

Global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security: A national security assessment

20th February 2026

This briefing is on behalf of nature and animal welfare coalition Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) and provides a briefing for Peer's ahead of Earl Russell's [oral question](#): "to ask His Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the findings of the Nature security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security, published on 20 January" on Monday 24 February.

Findings of the security assessment

The [national security assessment](#) summarises the risks to the UK from global biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse. As with other risks assessed in the National Risk Register, such as terrorism and armed conflict, it assesses a reasonable worst case scenario.

The assessment makes clear the severe risks from biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse: *"Nature is a foundation of national security. Biodiversity loss is putting at risk the ecosystem services on which human societies depend ... The impacts will range from crop failures, intensified natural disasters and infectious disease outbreaks to conflict within and between states, political instability, and erosion of global economic prosperity."*

Ecosystems on which the UK relies for its food and economic security could collapse as soon as 2050, or 2030 in some cases. Risks will be cascading:

Degraded ecosystem functions, such as water cycling, pollination and carbon storage
→ drive physical/biological impacts such as crop failure, water scarcity and novel diseases
→ lead to security risks such as food shortages, supply chain disruption and pandemic risk → international security risks such as terrorism, serious organised crime and conflict.

The assessment states this is not a risk of the future, "The world is already experiencing impacts including crop failures, intensified natural disasters and infectious disease outbreaks" but in the future "If current rates of biodiversity loss continue, every critical ecosystem is on a pathway to collapse."

The UK's response falls short

The UK is failing to adequately address these risks. Domestically, the UK is not on track to meet nature and environmental targets, increasing risks from UK biodiversity loss:

- The Office for Environmental Protection, in its most recent [report](#) on progress in improving the natural environment, states the “government remains largely off track to meet EA21 [Environment Act 2021] targets and EIP [Environmental Improvement Plan] ambitions, targets and commitments”.
- [Analysis by Link](#), shows that progress towards protecting 30% of UK land and sea by 2030 (the 30by30 target) is poor. Just under 6% of the UK’s land is conserved and effectively managed for nature. At sea monitoring is too patchy to assess progress.
- At the Spending Review, Defra spending was only due to go from £6.8 billion to £7.4 billion, a real terms fall of 0.7%. This contrasts with a real terms increase in the Department of Defence budget by 3.4%. There is a mismatch between spending on conventional security risks and those from biodiversity loss.

Internationally, the UK is failing to protect and restore global ecosystems on which it relies:

- The UK is not contributing adequately to reaching international nature targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity. The UK is making [some progress](#) towards only 7 out of 23 targets, and is making good progress towards none.
- The UK economy takes an unsustainable toll on nature. As the assessment notes, “It would take resources of 1.6 Earths to sustain the world’s current levels of consumption”, but if all countries were like the UK we would need [4 earths](#).

How the UK should address these risks

The UK must take risks from biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse as seriously as those from conventional threats. Both domestic and international action are crucial. As the assessment notes, “countries best placed to adapt are those that invest in ecosystem protection and restoration”.

- **Increase domestic spending on nature.** Without additional funding for nature restoration in the UK, ecosystems will continue to degrade increasing domestic risks from biodiversity collapse. In particular, the UK should increase spending on the Environmental Land Management Schemes, especially higher ambition options. The assessment is clear that food security is the key threat and that “Food production is the most significant cause of terrestrial biodiversity loss”. Transitioning to nature-friendly farming and reduced livestock, would increase the [resilience](#) of farms to changes in weather patterns, decrease ecosystem impacts and free up space for nature.
- **Increase international spending on nature.** There is an international nature [finance gap](#) of at least £170 billion. The UK must contribute its fair share and increase spending in line with money spent on military aid.

- **Lead the way internationally by meeting 30by30 targets.** The UK should demonstrate good practice, by effectively protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030. Meeting this goal domestically, and internationally, is essential to ecosystem integrity.
- **Transition to a circular economy to reduce impacts on global nature.** Resource extraction and processing is directly responsible for 90% of land-based biodiversity loss. The UK Government's upcoming Circular Economy Growth Plan must focus on reducing UK resource consumption by keeping resources in use longer. This will also increase our resilience to threats to supply chains from ecosystem collapse.

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is the largest nature coalition in England, bringing together 94 organisations to use their joint voice for the protection of the natural world and animals.

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