

## **Adjournment debate on the Convention on Biological Diversity 25.07.24**

### **Briefing from Wildlife & Countryside Link**

We ask MPs to attend Thursday's adjournment debate on the upcoming United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (known as COP16).<sup>1</sup>

The Convention is an opportunity for the UK to play a leading role in maintaining multilateral momentum toward critical international nature recovery targets. We ask MPs to press the new Government to commit to the following actions to demonstrate UK leadership and help address global biodiversity decline:

- A swift and effective review of the Environmental Improvement Plan to help ensure domestic implementation of global targets.
- The publication of an ambitious UK National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan.
- A bid for the UK to host the next United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (COP17).

### **Background**

The 2022 Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (known as COP15) agreed an ambitious set of 4 goals and 23 targets to halt and reverse the loss of nature across the world by 2030.<sup>2</sup> These include landmark commitments for nature, such as the commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 (known as '30x30').

It is critical that these commitments, known as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), are followed by up by all signatories with detailed domestic delivery plans. Richer countries must also meet their international finance commitments. The last set of international targets, the 2011-2020 Aichi Biodiversity Targets, were comprehensively missed due to a failure in national-level implementation.<sup>3</sup> COP16 in October 2024 and COP17 in 2026 must focus on national-level delivery by all GBF signatories to ensure this time is different.

With biodiversity in sharp decline in the UK<sup>4</sup> and across the world<sup>5</sup>, worsening the climate crisis by limiting natural tools to both mitigate and adapt to climate change, the economic, social and human

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<sup>1</sup> For a background briefing on the Convention itself, see [https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/MP%20Briefing %20The%20Convention%20on%20Biological%20Diversity%20COP16.pdf](https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/MP%20Briefing%20The%20Convention%20on%20Biological%20Diversity%20COP16.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cbd.int/article/cop15-cbd-press-release-final-19dec2022>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wcl.org.uk/new-era-for-nature-needed-after-lost-decade.asp>

<sup>4</sup> <https://stateofnature.org.uk/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wwf.org.uk/our-reports/living-planet-report-2022>

health costs of failure to meet GBF targets would be significant.<sup>6</sup> Success would be a triumph for the international economy, wellbeing and for wildlife.

### **Required action: swift and effective review of the Environmental Improvement Plan**

Thanks to cross-party support, the UK passed the Environment Act in 2021, committing the Government early to many of the nature recovery actions that were agreed internationally through the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework a year later. One of the welcome provisions in the Environment Act was a requirement on the Government to publish an Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) for England, setting out the steps Ministers would take to achieve Environment Act targets. Due to the overlap between targets set under the Environment Act and the GBF targets, an effective EIP will serve as a blueprint for the Government to uphold many of its international nature recovery commitments.

While it includes many positive provisions, the current Environmental Improvement Plan falls far short of the kind of clear delivery plan needed to halt the decline of wildlife in England by 2030. Published in January 2023 by the previous Government, the EIP consists of hundreds of unprioritised, unquantified steps, without a clear plan for delivery or accountability. The Office for Environmental Protection has reviewed the EIP and concluded that *"in seven goal areas, including the apex goal of achieving 'thriving plants and wildlife', government is 'largely off track' and that the Government must 'speed up and scale up its efforts' to halt wildlife decline by 2030.*<sup>7</sup> The EIP should be strengthened to ensure that it is capable of achieving the Environment Act targets.

During the General Election campaign, Labour took the welcome step of committing to revise the EIP, to make it a better vehicle for achieving Environment Act targets.<sup>8</sup> Now that Labour are in Government, it is imperative that this commitment is speedily fulfilled. Link and Green Alliance have written to the new Defra team (who hold responsibility for the EIP) to recommend that the review:

- Commences this summer and is conducted via a policy sprint, with rapid stakeholder engagement, over three months.
- Is structured around Environment Act targets, carefully considering the delivery barriers to each identified by the OEP EIP report.
- Identifies funding commitments to enable progress to target achievement, including how the incentives to switch to nature friendly farming available in the Environmental Land Management

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<sup>6</sup> See World Economic Forum Global Risks report:

[https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Global\\_Risks\\_Report\\_2023.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2023.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theoep.org.uk/report/government-remains-largely-track-meet-its-environmental-ambitions-finds-oep-annual-progress>

<sup>8</sup> See <https://www.stevereedmp.co.uk/guardian-article-britains-natural-landscape-is-in-ruins-thanks-to-theories-heres-how-labour-will-restore-it/> & <https://x.com/tobyperkinsmp/status/1802766325061677358>

(ELM) schemes will be sufficient to achieve the scale of nature recovery required across farmed landscapes.<sup>9</sup>

If the above recommendations are acted on, the review could lead to an EIP that is an enumeration of precise policy levers to effect change, rather than the current set of unprioritised and unquantified aspirations. A revised EIP will also serve as a meaningful blueprint in England for achieving Environment Act targets, upholding much of the UK's share of the international GBF agreement.

### **Required action: publish an ambitious UK National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan**

Parties to Global Biodiversity Framework are required to publish National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) ahead of COP16 this October, setting out how they will contribute to the achievement of the GBF.

The UK's NBSAP is expected to comprise four individual country strategies for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as strategies for the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. It is understood that the previous Government had a draft of the UK NBSAP ready for publication in May 2024, and that this draft was light on both content and ambition. The changes in the Scottish Government in early May and the calling of the UK General Election on 22<sup>nd</sup> May meant that this draft was never published.

This means that the new Government has the opportunity to publish a UK NBSAP that fully rises to the challenge of GBF target achievement. The review of the EIP in England, as recommended above, would form an excellent foundation for the new NBSAP, ensuring that core plans for domestic delivery in England are both costed and effective. As well as reflecting a reviewed EIP, the UK NBSAP should:

- Ensure collaboration between all four UK nations. Successfully meeting the GBF targets will require a collaborative approach between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Just as it will be impossible to meet global targets unless there is coordination between all parties, it will be challenging to meet the UK targets collectively as a whole unless each country plays its part. The NBSAP should clearly integrate the four country strategies, so they are components of the wider whole that add up to meeting global targets rather than documents that speak past each other. It should also establish a framework for ongoing collaboration between environment departments and nature agencies in each country, to facilitate lesson sharing on what does and doesn't work for successful implementation.
- Identify where policy gaps exist across the four UK nations and explain exactly how they will be filled, including through funding decisions. In December 2023, a year on from the agreement of the GBF, Link analysed progress in England towards 18 of the 23 Framework targets. The analysis suggested that none of the 18 targets assessed none were on track, with progress in

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<sup>9</sup> For full Green Alliance & Link briefing see: <https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Government-review-of-the-environmental-improvement-plan.pdf>

11 of them either stalled or going backward<sup>10</sup>, whilst species continue to decline in abundance across the UK.<sup>11</sup> Preparation of the UK NBSAP should include a thorough review of these policy gaps, with the final document explaining exactly how they will be filled through legislative and regulatory change, land and sea designations and funding decisions. The EIP review will provide much of this material for England, which can then be built on and added to, providing a blueprint for target achievement across the UK, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish Governments.

- Develop and implement a robust monitoring, reporting, and verification framework to measure progress towards targets and goals. The collective failure to meet the Aichi targets was in part due to a lack of a monitoring framework to periodically assess to what extent parties were on track to meet the 2011-2020 framework targets. This can be avoided by NBSAPs including coordinated set of indicators to enable transparent assessment of implementation progress at regular intervals, allowing for plan adjustments when required. By including a robust monitoring, reporting, and verification framework, the UK NBSAP can drive wider adoption of monitoring systems across the world, helping pave the way to the achievement of the GBF.

### **A bid for the UK to host the next United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (COP17)**

The UK can point to genuine leadership across recent COPs. Cross party support for the protection of 30% of land and sea for nature saw the Government adopt this commitment for the UK in 2020, before successfully advocating for 30x30 to become a key target within the Global Biodiversity Framework. Ministers from the previous Government deserve significant credit for helping to increase the ambition and scope of the GBF agreed at COP15.

The new Government has the chance to build on this international track record. COP16 is being hosted in Columbia this October; the UK should send representatives at the highest level, including the Prime Minister, to show its commitment to achieving the GBF targets.

The UK should also bid to host COP17 in 2026. The UK can make an excellent case to support the bid, pointing towards pioneering work on 30x30, strong civil society efforts to recover nature and successful UK hosting of the climate COP in 2021. We have the motivation, the support and the experience to make COP17 a success. Simply making a bid would show that the UK government intends to take a positive role on the global stage; success would leave a lasting legacy and real recognition of the UK as a global leader on nature and climate.

For a new Government elected on the manifesto that recognised the climate and nature crisis as the *“greatest long-term global challenge that we face”*, hosting the United Nations Biodiversity Conference in 2026 would be an opportunity to showcase domestic efforts to address the crisis, from clean energy to habitat restoration. If sufficient progress is made towards delivering on Environment Act and GBF

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.wcl.org.uk/cop15-one-year-on.asp>

<sup>11</sup> <https://stateofnature.org.uk/>

targets, through upheld commitments on the EIP, 30x30 achievement<sup>12</sup> and nature-friendly planning<sup>13</sup>, a UK hosted COP17 in 2026 could demonstrate the path to nature recovery success.

Global events like COPs generate lots of warm words and positive headlines for participating countries. What separates Governments that do, from Governments that merely say, are granular implementation plans and sustained political prioritisation of target achievement. The UK has the opportunity to show global leadership for nature by reviewing the EIP, publishing an ambitious NBSAP and bidding to host COP17. We urge the new Government to seize this opportunity to improve the natural environment in the UK and to establish the UK as a global leader on the international stage.

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Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is the largest nature coalition in England, bringing together 83 organisations to use their joint voice for the protection of the natural world.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://wcl.org.uk/30-by-30-progress-report.asp>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Kings%20Speech%202024%20-%20Link%20response.pdf>