 - 3.6. The Government response to the final report of the Independent Panel on Forestry should include the delivery of biodiversity aims through woodland management restoration of ancient woodland and heathlands, as part of the delivery of *Biodiversity 2020*.
 - 3.7. The statutory agencies need to ensure that their corporate planning is properly aligned with the timings and objectives of the *Biodiversity 2020* delivery plan.
4. There is a pressing need for **better and clearer connections** between the national priorities outlined in *The Natural Choice* and *Biodiversity 2020* and local delivery.

³ DCLG (2012) *National Planning Policy Framework*, p.3.

⁴ House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee (2012) *Natural Environment White Paper: fourth report of session 2012-13*, www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmenvfru/492/492.pdf, pp.3 and 34.

⁵ Pitt, M. (2008) Learning Lessons from the 2007 Floods, http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100807034701/http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/pittreview/ /media/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/flooding_review/pitt_review_full%20pdf.pdf.

- 4.1. Delivery of *Biodiversity 2020* outcomes will require significant investment by local authorities, NGOs and businesses, but they are largely unaware of *Biodiversity 2020*, and those who are aware of it find that there is little or no information available on how they can get involved with it, and there are no incentives – funding or otherwise – to persuade those who might not otherwise want to get involved. The Government must promote *Biodiversity 2020* so that the species, habitats and ecosystems it aims to restore are well known and the economic value of their restoration is used to leverage further political and economic support for biodiversity.
- 4.2. NIAs and LNPs must link more directly to *The Natural Choice* and *Biodiversity 2020*. In light of the Heseltine Review proposals for local growth funding to be delivered via Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), it is also vital that LNPs are empowered to make the case for funding to support nature and the green economy with their local LEPs.
5. **Species recovery** must be prioritised within delivery of *The Natural Choice* and *Biodiversity 2020*, in line with *Biodiversity 2020*'s outcome 3: 'By 2020, we will see an overall improvement in the status of our wildlife and will have prevented further human-induced extinctions of known threatened species.'⁶ In particular, the needs of priority species must be integrated into habitat and landscape-scale conservation and locally-led initiatives. The need for species recovery programmes for those species that do not respond to wider habitat-based measures must also be recognised. Such action should enable an overall improvement in the status of species, which is a vital measure of success for environmental policy: stable and increasing populations indicate good and/or improving conditions of habitats, ecosystems and landscapes.
 - 5.1. We need to see a greater focus on INNS, using momentum from the devastating spread of Ash dieback and the Secretary of State's commitment to use 'radical' measures to tackle diseases and INNS. We believe radical measures will be needed to reduce the impacts (both economic and ecological) associated with a range of INNS, which may include further bans on sale, trade and import, of particularly problematic species.
 - 5.2. We need to see a monitoring and surveillance strategy that supports the delivery of all the commitments in both strategies, including monitoring and surveillance at local level, including within NIAs.
6. At present, the Government's **funding plan** for biodiversity, in the long- and the short-term, is insufficient. Direct, albeit short-term funding, has been provided to maintain and enhance biodiversity – for example, to NIAs and Water Framework Directive (WFD) delivery. The natural environment will not improve without further investment and more resources must therefore be found from other sources. A number of innovative solutions are being trialled by the Government, including biodiversity offsetting pilots and research into funding Payments for Ecosystem Services. Defra must monitor their effectiveness in terms of delivering benefits for priority species and habitats, and monitor other market-led/ private sector-driven funding mechanisms and initiatives to ensure that they deliver the funding required; the department should intervene swiftly if they do not. Defra should also continue to explore other new potential sources of non-public funding for the natural environment.

This response is supported by the following eight organisations:

- Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
- Bat Conservation Trust
- Buglife - The Invertebrate Conservation Trust
- Butterfly Conservation

⁶ Defra (2011) *Biodiversity 2020*, p.14.

- Mammal Society
- Plantlife
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust

**Wildlife and Countryside Link
December 2012**



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