



## Rooting Recovery in Resilience

Nature proposals for the post Covid-19 recovery package

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## The choices that will root resilience into our recovery

As discussion of national recovery from Covid-19 continues, there is broad consensus on the need to prioritise resilience– for the UK to build back from the outbreak in such way that enhances our capacity to overcome future shocks.

If we are to do this, we must first choose to avoid repeating mistakes that undermine our ability to respond to critical challenges when they hit. Such mistakes include the kneejerk slashing of regulations - we now know that while this may cut costs for business in short term, it simply transfers those costs to the public, and increases the fragility of businesses in the longer term<sup>1</sup>. We have seen a terrible example of this recently – evidence suggests that air pollution has exacerbated the pandemic, with countries that have cut air quality regulations being hit harder as a result<sup>2</sup>. Wide scale deregulation has been shown to simply pile up greater environmental and economic costs further down the line, from the 2013 horsemeat scandal wiping £300 million off the value of UK supermarkets to the £1 billion in public money now required to resolve the cladding issues identified in the wake of the Grenfell Tower tragedy<sup>3</sup>.

Similarly, choosing investment in environmentally damaging hard infrastructure over greener alternatives can be shown to simply lay down concrete foundations for future problems. A generation of new roads build in 1990's, intended to bulldoze the country out of recession through cutting congestion, missed their primary aim – congestion in the areas targeted has increased above national rates in subsequent decades, as a direct result of the construction<sup>4</sup>. When combined with increased pollution and carbon emissions, reduced farmland for food production and loss of precious habitats and landscapes, we can say with confidence that these recovery measures, delivered at great public cost, made things worse – not better.

Measures that seek to deliver short term economic benefit at the price of the environment are simply not worth the long term cost, especially as we now know that this cost includes exacerbated environmental crises.

In order to build real resilience and prepare against these crises, rather than fanning their flames, we need to invest in the natural assets that can help safeguard our future.

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<sup>1</sup> See 'implications' sections of the following report:

[http://docs.wbcsd.org/2006/11/Ecosystem\\_Challenges\\_Business\\_Implications.pdf](http://docs.wbcsd.org/2006/11/Ecosystem_Challenges_Business_Implications.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/science/2020/04/pollution-made-the-pandemic-worse-but-lockdowns-clean-the-sky/> & <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/climate/trump-environment-rollbacks.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/remediation-of-non-acm-buildings>

<sup>4</sup> <https://bettertransport.org.uk/roads-nowhere/induced-traffic>



The Government's early recognition of the role nature must play in rebuilding the country after Coronavirus is welcome, especially mention of developing a new 'covenant with nature' to increase our resilience<sup>5</sup>.

We have prepared this paper to contribute practical suggestions to this development process. We have identified three policy proposals to build back safer and grow back better:

- The Natural Health Service – to recover nature, public health and the economy
- Strong laws for nature - to prepare against further disasters
- Action to lead the world - to restore nature on land and at sea

These are win-win policies, for the environment and for people, and we are pleased to propose them for inclusion in the Government's recovery toolkit.

Crucially, at a time when resources are constrained, the mechanisms that would deliver these policies are already partly in place. They require only limited public spending, to unlock significant public benefit, both in terms of protection against future environmental crises and in the generation of lasting social and economic benefits. The choice to include them in the Covid-19 recovery package is a choice to root our recovery in resilience.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://twitter.com/zacgoldsmith/status/1247463367482183680?lang=en>



## Proposal 1: A Natural Health Service - to recover nature, public health and the economy

Nature is suffering, and that means that we will suffer further down the line - from flooding, drought, climate change, soil degradation, air pollution, fish stock collapse and pollinator declines. These threats to people's livelihoods and the productive economy are not distant and intangible—they are happening here and now. Last year was the second worst on record for flood and drought in the UK, with flooding alone costing £2.2 billion per year.

A programme of nature investments, to be known as the Natural Health Service, would provide a bastion against these shocks. Reducing harm to nature is a prudent, cost-effective economic strategy for reducing the economic and social risks of environmental degradation, as shown by the interim report of the Dasgupta Review<sup>6</sup>.

Just as our National Health Service rose from the ashes of the Second World War, so to could a Natural Health Service form from our struggle against Covid-19. Just as concrete hospitals and health drives underpinned the National Health Service, accessible green spaces and nature restoration projects would underpin the Natural Health Service – preventative medicine for nature and a boost for public health, and the economy.

### *Recovering nature*

Working with partners across the environmental sector, we have identified over 300 individual projects – from new saltmarshes to restored woodlands – that would hugely grow the space available to nature to recover in. The projects, if unlocked by a required £315 million of investment, could:

- Create or enhance at least 200,000ha of priority habitat, including woodland, scrub, heaths, peatland, grassland, hedgerows, marshes, wetlands, streams, rivers, marine and coastal habitats. This would deliver two fifths of the 500,000ha 25 Year Environment Plan priority habitat target in just a few years
- Plant at least 4.5 million trees, helping to meet UK targets to plant 30,000 new hectares of woodland every year
- Capture around 3 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. The projects would capture a minimum of 100,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> p.a. initially, rising significantly over time. Early investment in nature-based solutions is essential to delivering the carbon capture levels of matured habitats and trees to meet the Government 2050 net zero targets
- Protect hundreds of at risk UK plant, animal and fungi species, from seahorses to hedgehogs, to bats and rare birds. Vulnerable and declining habitats would be restored.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/interim-report-the-dasgupta-review-independent-review-on-the-economics-of-biodiversity>



Investment could also unlock more land for nature – an essential requirement for new habitat creation. The Government could create a fund for Departments and public bodies that own land to invest now in restoring and enhancing habitats. In particular, many Sites of Special Scientific Interest are located on public land, which could be enhanced to deliver the target of 75% in good condition.

### *Recovering public health*

The UK's green spaces are estimated to produce health and wellbeing benefits for people worth over £30 billion a year<sup>7</sup>. As an island nation, blue spaces, such as rivers and coasts also provide a myriad of benefits to mind and body<sup>8</sup>. The Covid-19 pandemic is further proof that nature is a vital source of joy and solace in times of need, with 60% of people saying they are now more appreciative of their local nature than they were before lockdown<sup>9</sup>.

However, not everyone benefits equally from nature's positive effects on physical and mental health and wellbeing. Access to nature is far worse for people in deprived areas and places with higher proportions of minority ethnic groups<sup>10</sup>, and this lack of accessible natural space – whether it be public parks, nature reserves or private gardens – exacerbates health inequalities<sup>11</sup>. Covid-19 has thrived on these inequalities, with death rates twice as high in deprived areas<sup>12</sup>.

Investing in nature in places where it is most lacking will immediately start to tackle these disparities. Researchers estimate that more green space would take a huge financial burden off health services, estimated at £3 billion per year<sup>13</sup>, potentially saving over 1,328 lives per year<sup>14</sup>.

These spaces, created through new Natural Health Service, should be accessible, safe, ecologically functional and attractive to the local community. They should be connected by 'stepping stones' of nature throughout the town or city, such as street trees and green rooves, to ensure maximum ecological functioning and delivery of health and wellbeing benefits. Green and blue spaces should incorporate active transport infrastructure, such as walking and cycling routes, and encourage active

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<sup>7</sup> <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/Resources/tabid/82/Default.aspx>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.bluegym.org.uk/research/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://orb-international.com/2020/04/24/covid19-uk-perceptions-and-behaviours-week-6-22-24-april/>

<sup>10</sup> MENE 2018-19

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/marmot-review-10-years-on>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsinyoungpeoplebylocalareasanddeprivation/deathsoccurringbetween1marchand17april>

<sup>13</sup> <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/Resources/tabid/82/Default.aspx>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/news/lifestyle-and-exercise/green-space-and-health/> and [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(08\)61689-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(08)61689-X/fulltext)



engagement with nature in these spaces, through volunteer programmes and community food growing projects – all of which are proven to boost mental and physical health and local economies<sup>15</sup>.

Current work at Natural England to update and integrate Accessible Natural Greenspace Standards (AGSt) into new Green Infrastructure Standards could form the basis of this work. Existing partnerships, such as with Ordnance Survey, should be built on to ensure effective targeting of projects to areas that, for instance, rank most highly on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation<sup>16</sup>.

### *Recovering the economy*

The nature projects we have identified for inclusion in a Natural Health Service could between them create around 5,000 FTE direct jobs, along with 5,000 FTE jobs in delivery and contracted work.

Nature's recovery will also save the economy huge potential costs. Environmental degradation threatens both our £257 billion tourism sector and our £122 billion food and farming sector.

Natural Health Service investment could also fund natural flood prevention works, including better soil management, restoring rivers to their natural course, improving floodplains, wetlands and peatlands and planting trees to slow and spread the flow of water. Similarly coastal realignment projects, and the creation of mudflats and saltmarshes, could reduce the impacts of coastal flooding, protecting businesses from rising sea-levels and major storm events.

### *Delivering the Natural Health Service*

Civil society organizations offer an efficient means of delivering, advising on and monitoring the Natural Health Service. They have specialist skills and knowledge; practical on-the-ground conservation capability; they can draw on a large volunteer and citizen scientist workforce; and they are able to attract large-scale funding from members, philanthropic funds and the private sector which would not be readily available to Government. In this way, charities leverage in large amounts of conservation spending.

However, the sector's financial situation has been severely weakened by the covid-19 pandemic, so its ability to deliver critical environmental improvement projects is compromised at exactly the same time as it should be scaled up. Government has the opportunity now to enable NGOs to reinstate crucial projects and services, by allocating a specific funding stream in the Spending Review for NGO partners to deliver and scale up services that would help deliver a Natural Health Service.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/nature-health-and-wild-wellbeing#evidence> and <https://www.sustainweb.org/growinghealth/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/blog/2019/03/quantifying-britains-greenspaces-with-data-and-standards/>



One of these services could be an innovative one – the coordination of a new delivery body, to be known as the National Nature Service (NNS). The NNS concept is inspired by the Civilian Conservation Corps, formed in the United States after the Great Depression. This was a “back to work” programme where young men were creating national parks and conserving nature. By the time the programme ended at the start of World War II, President Roosevelt’s “Tree Army” of 3 million men had planted more than 3.5 billion trees on land made barren from fires, natural erosion, agriculture or lumbering. The Manpower Services Commission, introduced by Edward Heath’s government in the 1970s, also provides a precedent in the UK context.

Environmental organisations stand ready to lead a National Nature Service fit for the present day, and work with local authorities and land owners to, over time, provide tens of thousands of jobs and the skills and training opportunities needed to deliver climate-change ready natural infrastructure and equal access to nature. Jobs and projects would be available particularly to young people and those in the most disadvantaged areas of the country, urban and rural. In order to deliver meaningful improvements with environmental integrity, people already in the nature sector should be empowered to oversee and the work, with additional supervisor-level roles created where necessary. Participants could undertake a variety of work, targeted by an independent board (after the model of the Nature Improvement Areas), or by Local Nature Partnerships working with Local Enterprise Partnerships. Options could include:

- Delivering large-scale habitat creation, restoration and enhancement
- Recovery and protection of priority species
- Improving public footpaths, waterways and access to nature
- Undertaking a “citizen census” of natural capital, as proposed by the Natural Capital Committee
- Creating a “Greener Belt”, with funded work to improve biodiversity near to urban populations
- A Biosecurity Taskforce to guard against invasive species and improve biosecurity, building on models such as the Woodland Trust’s Observatree project
- Assisting in the delivery of agri-environment schemes on farms where labour is in short supply

The NNS could make the Natural Health Service a reality, whilst boosting the incomes, training and future prospects of the people employed through it.

#### **Case study: The National Forest**

There is a successful precedent for the type of project that would make up the Natural Health Service – the National Forest. The NF project has seen 8 million new trees planted between Leicester and Lichfield, and existing wooded spaces linked up, to create a swathe of woodland habitat for nature and new green space accessible to urban communities. As well as showing the duality of benefit to nature and people, the NF project has also demonstrated how cost effective such projects can be. Between 1991 and 2010 the project received £89 million in public funding and delivered combined benefits of around £228m (reference [here](#)). We believe that the Natural Health Service projects we have identified would generate similar returns on public investment.



## Proposal 2: Strong laws for nature – to underpin our natural assets and economy

Strong laws for nature will deliver direct social and economic benefits. Good regulation leads to good outcomes - cleaner air and water, healthy and abundant food, and a flourishing natural environment. Such outcomes improve everyone's quality of life. These social benefits have an economic impact – every £1 spent by businesses to comply with environmental regulations generates a benefit of at least £3 to society<sup>17</sup>. There is also evidence of a direct boost to competitiveness, driving up national productivity<sup>18</sup>.

Environmental regulation also protects the natural assets on which much of our economy directly relies, including our £257 billion tourism sector<sup>19</sup>, our £122 billion food and farming sector<sup>20</sup>, and our fishing sector – a vital component of coastal economies. Indeed, as noted in the Dasgupta Review interim report<sup>21</sup>, our natural assets also indirectly underpin every sector of the economy – without them, there would be no business.

The good news for the UK is that intelligent green regulation is on the cards which, if strengthened, could establish a robust legal framework capable of addressing these risks. These laws represent a non-financial investment in the future by building resilience against future economic and social threats – including climate change, flooding, resource scarcity, biosecurity and food supply disruptions.

To unlock these benefits, in addition to addressing looming environmental risks, the Government should strengthen:

### *The Environment Bill*

The Bill has the potential to arrest the decline of the natural world on which we all depend, through co-ordinated action to meet ambitious nature restoration targets.

More work is needed to ensure that nature restoration targets are truly ambitious. The Bill should require the setting of apex targets to restore nature on land and at sea, supported by contributory targets to reverse species loss and improve the extent and condition of habitats.

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<sup>17</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/406225/defra-regulation-assessment-2015.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/406225/defra-regulation-assessment-2015.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.lse.ac.uk/GranthamInstitute/publication/the-impacts-of-environmental-regulations-on-competitiveness/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6692039286587392>

<sup>20</sup> <https://thepoultrysite.com/news/2019/04/how-much-is-the-uk-agri-food-sector-worth>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/interim-report-the-dasgupta-review-independent-review-on-the-economics-of-biodiversity>





Similarly, the detail of Local Nature Recovery Strategies created by the Bill must be scaled up to match their intended purpose – to serve as the building blocks for a national Nature Recovery Network of contiguous habitat for wildlife. The Strategies should act as a glue, embedding environmental considerations into all local decision making, including through Local Planning Authorities and Local Enterprise Partnerships decision-making.

The net gain planning condition created by the Bill will help deliver biodiversity-rich green space to grow the Nature Recovery Network. However the condition should be extended to cover the vast majority of development (including Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects and Development Orders) in order to deliver enhanced habitats on a scale commensurate with the ambition for the Nature Recovery Network – an England-wide patchwork quilt of connected spaces for nature to thrive.

Such scaled-up environmental ambitions and measures to deliver them, swiftly implemented through the Bill, will restore nature to reduce key environmental risks, including flooding<sup>22</sup> and pollinator decline<sup>23</sup>. They will also secure healthy air, unpolluted waters, a thriving natural world, and access to high-quality natural green and blue space across the UK, delivering significant public health benefits<sup>24</sup>.

Funding Local Authorities to effectively manage Local Nature Recovery Strategies will create jobs in ecology, planning and development, especially in rural areas where natural assets are accumulated, furthering the government's levelling up agenda. Further aspects of the Bill, including increased recycling, water conservation and air quality monitoring work will create further sustainable job opportunities.

### *The Agriculture Bill*

The Covid-19 pandemic foreshadows the longer-term impacts that climate change and ecological decline and projected to have on our food system, with droughts and flooding likely to bring much greater supply chain disruption in the future, and soil degradation and loss of pollinators inhibiting food production.

The Agriculture Bill has the potential to future-proof food production and supply chains, financially rewarding farmers and land managers for producing food alongside public goods that will arrest environmental decline, create habitats and enhance animal welfare and public access to the countryside.

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<sup>22</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.fao.org/news/story/en/item/1194910/icode/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/ukairpollutionremovalhowmuchpollutiondoesvegetationremoveinyourarea/2018-07-30>



Pressing ahead with these reforms is critical, as is sticking to a transition timetable that will see rewards for public goods, delivered through the Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme, fully operational by 2028. Investing in nature-friendly farming now will shore up this critical sector, safeguard the natural resources on which it relies and sharpen its competitive edge outside the Common Agricultural Policy. Providing sufficient funding<sup>25</sup>, linked to targets in the Environment Bill, and setting long-term spending plans will give farmers and land managers confidence in the new system.

The Agriculture Bill must also introduce powers to better regulate farming and land management, building on our current baseline environmental, animal welfare and public access standards. This strong and well-enforced regulatory baseline is needed, so that activity above this baseline can be rewarded as 'public goods'. The current regulatory regime is far from perfect, and important elements of it will be lost now the UK has left the EU, such as protections for soils and hedgerows. Inadequate enforcement also leads to high rates of non-compliance with basic standards which must be rectified.

Whilst an essential part of the solution, the Agriculture Bill is not and should not be the totality of public policy relating to food and farming. In this context, the National Food Strategy for England will be more important now than ever. Lessons learned from Covid-19 about the resilience and flexibility of food supply chains, and the impacts of the erosion of regional and local food supply and processing infrastructure, should be integrated into the development of the Strategy. Among other things, the strategy should also introduce more stringent requirements for procurement of healthy, sustainable food in the public sector, reduce food waste and seek to address demand-side measures such as seasonal eating and 'less but better' meat.

By learning and applying the lessons learnt from Covid-19, the Agriculture Bill and National Food Strategy can create a thriving, high-standards, low carbon food and farming sector capable of getting British food to British plates and resisting future environmental shocks<sup>26</sup>. The economic benefits of strengthening the sector in this way will be considerable, and will be matched by the climate benefits derived from reduced carbon emissions from farming.

### *The Fisheries Bill*

Measures brought forward in the Fisheries Bill could also play an important part in delivering a more secure food supply chain - by recalibrating our fishing system to recover our seas, so that they are capable of supplying food in the long term.

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<sup>25</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336000631\\_Paying\\_for\\_public\\_goods\\_from\\_land\\_management\\_How\\_much\\_will\\_it\\_cost\\_and\\_how\\_might\\_we\\_pay\\_Final\\_Report\\_A\\_report\\_for\\_the\\_RSPB\\_the\\_National\\_Trust\\_and\\_The\\_Wildlife\\_Trusts](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336000631_Paying_for_public_goods_from_land_management_How_much_will_it_cost_and_how_might_we_pay_Final_Report_A_report_for_the_RSPB_the_National_Trust_and_The_Wildlife_Trusts)

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.nffn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/NFFN-Report-FINAL-NXPowerLite-Copy.pdf>



The Fisheries Bill should be amended to provide a binding legal commitment to fish at sustainable levels and to reallocate quota so small-scale fishers have their fair share<sup>27</sup>. Further amendments should implement remote electronic monitoring (REM) to document what is being caught in our waters and provide valuable data for stock assessments. Implementing genuinely sustainable fishing now is essential to avoiding denuded marine food supplies in the future.

Further Government action could unlock the oceans potential to prevent further climate change. Marine environments capture 20–30% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions<sup>28</sup> – restoring these environments to full health will draw down more carbon. Expanding the Marine Protected Areas Network to better protect and improve more marine environments important for carbon storage, and providing sufficient funds for a long-term restoration programme, will enlist our oceans in the fight against climate change. The new high quality jobs in marine monitoring and conservation created by such a programme of restoration will boost coastal communities, furthering the Government’s levelling up agenda.

Further benefits arising from healthy seas include safeguarded access to marine biochemical essential to medicine<sup>29</sup>. Indeed early work on treatments for Coronavirus variants have utilised griffithsin, a microbe only found in our seas<sup>30</sup>.

#### *The need for action*

The Environment, Agriculture and Fisheries Bills - if strengthened, implemented swiftly and complemented by non-regression in existing regulations - could set out a strong framework of environmental law that will help prevent future environmental crises.

A key lesson from Covid-19 applies to these future environmental crises also - if you don't act promptly, you end up paying a far higher price. As such it is critical that the Bills are swiftly strengthened and passed into law; the environmental challenges they are designed to face are not going to wait for us to catch up.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmpublic/Fisheries/memo/FISH02.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/grantham-institute/public/publications/briefing-papers/Ocean-heat-uptake---Grantham-BP-15.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3648973/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27424494>



### Proposal 3: Action to lead the world – to restore nature on land and at sea

2020 is a year in which the world has paused. The UK's holding of the COP Presidency at this historic moment gives the Government an unparalleled opportunity to lead the world in a reset – to come back safer and build back better.

The Government should aim to agree decarbonisation goals to limit global warming to 1.5°C, protect 30% of the oceans by 2030, set new global targets to bend the curve of nature's decline, and take action to end deforestation and the illegal wildlife trade. Global adoption of the measures, encouraged by UK action, could set back the climate and ecological crises that are encroaching on our horizon.

To take this global leadership role, we must show leadership at home, by:

#### *Implementing the Designated Landscapes and Highly Protected Marine Areas Reviews*

Two independent reviews have the potential to make the UK an environmental world leader.

Implementation of many of the recommendations of the Glover Review of Designated Landscapes would deliver huge improvements for nature and climate, and link nature more closely to our society. The measures proposed in the Review, particularly in relation to community engagement and how they are managed for nature<sup>31</sup>, would make National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Trails exemplars of the symbiotic relationship that can be achieved when benefits to nature and people are considered alongside one another and of equal importance. High quality green and blue spaces would flourish and access to them would grow. Designated Landscapes would become the testing laboratories for nature-based solutions to climate change, driving forward the deployment of nature restoration for climate mitigation<sup>32</sup>.

The ocean's capacity for supporting life and providing resilience will also be key in our efforts to rebuild. The independent review into Highly Protected Marine Areas<sup>33</sup> should be used as an opportunity for Government to translate their ambitions to protect 30% of global oceans by 2030<sup>34</sup> into domestic action by designating Highly Protected Marine Areas in our own waters. If designated effectively and with restrictions on all extractive activity, these sites could bring our degraded oceans back to life, help us adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change and safeguard our seas so communities and

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.cnp.org.uk/news/ambitious-proposals-%E2%80%9Cbiggest-shakeup%E2%80%9D-%E2%80%93-findings-glover-review-renew-vision-national-parks>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/conservation/climate-and-nature-emergency/climate-and-nature-emergency-and-the-new-forest-national-park/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/independent-review-backs-introduction-of-highly-protected-marine-areas>

<sup>34</sup> <https://deframedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/09/25/10-countries-join-30by30-initiative/>



livelihoods can continue to benefit from our beloved blue spaces. By setting an example in our own seas, we can drive global adoption of the 30x30 ambition.

*Playing a leading part in efforts to end the illegal wildlife trade*

Nearly half of all emerging human pathogens come from wildlife<sup>35</sup> – the greater the close contact between wildlife and humans, the greater the risk of devastating new disease. Illegal wildlife trade facilitates this contact and the consequent risk. By transporting wildlife around the world, in unsanitary conditions, illegal traders diffuse dangerous pathogens across human populations.

The UK's National Wildlife Crime Unit is playing an important role combatting this risk, both by preventing smuggled wildlife from entering the UK and working with partner agencies around the world to tackle the trade at source. However funding for the unit is only in place until March 2021. The Government should agree a long term funding settlement for the National Wildlife Crime Unit, including an expansion of its current budget to £1 million a year. This will allow the Unit to recruit new officers and expand its operations, especially in regard to the growing trend of cyber enabled wildlife crime,

Backed up by best practice at home, the UK should be a leading advocate for a global ban on trade in wild animals and animals products that are involved in non-essential commercial trade (e.g. for use as luxury goods, exotic pets, traditional medicine and entertainment) that have been bred in captivity or captured from the wild.

This global leadership should also extend to the changes required to prevent natural disasters that know no borders. As well as making the UK safer, such action will create the space for UK business to take a leading role in innovating to meet climate and ecological challenges. Whilst the UK's COP presidency last only until 2021, the Covid-19 crisis – and our response to it – creates the potential for a green leadership role for Britain in the long term.

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<sup>35</sup><https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2874344/>



### No recovery without environmental resilience

Early research that suggests Covid-19 was the result of the harm we are inflicting on our natural world<sup>36</sup>. Whilst it may take some time to confirm this, we already know for certain that human actions like the illegal wildlife trade, industrial farming and deforestation can all turn our Planet into a petri dish for new diseases<sup>37</sup>. We also know that the many other ways we are harming nature bring huge threats: climate change, precipitous ecological decline, flood, drought, collapsing fish stocks, barren soils – all these threaten economy and society.

A recovery that fails to prepare against these risks is not a recovery at all – merely a retreat from a looming reality. At this critical point, when the economic and social activity of every corner of the Earth has been halted by an environmental crisis, we cannot afford to stick our heads in the sand.

We need the Covid-19 recovery to prepare against the environmental crises to come, whilst at the same time allowing society to benefit, socially and economically, from an enhanced natural world. A Natural Health Service to help nature recover, strong laws to prevent further degradation and global environmental leadership will help deliver this – rooting the recovery in resilience.

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<sup>36</sup> See 'The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2' paper, proposing two possible forms of animal-to-human transfer as the most plausible theories to explain the origin of Covid-19  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7095063/>

<sup>37</sup> An estimated 60% of emerging human pathogens are acquired from animals, with the majority of these animal derived infections, known as zoonoses, coming from wildlife  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2874344/>