

Great British Energy Bill – Briefing for Second Reading

This briefing is on behalf of environmental coalition [Wildlife and Countryside Link](#) ahead of Second Reading in the House of Commons of the GB Energy Bill on 5 September 2024.

The [Great British Energy Bill](#) will establish a publicly-owned company called Great British Energy, with the aim of accelerating investment in clean energy. The Bill was introduced to the House of Commons on 25 July 2024 by the Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, Secretary of State for the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero.

GB Energy will both develop renewable energy projects itself and by co-investing in projects alongside the private sector. The first major partnership of GB Energy, with the Crown Estate to help deliver more offshore wind, was announced in [a written ministerial statement](#) alongside the Bill.

Increasing the scale and pace at which renewable energy is delivered in the UK is essential to meeting the Government's commitments to decarbonise the electricity system by 2030 and achieve net zero by 2050 – and GB Energy is a central part of the Government's delivery plan.

What's missing from the Bill: A duty for nature alongside climate

GB Energy is an important part of the Government's plans to tackle climate change and the legislation to establish this company is welcome. However, **the GB Energy Bill is currently a missed opportunity to ensure that GB Energy delivers for nature alongside climate.**

The Government was elected on a manifesto which recognised the close links between climate and nature, acknowledging that 'the climate and nature crisis is the greatest long-term global challenge that we face' and that 'the climate crisis has accelerated the nature crisis.' It is important to also recognise that nature has a pivotal role to play in climate efforts.

In the absence of proven technological solutions, the natural environment is currently the only available carbon sink in the UK. Restoring nature has the potential to provide a third of the climate mitigation effort needed to reach net zero.¹

This potential is not yet realised; due to poor condition many habitats are releasing carbon rather than capturing and storing it. Only 7% of woodlands and only 25% of peatlands are in good condition.² It is

¹ <https://www.iied.org/cba14-closing-uk-minister-urges-countries-allocate-more-finance-nature-based-solutions-help-tackle>

² <https://stateofnature.org.uk/>

essential to meet nature recovery targets set under the Environment Act to put more habitats into good condition and increase the capacity of nature to contribute to net zero efforts.

The burning of wood for biomass fuels also sets back climate and nature action. It is claimed by the bioenergy industry that the carbon dioxide released by the combustion of woody biomass can be offset by the regrowth of forests – but this takes years or decades. This means that woody biomass from forests (in the UK's case, usually imported³) increases carbon dioxide in the atmosphere for many years or decades. It certainly cannot contribute to the Government's goal of clean power by 2030.

Done well, renewable energy development can reinforce protections for carbon-rich habitats and deliver more nature-based solutions on land and at sea. If done poorly, clean energy infrastructure can run roughshod over critical natural infrastructure, further diminish nature's contribution to climate mitigation and set back both nature and climate action.

In its current form, the Bill does not give GB Energy a remit to contribute to nature's recovery alongside boosting clean energy. This is a missed net zero opportunity, which strays from the joint nature and climate approach set out in the manifesto the Government was elected on. **We are calling for GB Energy to be given a nature recovery duty, alongside its clean energy, energy efficiency and energy security objectives.**

Why is a nature recovery duty needed for an energy company?

Currently, public bodies in the UK, including public sector companies, often fail to consider environmental costs and benefits. Despite some good practice, outdated legislation means that Forestry England continues to prioritise commercial considerations over growing and maintaining biodiverse woodland habitats on the Public Forest Estate. Network Rail does not remove the invasive non-native species finding footholds in railway banks in its ownership. Historically, Ofgem has prioritised lowering consumers costs, leading National Grid to make the decision to site cables through protected sites on land and at sea, causing declines in site condition. Ofwat was given a growth duty by the previous administration, but still has no statutory duty to restore the freshwater environment, despite huge public concern about sewage pollution.⁴

It is important the GB Energy does not repeat these mistakes.

A more positive precedent can be found in the form of the UK Infrastructure Bank (UKIB). This was successfully amended by Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green and crossbench peers during the passage of

³ <https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/fb239d3e-8bed-43c8-97e5-c401496298e2#:~:text=Analysis%20of%20the%20flow%20of,and%2075%25%20of%20its%20biofuels.>

⁴ https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/assets/uploads/April_24_Briefing_Draft_Economic_Growth_Regulatory_Functions_Amendment_Order_2024_accompanying_Statutory_Guidance.pdf

the UK Infrastructure Bank Act 2023, giving the bank remit to invest in nature-based solutions. This has directly led to UKIB investment in natural capital projects.⁵

The new Government should learn from the failure of other public bodies to embed environmental considerations in their policy and delivery, and from the benefits provided by the UK Infrastructure Bank's nature remit.

A nature recovery duty would place a clear and active requirement on GB Energy to do what it reasonably can within its means to contribute to the achievement of biodiversity targets set under the Environment Act.

Through a nature recovery duty, GB Energy would have a statutory direction to invest in clean energy projects that meet the highest environmental standards, embed wildlife-friendly design into renewable energy project design, and create more space for nature on development sites.

The Bill should also be clarified to specify that the objective of GB Energy should be to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from energy produced from biomass, as well as from fossil fuels. Bioenergy which burns woody biomass actively harms nature restoration efforts⁶ and will not contribute to GB Energy's goals of clean energy, energy independence, nor cheaper energy bills.

We urge the Government to amend the Bill to give GB Energy a duty to deliver for nature, further smoothing the path to net zero. We would be grateful if MPs could raise these points at Second Reading of the GB Energy Bill on 5th September.

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 and animals.

We are also calling for a nature recovery or [green duty to be applied to all public bodies](#), including the Forestry Commission, Network Rail, and The Crown Estate, as well as Ofwat and Ofgem. A Private Members Bill from crossbench peer Lords Krebs, proposing a green duty, will be debated in the Lords in September.

For questions or further information please contact:

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⁵ <https://www.endsreport.com/article/1819446/first-natural-capital-loan-paid-uk-infrastructure-bank-stimulate-markets>

⁶ https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Wildlife_and_Countryside_Link_bioenergy_position_paper.pdf

This briefing is also supported by the following organisations:

The Woodland Trust

RSPB

Buglife

Bumblebee Conservation Trust

Badger Trust

Campaign for National Parks

Open Spaces Society

Seal Research Trust

Whale & Dolphin Conservation

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