

Climate Assembly UK net zero report: Link evidence note

Link welcomes the publication of a full [report](#) from Climate Assembly UK, setting out a path to net zero. The report is due to be debated in the House of Commons on 26 November and, ahead of this debate, we present evidence to support two key recommendations of the report – using natural greenhouse gas removal methods and prioritising efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from farming.

Natural greenhouse gas removal methods – evidence of efficacy

99% of Climate Assembly members supported new forests and better forestry management as a greenhouse gas removal method, with 85% support recorded for peatland and wetland restoration towards the same end. This compares to sub-50% support for using carbon capture technologies to remove greenhouse gases.

This support for nature-based solutions is well placed. The restoration and protection of forests, peatlands and wetlands could be a powerful tool in climate change mitigation through the protection of existing carbon stores, and through sequestration of additional CO₂ from the atmosphere. A recent report from WWF and RSPB estimates that protection of existing carbon storing natural assets in the UK could secure 16,231 Mt CO₂e, equivalent to over 36 years of UK emissions at 2018 levels. The report highlights the potential to go even further, with nature securing additional climate change mitigation of 75-123 Mt CO₂e by 2030¹.

These carbon-storing natural assets go beyond terrestrial habits such as forests, peatlands, and wetlands. Our ocean has absorbed over 90% of the heat and almost a third of carbon dioxide humans have ever created – seagrass alone captures carbon 35 times faster than tropical rainforests².

As noted in the Climate Assembly report, assembly members saw natural greenhouse gas removal methods as 'having significant co-benefits'. These co-benefits include help to tackle the biodiversity crisis, fulfilling commitments made by the Prime Minister as part of the Leaders' Pledge for Nature, and contributing to the UK's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and the post-2020 biodiversity framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Furthermore, expanding the UK's green spaces will improve access to nature, and deliver on a wide range of health benefits for people. Natural England has estimated that £2.1 billion per year could be saved in health costs if everyone had good access to greenspace, due to increased physical activity in those spaces³.

As we move into 2021 and a crucially important year of negotiations for the future of our environment, it is time for better integration of international frameworks around climate and nature, and for us the UK to join up action on these agendas domestically. Investing in nature based solutions is a '[no-regrets](#)' strategy on the path to net zero, and as the host of next year's COP26, the UK has the

¹ https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/Nature_Based_Solutions_NDC_ReportV2.pdf

² https://www.wcl.org.uk/assets/uploads/img/files/Link_OR_briefing_restoring_carbon_sinks.pdf

³ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/904439/Improving_access_to_greenspace_2020_review.pdf

opportunity to demonstrate its environmental leadership and champion the importance of nature in climate action on the global stage.

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions from farming – evidence of efficacy

89% of assembly members supported making farm payments conditional on low carbon practices and other public benefits, with 87% agreeing that farmers and other landowners should be paid to use their land to absorb and store carbon, for example by restoring peatland or planting trees.

The decision to prioritise the reduction of carbon emissions from farming follows the evidence. 10% of GHG emissions (including carbon) in the UK come from the agricultural sector⁴. This proportion is unchanged since 2001, at a time when other sectors have reduced their own emissions significantly. Soil stores significant quantities of carbon- UK soil contains roughly 10 billion tonnes of carbon and holds three times as much carbon as the atmosphere⁵.

Practices that can help store more carbon must be encouraged through the farming subsidy system, to put the sector on road to net zero. These practices include cover cropping, agroforestry, reduced inputs to improve soil health (i.e. fertiliser and pesticides) and native woodland planting. ELM is an encouraging major policy in this direction, with a range extending from large-scale projects like natural flood defences and peatland restoration to smaller actions by farmers and land managers like beneficial grassland management. To realise its full potential, ELM will require a spatial targeting framework that deploys its anticipated three tier structure to optimise land use⁶.

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is the largest environment and wildlife coalition in England, bringing together 58 organisations to use their strong joint voice for the protection of nature.

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⁴https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/862887/2018_Final_greenhouse_gas_emissions_statistical_release.pdf

⁵https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/805926/State_of_the_environment_soil_report.pdf

⁶ <https://www.wcl.org.uk/getting-the-right-balance-from-our-land.asp>