

Wildlife & Countryside Link
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The Prime Minister
Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
10 Downing Street
London SW1 2AA

CC Rt Hon George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

1 March 2021

Dear Prime Minister

Thank you for helping to shape the Leaders' Pledge for Nature and for your personal efforts to put the UK at the forefront of international work to mend our broken relationship with nature. We are writing to ask you to complement that international work with a domestic legal target to reverse the decline of species and habitats by 2030.

To achieve its aim of reversing biodiversity loss by 2030, the Leaders' Pledge must be a precursor for a strong international deal at the 15th Conference of Parties of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. In turn, a global deal must drive credible domestic action plans for delivery.

The UK is uniquely placed to help secure a global agreement and can show real leadership by setting an example domestically, but more decisive action is needed here in the UK to ensure we realise this rare opportunity.

In particular, the Environment Bill has the potential to put your ambitions for nature on a statutory footing, including the goals you have championed on the international stage. Just as the UK led the way in creating the world's first Climate Change Act, we can be the first country to set ambitious targets in law for the recovery of the natural world. Magnified through the lens of the UK's COP26 and G7 presidencies, the bill could be a template for other countries ahead of COP15 and a powerful statement of intent that could strengthen other countries' resolve to support a global deal.

At the moment, however, while we welcome its intention, the Environment Bill falls short of its potential to set world-leading nature targets. The framework for target-setting is too technocratic and slow. No targets will even be set under the bill until almost 2023, long after the moment for UK international leadership has passed, and the deadline for the targets cannot be earlier than 2038.

Perhaps most significantly of all, Clause 1 of the Bill would not allow the government to set new 2030 targets in law—a timescale which is at the heart of the CBD talks and which is reflected in the language of the Leaders' Pledge. This mismatch in urgency and timescales means that it would not be possible to set a 2030 target to halt nature's decline, and that important actions to deliver it, such as your own commitment to protect and manage 30% of land and seas for nature by 2030, cannot be placed in law under the Environment Bill framework.

Some simple changes to the bill—ensuring its target-setting framework can reflect CBD timeframes and progress made under the Leaders’ Pledge—would make a huge difference.

In particular, we are calling for a clear target on the face of the bill to reverse the decline of species and habitats by 2030.

Supported by an independent and effective Office for Environmental Protection, legally binding interim targets and a more explicit link between targets and the environmental improvement plans, this would send a powerful message of UK commitment ahead of this year’s climate and nature talks, which could make all the difference in securing a successful outcome.

We hope that you recognise the potential of the Environment Bill to play a formative role in nature’s recovery and climate change mitigation, not just here in England but around the world. We also hope that you will share our analysis that without a clear domestic target to restore nature by 2030 on the face of the Environment Bill—with a stronger targets and governance framework, and robust environmental principles—that potential will not be fulfilled.

There is still time to amend the bill to fill this gap and we stand ready to support you in making this a genuinely world-leading legislative achievement.

Yours sincerely

Wildlife & Countryside Link Members

Hilary McGrady, Director General, National Trust

Beccy Speight, CEO, RSPB

Craig Bennett, CEO, The Wildlife Trusts

Dr Darren Moorcroft, CEO, The Woodland Trust

Tanya Steele, CEO, WWF

John Sauven, Executive Director, Greenpeace UK

Andy Atkins, CEO, A Rocha UK

Miriam Turner and Hugh Knowles, Co-Executive Director, Friends of the Earth (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)

Mark Lloyd, CEO, The Rivers Trust

Julie Williams, CEO, Butterfly Conservation

Chris Butler-Stroud, Chief Executive, Whale and Dolphin Conservation

Andy Knott MBE, CEO, League Against Cruel Sports

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Tony Gent, CEO, ARC Trust

Professor Fiona Mathews, Chair, the Mammal Society

Allison Ogden-Newton, CEO, Keep Britain Tidy

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Crispin Truman OBE, CEO, CPRE The Countryside Charity

David Bunt, Chair, Institute of Fisheries Management

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Sally Hamilton, Director, ORCA

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Kit Stoner, CEO, Bat Conservation Trust

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Ian Dunn, CEO, Plantlife

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Supporters

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