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Sent by email

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Statement from UK scientists on nature as an election priority

Background

We are in a biodiversity crisis, which threatens humanity globally¹. Recovering nature must be a priority for all political parties in the UK, as the UK is amongst the most nature-depleted countries in the world².

Nature loss at home and abroad is a risk to UK prosperity, and nature is an issue which the UK public cares deeply about³.

Policy context

The UK was the first country to pass a legally binding target in its Environment Act to halt declines in species abundance, but the Act only covers England. The associated 25 Year Environment Plan aims to both halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity, but the Plan is not legally binding.

In December 2022, the UK signed up to the Convention on Biological Diversity's Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which commits to bold action to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity by 2030; however, government policy has focussed on nature at home, while nature overseas is still not a focus. Additionally there is no joined-up approach across the UK's governments (Westminster and the Devolved Administrations) to implement the measures required to fulfil our obligations under international conventions.

¹ World Economic Forum consistently puts biodiversity loss as a top 10 year global risk: <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2023/digest/>

² As reported in the government's State of Nature report: <https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/2023/09/29/state-of-nature/>

³ <http://www.greenfund.org/wp-content/uploads/Passionate-Collaboration-Full-Report.pdf> One in ten UK adults is a member of an environmental group. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/mostadultsreportmakingchangestotheirlifestyleforenvironmentalreasons/2023-07-05#:~:text=More%20than%20eight%20in%20ten,between%20May%20and%20June%202023>. 86.5% of UK adults report making changes to their lifestyles for the environment according to the ONS.

What we call for

Legislate a legally-binding requirement on government to halt and reverse biodiversity loss

All countries should protect nature for the benefit of present and future generations of humankind, on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities. Accordingly, the UK, as a High Income Country, should take the lead in combating biodiversity loss and its adverse effects.

Therefore, the incoming Westminster government must work with the Devolved Administrations to halt and reverse the degradation and loss of nature in the United Kingdom and overseas by increasing the health, abundance, diversity and resilience of species, populations, habitats and ecosystems so that by 2030, nature is visibly and measurably on the path to recovery.

This would enable the UK to fulfil its international obligations under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and its protocols, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

Set up a whole-government platform for implementing this biodiversity commitment

Nature underpins our economy, health and wellbeing, being key to addressing the climate change crisis. Biodiversity loss therefore impacts all sectors of society, and can not be addressed in a silo.

Conservation approaches alone will not restore ecosystems to levels that will reverse the decline in biodiversity and help combat climate change, without transformation of our economy and society.

Therefore, the incoming Westminster government, together with the Devolved Administrations, must commit to addressing the current landscape of disjointed and often conflicting laws and policies, by requiring all Departments to coordinate their efforts to address biodiversity loss, towards the definition and implementation of a whole-government strategy for nature.

Yours sincerely,

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