

Environment charities welcome 25 Year Environment Plan, but Environment Act needs to secure its success

The Prime Minister's commitments on the environment and the UK Government's long awaited 25 Year Environment Plan for England - launched today - have been welcomed by a coalition of 31 organisations represented by Wildlife and Countryside Link.¹ The environment and animal welfare organisations support the scope of the plan and the UK Government's ambition to restore nature in a generation.

Particularly welcome are Government moves to establish a new watchdog to monitor environmental outcomes, to give the environment a voice and uphold environmental standards as we leave the EU. This should be given real teeth, to rival those of the EU's Commission and the Courts. The charities are also encouraged by the emphasis the Government will place on science and evidence to inform the Plan, and its recognition that the environment benefits both people's health and wellbeing and the economy.

The coalition is pleased the UK Government has listened to its calls and responded with promises on:

- **The "polluter pays" and "public money for public goods"** principles guiding future farming policy - so reforms should finally reward farmers who invest in nature
- **Sustainable drainage to make cities safer from floods** - with new planning guidelines
- **Healthcare that takes advantage of green prescriptions** - preventative care that can make the most of our "natural health service"
- **Commitments on waste reduction and single-use plastics** – with plans to be developed

But the coalition has warned that, delivering the UK Government's ambition of restoring nature, the environment and landscapes over the next 25 years, will require **law on the page, cash in the coffers, and a watchdog with teeth.**

Karen Ellis, Chief Economist at WWF-UK said: *'We all depend on nature, from the UK and overseas, and letting it decline is causing misery due to ill-health, flooding and pollution. A weakened environment also costs the UK millions of pounds. The UK Government's new 25 Year Environment Plan could be a game-changer, reversing long term declines and making the UK an exemplar for the rest of the world to follow. To achieve that, the Plan will need to be underpinned by strong laws and regulations, and a clear action plan for achieving the goals it sets out.'*

Dr Richard Benwell, Head of Government Affairs at Wildfowl and Wetland Trust said: *'Brexit has cast doubt over the future of the laws, courts and cash that protect nature. Take the wrong path and the UK's environment faces irreparable damage. But the 25 year plan is a big green signpost that Government intends to take nature's way to a greener future. We'll be watching the first steps closely. Before Brexit we need a strong UK environment regulator and green trade guarantees. Early in this Parliament, we need a powerful new Environment Act to set the plan in law and make sure that future governments stay on track to improve our air, water and wildlife.'*

Dr Elaine King, Director of Wildlife and Countryside Link, said: *'The public is deeply worried about the rapid degradation of our environment and is relying on the Government to take urgent action before it is too late. The 25 Year Plan makes for good reading, but words must be backed up with a decisive and well-resourced road map for delivery that includes clear milestones, evidence-based decision-making and transparent processes for monitoring and reporting on progress. If the UK is to lead the world in protecting the environment and get the environment back on track, it must now enshrine its goals and targets into law.'*

The scale of the environmental challenge is huge:

- The 2016 State of Nature report showed that 56% of UK species are in decline²
- UK annual flood costs come to an average of £2.2 billion every year³
- Less than a fifth of rivers, streams and other water bodies in England meet ecological targets⁴
- There are around 40,000 premature deaths from air pollution every year.⁵

The coalition said that the UK Government could meet the challenge if the 25 Year Plan is backed up with decisive action and funding. The first test of the 25 Year Plan will be the Agriculture Bill that is expected in the next few months. This should contain clear targets for investing in natural assets like soils and freshwater, aligned with the goals set out in the 25 Year Plan, and the public funding mechanisms to deliver them.

The charities are urging the UK Government to:

- Establish, before Brexit, legally-binding targets for the whole public sector within a new Environment Act in England. To ensure that action is not delayed, and that further environmental damage is avoided
- Ensure sufficient resources to deliver these plans and to fund the new environmental statutory body
- Give the new watchdog responsibility to oversee implementation of the Plan and monitor Government performance against its goals, and the teeth to take enforcement action if the Government falls short
- Work closely with the devolved nations to develop a co-designed and co-owned common framework for the whole of the UK's environment and back this up with long term action plans. This is essential as although much of the plan relates to England only the environment does not respect political borders
- Embed EU environmental protections into UK law in their entirety, including enshrining important environmental principles, such as 'the polluter pays'
- Set out how the private sector will be mobilised to support the delivery of the Plan and secure public involvement by ensuring that there are significant opportunities for new and improved public access and recreation.

The coalition is encouraging the Government to align other new legislation with the goals set out in the Plan, such as the forthcoming Agriculture and Fisheries Bills, and policies such as the Clean Growth Plan and Industrial strategy, to ensure they contribute to the successful delivery of the Environment Plan.

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Notes to editors:

For more information and for interviews, please contact Emma Adler at Wildlife and Countryside Link on 020 7820 8600

1. The calls are supported by the following organisations: Amphibian and Reptile Trust, A Rocha UK, Bat Conservation Trust, Born Free Foundation, British Mountaineering Council, BugLife, Butterfly Conservation, Client Earth, Campaign to Protect Rural England, Freshwater Habitat Trust, Friends of the Earth, Institute of Fisheries Management, Marine Conservation Society, Marine Life, National Trust, Nature Watch Foundation, ORCA, Open Spaces Society, Plantlife, People's Trust for Endangered Species, Rewilding Britain, The Rivers Trust, RSPB, RSPCA, Salmon and Trout Conservation, Whales and Dolphin Conservation, Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, Wildlife and Countryside Link, Woodland Trust, WWF UK, Zoological Society London

[Wildlife and Countryside Link](#) (Link) is the biggest coalition of wildlife and environment charities in England, which brings together 47 voluntary organisations. Link's 25 Year Plan Group holds the UK Government to account for delivery of [the manifesto promise](#) to "develop a 25 Year Plan to restore the UK's biodiversity". Note: The 25 Year Plan only applies to England.

2. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-projects/state-of-nature/state-of-nature-uk-report-2016.pdf>
3. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/300332/04-947-flooding-summary.pdf
4. [http://www.legco.gov.hk/general/english/library/stay_informed_overseas_policy_updates/water framework.pdf](http://www.legco.gov.hk/general/english/library/stay_informed_overseas_policy_updates/water_framework.pdf)
5. <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/every-breath-we-take-lifelong-impact-air-pollution>