



Environment and Climate Change Committee

Oral evidence: COP15: the international biodiversity conference

Tuesday 6 July 2021

10.45 am

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Baroness Parminter (The Chair); Baroness Boycott; Lord Browne of Ladyton; Lord Cameron of Dillington; Lord Colgrain; Lord Lilley; Lord Lucas; Baroness Northover; The Lord Bishop of Oxford; Lord Puttnam; Lord Whitty; Baroness Young of Old Scone.

Evidence Session No. 6

Virtual Proceeding

Questions 54 - 62

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Will Lockhart, Joint Head of International Environment Negotiations, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Examination of witnesses

Rt Hon George Eustice MP and Will Lockhart.

Q54 **The Chair:** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the final evidence session of our inquiry on COP15, subject to any follow-up that we want to undertake after the conference itself.

I welcome our Secretary of State, the right honourable George Eustice MP, and Will Lockhart, who is the joint head of international environment negotiations at Defra. It is nice to see you. Good morning to you both.

I remind everyone that a transcript will be taken and made public. The witnesses will be able to see it before it is published. The session is webcast live, and it will subsequently be made available on the parliamentary website. I ask Members to declare any relevant interests before their first question.

Let us kick off. Secretary of State, what are the main priorities for Defra's COP15 work over the coming months? How confident are you that there will be an effective agreement by October?

George Eustice: The first thing to say is that this is a really big year for the environment internationally. We have COP26 on climate change, which we are hosting in Glasgow later this year. There is also COP15 on the CBD. It is a crucial year, because it is the year when the overall biodiversity targets are reviewed and refreshed. We want to improve on the targets that were set at Aichi a decade ago.

Some of the key things that we are looking at are, first of all, a commitment to bend the curve on biodiversity loss by 2030. We got the G7 to make that commitment, and we will be pushing for a similar commitment at the CBD. We will then be looking for something that is more specific and action- focused to help achieve that target. The issue that we have been pushing through the Leaders' Pledge for Nature, with allies, is the 30by30 target: protecting 30% of terrestrial land and 30% of our oceans by 2030. We will probably be pushing for a more specific target around extinctions, trying to ensure that we halt extinctions and change the pressures that are driving extinctions, and probably something on wildlife populations and species abundance.

To make all of that fit together, the finance issue will be key. We have already made a commitment that 30% of our ICF over the next five years, some £3 billion, will go on Finance for Nature. It is important, if we are to deliver these objectives, that other donor countries step up and make similar commitments, so that we have the finance available to do that. There is a linked agenda, which is trying to get more private finance brought to bear to help deliver these objectives. We have also launched the LEAF coalition, which is all about trying to get private finance to halt deforestation.

The Chair: [*Inaudible.*]

George Eustice: I think you are on mute, Baroness Parminter.

The Chair: Thank you for pointing that out, Secretary of State.

Are there any particular opportunities that our Government are creating between now and October to iron out some of the areas where there are potential problems? One of the issues that we heard about last week from the representative from China was a real reluctance to run with the idea of the 30by30 targets, so there are clearly issues that need resolving between now and Kunming. What are the Government doing to try to create opportunities to resolve them?

George Eustice: We have been linking the dialogue and the work that we are doing on COP26 to CBD as well. As I have said, one of our key objectives as Defra, and our role on COP26, is to make sure that there is much more prominence and recognition of the role for nature-based solutions. Obviously, along the way, as we do that engagement, we are simultaneously engaging countries on these issues. It was a good start to get the commitments that we did on some of these areas in the G7 communiqué.

Between us, Lord Goldsmith and I have engaged with around 15 countries. In my case, I have spoken to the US, Chile, Costa Rica and Brazil. Lord Goldsmith has spoken to Canada, Ecuador, Argentina and Belize. In addition, our officials have been working at official level with some 20 parties bilaterally to try to get some momentum behind this, and a number of other groupings are engaging at the moment with 35 countries. Obviously, we will be stepping that up as we get closer to the working groups that will be taking place formally, under the current plan, at the end of August and the beginning of September, but we have already done quite a lot of pre-engagement with some countries on some of the issues.

We now have well over 80 countries signed up to the Leaders' Pledge for Nature, which is all about trying to get a coalition of like-minded countries in the right kind of place to get the sorts of objectives we are seeking.

Q55 **Lord Browne of Ladyton:** Good morning, Secretary of State, and to you, too, Mr Lockhart. Thank you very much, both of you.

You will be familiar with the point that the preparatory negotiations under the CBD subsidiary bodies have revealed a few topics in particular to be highly politicised and difficult to make progress on, including resource mobilisation and sharing the benefits of genetic resources and digital sequence information. How much international outreach is the department doing or planning to do on the issues of funding for implementation, in particular finance mobilisation and digital sequence information?

George Eustice: On resource mobilisation, as it is called, which is really the donor countries putting their money where their mouth is to make this work, the key thing, the most important thing, is to lead by example. The Prime Minister has committed 30% of our ICF funding over the next

five years: £3 billion. That means that, per capita, we are now, by some way, the most generous donor country to this agenda.

We are raising it with others, too. I have discussed this matter with the United States, for instance, and John Kerry told me that they are looking at their own commitments in this space. We got a broad commitment at G7 about the importance of finance, and that reflected the fact that some countries have formal decision-making processes that they have to go through. Others, like the US, are looking at the issue closely.

Specifically, we have some other important funds behind it. There is the £500 blue planet fund. At UNGA in 2019, the PM announced the £220 million biodiversity fund that we have. We are also a major donor to the GEF, the Global Environment Facility, which supports some of the UN's work in this area. I think we account for about 10%. It is a combination of leading by example and then raising the question with other countries. That is what we have been doing with the donor countries we have spoken to.

The data point is quite technical. It was explained to me yesterday, but, William, can I ask you to pick up on that separate point?

Will Lockhart: I am happy to, Secretary of State, and good morning, everyone.

On the question of digital sequence information and outreach arrangements specifically, we can talk more generally about the policy—*[Inaudible]*—outreach, we recognise that this is a really—*[Inaudible]*—parties and—*[Inaudible.]*

The Chair: Will, you are cutting in and out.

Will Lockhart: I am so sorry. That is unusual. Is this any better?

The Chair: Yes.

Will Lockhart: You can hear me? Fine. Do let me know if you cannot.

We are participating in, and supporting the delivery of, the second global dialogue on digital sequence information, which is a discussion group—*[Inaudible]*—to the convention and—*[Inaudible.]*

The Chair: You are cutting out again, Will.

George Eustice: Will, you might need to abandon your headphones. I suspect it is a problem with your connection.

Will Lockhart: I will do just that. I am so sorry: they have never let me down before. Now would be the perfect time, wouldn't it? Let me try again. Can you hear me okay?

The Chair: Yes.

George Eustice: We can. Let us see how we get on.

Will Lockhart: I will try again. We are participating in the delivery of the second global dialogue on digital sequence information—*[Inaudible]*—parties and stakeholders—*[Inaudible.]*

The Chair: You are cutting out again, Will. We cannot hear you.

Will Lockhart: *[Inaudible]*—we are doing a wide range, and the Secretary of State already—*[Inaudible.]*

The Chair: Will, we may need to come back to you. Shall we come back to this question in a moment, after you have seen if you can resolve the issue? We will leave the issue of digital sequencing for a moment. Was that your last question, Lord Browne?

Lord Browne of Ladyton: I had a supplementary, but I think it would probably require Will to speak again, so until we get that resolved I am happy to park it for the moment.

The Chair: In which case, let us move on to Lord Cameron and then come back a bit later if we can sort out Will's line.

Q56 **Lord Cameron of Dillington:** Good morning, Secretary of State. First, I declare an interest as a farmer and as chair of the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology.

To some extent, you answered my question in your introductory remarks and answers to the previous questions, but are we giving enough money to create an international initiative? You say that 80 countries signed up to the Leaders' Pledge for Nature, but are we going to lead on that? Is China leading enough in trying to get more developed countries on board, and to offer more money? Is there a further announcement that we could make to galvanise more action from developed countries in getting everybody to really push this initiative?

George Eustice: That is why G7 was so critical: to get the G7 countries to commit to halting the decline of biodiversity by 2030. There was some language in the communiqué about the importance of finance to do that and for donor countries to step up. I think that was indicative that there is a real appetite to do it.

I have seen a few G7 communiqués in my time. Sometimes they are very long but do not say a great deal. This one was really quite different. I feel that we had some really concrete commitments on the environmental track at the G7, and I think there is a real appetite from all countries, in this really big year, to start taking the action necessary to solve the issues, both at COP26 and at COP15, at CBD. It feels to me that the appetite is there. We just have to keep the momentum going. I think the Leaders' Pledge for Nature has been highly successful at getting like-minded countries on board.

The High Ambition Coalition and other like-minded groups are acting in this space, and we are participating with and linked up to them. I think it bodes well. Of course, we are working closely with China as well. The fact

that we have a parallel agenda around COP26, where we want nature to be a significant part of that agenda, too, also means that we can help move the debate and work with them and others to try to get some momentum behind it.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: What are the other developed countries? As Lord Goldsmith keeps saying, we seem to be doing most of the heavy lifting. China does not seem to be getting behind a lot of this, it seems to me, in any major way. What are the other countries that are supporting us in this initiative?

George Eustice: I think it is fair to say that none of them has quite made the commitment that we have around their ICF at this stage. Others are contributing some funds. I do not have the precise figure. I can give the committee a breakdown of what other countries are doing.

In absolute terms, in cash terms, the US is still probably giving more than the UK does, but, per capita, it is currently a bit less. Germany and France are also upping their ambition. I do not particularly want to be critical of them because, although we have been the first mover and are leading by example in some ways, we are not detecting an inherent resistance from some of the other donor countries to do their bit.

We all recognise the challenges. If everybody were to do the same as we had done, and say that 30% of ICF goes on nature-based solutions, it could be quite a game-changer. That is why we have done it; we want to lead by example. If you want other countries to do it, you have to carry them with you and inspire them to do that. There is a way of trying to persuade countries to help you, and it is not always to be critical about what they have done to date, because I think there is quite a strong appetite from all those countries to do more.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: Thank you.

The Chair: Will, you are now back with us. Shall we see if we can hear you clearly?

Will Lockhart: I hope you can. I am sorry about that. Good. Would it be helpful for me to cover the answer on digital sequence information?

George Eustice: Digital sequence information, yes, Will.

Will Lockhart: Will do. You have either heard this twice already or not, so I will start at the beginning. We are actively supporting, on outreach and on DSI, the delivery of the second global dialogue on digital sequence information, which is an informal discussion between parties and involves wider stakeholders. We know that the scientific community in particular is extremely interested in DSI. We have made available to the international community a Defra-commissioned evidence review, which considers lessons learned from our experience with respect to access and benefit sharing in other fora and more widely.

We continue to reach out to the like-minded countries we have just been talking about, and of course those with different views as well, as part of our intensive bilateral programme, which the Secretary of State has already mentioned. We have established a cross-Whitehall interest group, through which we can cascade messaging, in and out, and through and from the wider UK stakeholder community.

The Chair: Lord Browne, do you want to come back on that at all, or are you content?

Lord Browne of Ladyton: I very quickly want to come back on something. Secretary of State, I think three times now, you have referred to the G7 communiqué, I think with justification, as it is a powerful document and displays quite a lot of agreement.

Specifically on biodiversity, there are two paragraphs, one of which reaffirms the G7 2030 nature compact and kind of incorporates that. However, absent from those two paragraphs—paragraphs 42 and 43, as it happens; I have printed them out—there is no mention of the issue of redistribution of finance. There is a very strong statement in the climate change thing on the reaffirmation of the collective development goal of \$100 billion. There is no mention of that, and there is no mention of the very thorny issue of digital resource information. Was that deliberate? Did those conversations take place, or were they just not welcomed by our partners?

George Eustice: In the case of spending specifically for biodiversity and nature-based solutions to climate change, which is something we have been promoting, we have to recognise—I know many on the committee have experienced government themselves—that often, when you are putting together an agenda and a communiqué for a G7, other Governments may be looking at something or discussing something, and they may be ready to do more, but if they have not actually gone through the necessary processes to make that decision, they cannot include it in a communiqué. I think we have all had moments when we are minded to do something, but there is a domestic process we have to go through first before we can commit to it.

I cannot remember the precise wording now, but we did get some language in there about the importance of international finance and mobilising resources to deliver on this agenda. It stopped short of being a hard commitment to amounts, just because not every member of the G7 was in a position to do so. However, that does not mean that they are not seized of the importance of doing so, if that makes sense.

Lord Browne of Ladyton: Thank you.

Q57 **Baroness Boycott:** Thank you very much, Secretary of State, and Will, for being here. My question kind of follows on from Lord Cameron's, in that the whole issue of trust, when we make international commitments, is obviously massive; people are committing to cut their emissions or indeed increase their biodiversity, and it is very individual. There have

been many things, but there are two big things: one is the global access to vaccines, which is patchy, and the other is of course our own cuts to ODA. Have those affected the issue of trust, and do you think that they will affect the outcomes of the big conferences coming up?

George Eustice: I do not think they have. On the pandemic, the UK has played a leading role, not least through the development of the AstraZeneca vaccine, which is now being used around the world. We have also been heavily involved in multilateral efforts to support vaccination in other countries, through COVAX. We have been involved in that from the start, and we have given over £500 million to that project. Of course, the importance of vaccinating the rest of the world was high on the agenda at G7 as well. On that front, we have shown international leadership.

On ODA, we are still one of the largest donor countries. This is a temporary reduction in ODA to help us deal with some extraordinary problems around the pandemic, obviously. A lot of the work that we have done to help other countries with the pandemic does not technically score against ODA but, in the extreme situation we are in, it is nevertheless very—*[Interruption.]* Sorry, there is somebody else there.

We have not had this thing brought up with us, and I do not think it has affected our agenda or our credibility when we are raising these issues. The credibility we gain to raise these issues with donor countries really comes from the fact that we have committed £3 billion of our ICF to the endeavour.

Baroness Boycott: Thank you. I have to say that I think the feeling, certainly in our House, is that the impact of the ODA cut is pretty serious on a lot of the issues that affect climate change: the education of girls and other things like that. It is very good to hear your views on it, but I confess to remaining a bit sceptical: these moves, as well as what we might call some unfairness in vaccine rollout, may affect the vital issue of trust. We all know we all have to be in it together. Thank you for your words; I will leave it at that.

Q58 **Baroness Northover:** Thank you, Secretary of State. This builds, in some ways, on the previous question. Obviously, we know that the poorest will be affected the most by loss of biodiversity and by climate change. We are also aiming, under the SDGs, to eliminate extreme poverty by 2030, leaving no one behind. How do we square that?

In your negotiating positions on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, how are you seeking to ensure that action on biodiversity is compatible with development and is actually supporting the relief of poverty?

George Eustice: It is a very good point. We increasingly realise that economic development and safeguarding our environment go hand in hand, in that, as you point out, it is often, in some developing countries, where they see big impacts on agriculture through drought and water scarcity, driven by climate change. We increasingly understand that you do not progress your economic well-being through a kind of war on

nature. It is important that we have the concept of sustainable, green growth right around the world, and that we prevent deforestation, protect biodiversity and build back nature in areas where it has been lost.

Given that we all have a stake in having a healthy global environment and given that we are all affected by climate change, the big question then becomes how in some of those countries, which have some of the most important environmental assets we have, in the shape of things like the rainforest, we ensure that we get those protected. The answer is that we have to find a way of mobilising the financial resources to incentivise their protection.

That is why the work that we are doing, through things like LEAF, to identify ways of getting green finance, institutional private finance, to actually get behind protecting the environment, particularly the rainforest, is going to be so important. We cannot expect those countries to do it if they do not have the financial resources to do it. We have an interest in making sure that those environmental assets are protected. That is why there is a really big role for us to help mobilise the finance to make sure that that is financially and economically the right thing for those countries to do as well.

Baroness Northover: Does that mean that the ODA that shifted from South America to Africa, for example, is being redirected back to South America?

George Eustice: There are obviously some important environmental assets in Africa as well. There are some projects that we are developing in Africa, some of them rainforest projects. It means that, with our focus and with 30% of our ICF budget now going on nature-based solutions, yes, that may change the mix of where that finance goes, but it will be to achieve the same objectives.

I do not know whether William wants to add anything on that point.

Will Lockhart: Thank you, Secretary of State. If the technology allows, I will add that the principle of sustainable development is baked into the current draft of the global biodiversity framework. Of course, that draft has not been concluded yet by the parties, but it talks about the sustainable use of wild species and the sustainable management of ecosystems. It does not suggest making them completely unavailable to indigenous or local peoples and communities. It talks about the mainstreaming of biodiversity into spatial planning, rather than calling for an immediate stop to spatial development of any kind.

In general, at the highest intellectual level, the whole approach that we are taking across the CBD is really about trying to manage those two occasionally mutually reinforcing but occasionally mutually conflicting things, and we recognise that. It is about managing those priorities jointly.

Baroness Northover: My questions thus far have been broader in terms

of development, but can I follow up, Secretary of State, by asking whether, in your view, the current draft framework does enough to secure the role played by indigenous people in protecting biodiversity?

George Eustice: Yes, I think it does. We recognise that indigenous people are completely dependent on these habitats and these landscapes as well. In the approach that we are taking in this current framework, that is recognised.

William, do you want to add anything?

Will Lockhart: Thank you, Secretary of State. According to—*[Inaudible]*—80% of remaining terrestrial diversity is stewarded by indigenous—*[Inaudible]*—and I think, in domestic discourse here, it might be something that we do not—*[Inaudible]*—enough about. In international discourse, and certainly—*[Inaudible.]*

The Chair: Will, you are cutting out again, sadly.

Will Lockhart: I am so sorry.

George Eustice: Perhaps I might add that we are co-chairing the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People. Through that, the UK is engaging with indigenous people and local community stakeholders, including the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity, to ensure that their views and concerns are reflected in all of the current, ongoing negotiations, particularly on the 30by30 target. We will be looking at other explicit safeguards, following the dialogue that we are having with the IPLC stakeholders.

The Chair: I could see Will nodding his head, so I think he thinks the Secretary of State has effectively answered that, but if there is anything supplementary that you wish to supply after the meeting, please feel free to do that.

Q59 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** Good morning, Secretary of State.

I declare my interests as chairman of the Woodland Trust, as vice-president of the RSPB, of Flora & Fauna International, and of BirdLife International, and as a commissioner on the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission.

Secretary of State, you talked about leading by example. One of the reflections we heard in earlier evidence was that a world-leading state of nature target in the Environment Bill could be a totemic thing for the COP15 negotiations and could inspire other countries. However, the verdict on the species-abundant amendment is that it is not adequate. Lots of good ideas for a more effective proposal came out during the Environment Bill debate.

I wondered whether you were pondering what you might bring forward at Report stage that would be more adequate and would, hopefully, meet the objective of halting decline by 2030, not just further it, and thereby fulfil the Leaders' Pledge for Nature commitment of halting decline by

2030, as well as setting the targets now, before October 2022, so that, in the run-up to COP15, we have clear, visionary, leading targets for the UK. Perhaps you could comment on your plans for the Environment Bill.

George Eustice: We are the first country in the world to do this—to actually have a statutory, legally binding target. Beyond the communiqués and wider commitments internationally, we are enshrining that in our domestic law.

We have chosen species abundance as the right approach. Biodiversity is a concept that we all understand, but it is notoriously difficult to measure as a concept. Species abundance, as people can increasingly see, should perhaps be our compass in our objectives to rebuild nature and to see a recovery in species. You can perhaps take 650 indicator species across the range, which, between them, can be representative of a general repairing and recovery of the ecosystem. You have to be able to have something that you can measure. We think species abundance is a good measure to have. I know that other groups such as the Wildlife Trusts, for instance, agree with that, and a lot of the green NGOs would support that approach.

The issue then becomes where you set it. In some ways, the easiest thing would be to name the number right now, as the Bill is going through Parliament, so that people can see precisely what our species abundance target for 2030 will be. Unfortunately, we are not quite at that stage yet. It is complicated, so we need to do a bit more work to understand exactly where the correlation lies between species abundance and biodiversity, to ensure that the species abundance target we are setting is in line with our objective on biodiversity. We need a bit more time to do that. That is why we are creating a requirement in the Bill that gives us the space to work out what level of species abundance is the correct level to set, and that we will then set alongside the other targets during the course of the next year.

I have seen the debates. Lord Goldsmith was in debate on the Environment Bill again yesterday. I think that there is one more day of committee taking place early next week. At that point, we will reflect on some of the suggestions and comments that came during the debate, and we will have further discussions on it.

To be clear, I am very passionate about the target to halt the decline of biodiversity by 2030, as is Lord Goldsmith, as is the Prime Minister. We mean it, and we are serious about it, but there is some complexity about where you pitch a species abundance metric so that it correlates with biodiversity, and we need a bit more time and space to be able to do that.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: You would not be concerned that there might be some scepticism felt about a target that existed as a principle, but its level of ambition was not yet clear.

George Eustice: No. It is not that the level of ambition is not clear; the ambition is clear, which is to halt the decline of biodiversity by 2030. To do that, you have to have a lot of policies in action, literally over the next few years, to be able to start turning the decline and to get to that point. The ambition is clear.

What we need to do further work on is to understand what the right level of species abundance is to get the correct correlation with that target. That is a technical question, rather than a legal question. Obviously, a Bill is a legal text, and I know that there will be suggestions on that, but, ultimately, it is a technical judgment about what that figure should be.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: You talked just now about there needing to be lots of policies to deliver that. How can we make sure that we are showing an example to the world by mainstreaming biodiversity across the government departments, which is practically all of them, that actually have to take action, when there are some key ones such as the Treasury and the MoD that have been given exemptions from the environmental principles in the Environment Bill, which seems to signal to them that they are kind of above the biodiversity, net zero and net positive link?

George Eustice: Yes, I understand that argument, but, equally, it is often the case that, in these areas—defence of the realm is of critical importance, and tax issues are also a complicated matter that has to take account of many different things—it is not unusual for certain departments, namely the Treasury and the MoD, to be exempt from certain things. Equally, the fact that they are exempt from that does not mean that they will behave in a way that is not conducive to the recovery of the environment; it just means that there are times when they need the freedom to be able to act—and act quickly.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Would it perhaps have been preferable to have defined that in the Bill rather more tightly? It appears to give them carte blanche in a fairly wide way. The MoD is a massive landowner in this country, and fiscal and taxation instruments are going to be crucial to get the achievement of net zero and net biodiversity.

George Eustice: Yes, but we have seen, through the Climate Change Act and the targets that we set under that that, once you have those legally binding targets and that framework, the Treasury takes that responsibility incredibly seriously.

I think it would be the same on the environment. As a nation, we will have environmental targets that we set; we mean it when we set them, and we intend to hit those targets. That is what will shape the Treasury's thinking across the piece on these matters when it comes to its policies, whether they be tax policies or spending policies. One of the things that it will have in its mind is those targets.

There are other bits of the Bill that departments such as the Treasury will be very focused on. Although the MoD, for reasons around the defence of

the realm, sometimes has to have the freedom to act, it does not mean that it does not take its role on the environment seriously. Indeed, I know the MoD is looking at whether there are opportunities for it to manage the land that it owns in a particular way, or to create more woodland, for instance, to help us achieve some of those targets.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: One of the key planks in the success story you talked about regarding climate change was the independent nature of the Climate Change Committee. Are you planning, at Report stage of the Environment Bill, to put forward tougher proposals for the independence of the Office for Environmental Protection?

George Eustice: The Office for Environmental Protection already has far more powers than the Climate Change Committee. The OEP has the ability to bring environmental review and even, in extreme cases, where there is urgency, to bring judicial review proceedings against government bodies. There is no such legal or arbitration procedure with the Climate Change Committee.

I know there has been some debate on the provision for guidance to be issued around how the OEP should conduct its activities, but that only mirrors a similar provision that was in the Climate Change Act and that relates to the Climate Change Committee. The Government can issue guidance to the Climate Change Committee. They have tended not to, but that is simply a power there, should there be a need at some point in the future.

What we have seen with the way the Climate Change Committee has worked—setting targets, often being critical of government and raising challenge—is that the Government have responded to that. We embraced its recommendations on carbon budget 6 recently. That shows that these sorts of governance arrangements can really work, and I think they are working when it comes to climate change; I think they will work in the wider environment with the OEP as well.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Could we turn to the issue of public engagement in COP15, particularly the linkage between COP15 and COP26? In Scotland, the Government have done a big net-zero media campaign in respect of the COP26 efforts. Are we going to see a similar campaign for COP15?

Perhaps you could also respond to this. A little bird has told us—when you are vice-president of the RSPB, little birds tell you things—that the Cabinet Office has just had its behaviour change scheme for these issues binned.

George Eustice: I might ask William, if his connection is working, to come in. We have a Together for our Planet campaign, which was launched in November 2020, and is really about trying to galvanise public engagement in the run-up to COP26 in particular, but also CBD—COP15—as well.

At Defra, we are pushing quite a lot of work around tree planting. There are projects such as the Queen's Green Canopy, which a lot of schools are engaged with. We are doing more besides, trying to get schools and the public engaged in some of these projects. We are doing quite a lot to try to engage the public through that particular campaign, which was launched by Alok Sharma last November, I think.

I have not heard about the behavioural unit in the Cabinet Office. It may be that its work has concluded because it has been converted into a campaign. I do not know if that is something that you are familiar with, William. Perhaps we will have to write to the committee.

Will Lockhart: I am not familiar with it, Secretary of State, and that is exactly what I was going to suggest that we do. All I would add to your answer is that we have a really busy programme of work with the leading NGOs, some of which I know the committee has heard from over the past few weeks. We are working closely with them. They have a tremendous amount of global and international reach, with huge memberships across the UK and internationally. We are working very closely with them on exactly these kinds of issues.

The Chair: Thank you. We look forward to receiving a note subsequent to the committee hearing.

Q60 **Lord Lucas:** Secretary of State, I am delighted that you are taking effective measurement seriously. I shall be taxing your colleagues on that when it comes to biodiversity gain tomorrow. For today, what concrete measures on biodiversity are you hoping will result from the FACT dialogue and the trade and environmental sustainability structured dialogue at the WTO?

George Eustice: On the FACT dialogue, we are very keen to promote the idea of due diligence in supply chains, for instance. Again, it is something that the UK is leading on. Our Environment Bill now has amendments, which we are incorporating, that will ensure that there is a legal obligation on companies buying forest-risk products such as palm oil to ensure that they have been legally sourced.

If we could get other countries around the world similarly to sign up to something like that, it would really help with enforcement. I get that it will not necessarily mean that we can change the laws that different countries have, but if we want to make progress on these things we have to work with countries. However, it will ensure that with the deforestation that we suffer, which is caused by illegal activities, breaching domestic laws in those countries, we can really strengthen enforcement if we have supply chains around the world not purchasing those goods, and paying more attention to due diligence. That is probably one of the key areas.

There are wider issues around the FACT dialogue, encompassing things like LEAF, finance for rainforests and so on. It is slightly broader, but a key focus that I have in this space is that, if we could get many more

countries to take the same approach as we do on the issue of due diligence in supply chains, it would go quite a long way.

Lord Lucas: Do you have a sense of what measure of biodiversity might be adopted? Are we following your route of species abundance? What do you think the international measure will be?

George Eustice: I might ask William about that. We will be pushing for a general commitment, which is to curb biodiversity loss by 2030, in line with what we had at G7 and what we have been pushing for for some time, and then probably a specific target to halt the overall decline in wildlife populations by 2030, and start to get to an increase by 2050; and then, something specific around extinctions. We think that species abundance is probably the right yardstick for us to use so that we have something that is measurable and that we can place on the statute book, whereas biodiversity is less easy to measure overall.

William, is there anything further you want to say about whether there will be a specific metric about how biodiversity is measured?

Will Lockhart: Thank you, Secretary of State. You alluded to exactly the right answer. So far, 28 countries have been involved in the FACT dialogue; 24 have endorsed the joint statement on the principles for collaboration. The point to underline is that those 24 countries cover a huge range of biodiverse species, flora, fauna and ecosystems and, perhaps just as importantly, domestic political and economic arrangements.

The purpose of the dialogue is to share expertise and understanding, and to think about exactly what measures can be put in place domestically, in all those different contexts, most effectively. I do not think, at this stage, that we want to suggest that there is going to be a one-size-fits-all answer to how a biodiversity metric might be used. I am not ruling it out, but I think it is part of the process that we have to go through in the dialogue in the context of COP26 and our role as president.

Lord Lucas: Secretary of State, do you see the evidence on what is happening on biodiversity being produced in a way that makes it possible for NGOs and others to reconcile it with the evidence from satellites?

George Eustice: Lord Lucas, that is a very technical question. We can assess some things from satellite, predominantly the state of habitats. Obviously, there is a correlation between that and overall environmental health and biodiversity. Data that we have on these matters will of course be published, in so far as we have it. There is some very good work on endangered species done by groups such as the IUCN.

William, are there other data sources, and how much can we discern from a satellite image?

Will Lockhart: It is a critical question in the context of the overall CBD negotiations. Obviously, as part of the CBD and agreeing a global biodiversity framework, we want to set ourselves really stretching

targets, but there is no point in doing that unless we can monitor how the global delivery of those targets is going. Of course, the point of the CBD is that, with 196 global parties, they all have access to very different levels of data, domestic monitoring and so on, which means that we must be very careful not to set a target that, for instance, we could monitor, or perhaps even deliver effectively, here in western Europe or in the UK, but that would be impossible to measure elsewhere.

There is tremendous potential in the use of satellite data for solving some of these questions, but it will not enable us to cover every aspect of the biodiversity framework that will be important in the negotiations. There is definitely potential, but the information has to be quite widely available, and that often comes at cost, and it will not be able to solve all our problems.

Lord Lucas: Thank you.

Q61 **Lord Puttnam:** Secretary of State, the evidence we have received so far suggests that, thanks to the UK's leadership, and after a lot of negotiation and debate, we are finally starting to see the climate and biodiversity agendas coming together, and there is a far greater understanding of the interrelationship between the two. That is the context of my question.

In a relatively small department, the best favour that I think we as a committee can do is to support you and give you additional clout within government or within the machinery of government. How are you seeking to ensure that there are lasting links between the biodiversity and climate change agendas beyond, and indeed outside, COP15 and COP26?

In answering that, could you focus on the domestic issue? What sort of Cabinet committees will be established? How will the links be progressed, and how will parliamentarians be able to track which departments are supporting you best and which are beginning to let you down? Frankly, if they are letting you down, they are letting us down.

George Eustice: The critical thing to say is that we want this to be the beginning, not the end. We do not see this year, with COP26 and COP15, being, "Well, that was good. We got it together. Now, let's forget about it and move on". Obviously, the idea is that, in the case of the CBD, COP15 will set some real targets, benchmarks, monitoring and tangible actions that we will then want to follow through.

We also have in the background, with international, multilateral fora, some other work going on. We are now entering the UN decade on ecosystem restoration. That gives us a framework for further dialogue on this and, crucially, to check that, whatever we get agreed at CBD, we can track progress on it.

For the UK, the commitment to spend, over the next five years, 30% of our ICF on nature-based solutions is a real and durable commitment that will run for the next five years. It will manifest itself in a whole series of projects for nature, for the environment and for biodiversity overseas. It

will be a significant UK contribution. It is a combination of the programmes that will follow the spending commitment we have just made, relating to the ICF, coupled with some of the continued international dialogue, particularly through the UN.

Lord Puttnam: Secretary of State, it is not so much about money; it is really about our ability to track and ensure that your priorities are being matched and taken seriously by the other departments of state. How can we go about that? How can we do that? How can we support you in ensuring that happens?

George Eustice: This is an ambition that is shared across government, and a lot of the push, particularly when it comes to the environment and issues such as species extinction, is very close to the heart of the Prime Minister. He means it, and he is serious about it. That, therefore, translates and permeates right across government.

The critical thing for us domestically is to get our own targets on things such as biodiversity right, and those then become a target that the whole of government must engage in the pursuit of, so it is critical for us to get the governance and targets framework right domestically. On the international stage, Defra principally works with FCDO on these matters. It is the department that leads on the ODA budget, but Defra has a very important role on the delivery of the nature component of that.

Lord Puttnam: Thank you.

Q62 **The Lord Bishop of Oxford:** Thank you very much, Secretary of State, for all that you are doing.

As you will be aware, we had a session with Minister Yang from the Chinese Government last week. We explored the relationship between the British and Chinese Governments in the joint chairmanship of these two bodies. He was very frank in talking about some of the difficulties of collaboration at the present time. In the light of that, what efforts are being made to improve the working relationship between the UK in its COP26 presidency role and China as the COP15 president? What are relationships like from your perspective?

George Eustice: The Prime Minister met President Xi last year, and they agreed at that point that we should work together and co-ordinate our activities with both COP26 and COP15. Alok Sharma had discussions with the Chinese Minister for Environment and Ecology last June about joint working. This year, Alok has continued to have discussions and engagement with China on these matters. We have a commitment to work with China on this, and we obviously want to work constructively.

Of course—I presume this is what you are alluding to—there are issues where we have differences with China at the moment. Some of the tensions around Hong Kong and some of the issues around the Uyghur community are undoubtedly issues where we have differences with China, and it is important that we articulate those and do so with clarity.

All of us want a robust diplomatic framework within which we can have dialogue on the really important issues that we cannot turn a blind eye to, but given that this is another issue of global importance, where everyone has a role to play, we want to ensure that we can maintain a constructive dialogue on these matters as well. From the UK perspective, while we have some issues of difference with China, and it is essential that we articulate those, we also want to separate that from this other issue, which is not really about anyone's individual national interest but is about the global interest and a challenge that the whole world must face together.

The Lord Bishop of Oxford: That is understood, and on the other issues. Thank you.

One of the things that Minister Yang emphasised that was impressive was the Chinese approach stemming from a philosophy of ecological citizenship, which was embedded in the Chinese constitution in 2018 and from which their approach to these issues flows. Have the UK Government engaged with that philosophical basis at all, and have you found it a fruitful ground for dialogue with China?

George Eustice: I may ask William whether that is a particular issue that we have covered. I know that a number of countries around the world have these sorts of provisions. India has some similar provisions that often motivate its approach in these matters. Ecological citizenship is not something that I am specifically aware we have raised, but it is a very interesting suggestion, so we will take it away, unless William wants to come in and tell me that we have already had discussions in that space.

Will Lockhart: Thank you, Secretary of State. We have had some discussions. That is absolutely right. It is philosophically and practically a really interesting approach, and we are familiar with it. You can imagine that we engage very closely with our colleagues in our embassy in Beijing and with our colleagues in the Chinese Government. We have had really fruitful conversations about ecological citizenship. We are also extremely interested in the Chinese approach to ecological redlining, which is another zoning approach to the spatial application of protected areas and so on. There is a range of fruitful conversations going on, both with China and more widely, about different ways of implementing various aspects of the CBD.

The Chair: [*Inaudible.*]

The Lord Bishop of Oxford: Chair, you are muted, I think.

The Chair: Thank you. I am not doing very well today, am I? Baroness Young wants to come in, but I will ask a quick question myself, if that is possible.

You have spoken very convincingly, Secretary of State, about the need to protect planetary resources, moving to a more circular economy and

cutting waste, and there are some really welcome initiatives in your Environment Bill, for which we thank you. There has been a lot of public concern about Amazon, which has recently been exposed as destroying millions of unsold products—new TVs, laptops and drones. I understand that you have been in touch with Amazon, and I wondered if you would like to say something about what is happening to stop this level of unacceptable waste.

George Eustice: This was a story that came up about a week ago. Following that, I asked my officials to investigate the matter and to consider whether there is a need for a change to the law. It sounds an extraordinary approach, to dispose of goods that are perfectly good, but they just do not have a home and they cannot be bothered to store them. Obviously, that is a chronic waste.

We are looking at things like the WEEE regulations that we have on electronic goods that are in retained EU law, and we are looking at whether there are more things we can do to encourage the repair of electrical equipment. Often there is a big problem that white goods such as washing machines have a component that goes wrong, and then it is cheaper, frankly, to buy a new one than to try to repair the old one. We need to try to get a culture change there. It is an issue that we are looking at more broadly.

I am happy to write to the committee with an update on the specific outcome from Amazon. Although I asked our officials to investigate, I have not had any further feedback yet.

The Chair: Thank you, Secretary of State; we appreciate that.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: I am a bit confused about what the UK Government and G7 discussions were about biodiversity loss by 2030. In one of your answers today, Secretary of State, you talked about curbing biodiversity loss by 2030. What has happened to the target of halting biodiversity loss by 2030? Is that now no longer government policy?

George Eustice: The terms are often used in an interchangeable way, but they mean the same. Some people use the term “bending the curve by 2030”, and I have probably borrowed it. That, mathematically, is the same as halting the decline, in that you pass the break-even point and get the trend in an upward direction by 2030, rather than a downward trajectory. They are often used interchangeably by green NGOs and, I am afraid, by me as well, but it means that halting the decline is the same as bending the curve.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Perhaps we should just call it halting the decline.

George Eustice: Of course, if you take the policy steps necessary to recover—sometimes people ask me, “Don’t we then need it to recover?”—the answer to that is yes. A big focus of what we are doing now, and all of our thinking on the environment, is how we move from just trying to

protect the ever-diminishing set of habitats and species that are left, and how we start to build back nature and make space for nature. The truth is that, if we take policy steps on things like agriculture and water quality, and on habitat and protected sites, and take the steps necessary to bend the curve by 2030, you will actually have things on a positive trajectory, so you can expect to see things recovering thereafter.

The Chair: Lord Whitty, were you trying to come in with a question?

Lord Whitty: Yes. I have two questions, very quickly. I was unsure that we got a clear answer to Lord Puttnam's question about the machinery of government for taking these things forward, particularly given the interrelationship between the climate issue and the biodiversity issue. After the two conferences, how will the Government bring together, across Whitehall and across all the agencies, a strategy? Has that been decided yet, and who would be the lead? That is one question.

My other point is this. Lord Lucas mentioned the WTO. In the end, we will not transfer sufficient resources to the countries that are faced with the direst biodiversity crises unless it is linked to trade, aid and the transfer of intellectual property. How far has discussion at the WTO accepted that we will have to have a biodiversity or an environmental dimension to our trade structure and the rules of trade?

George Eustice: Apologies if I had not quite articulated the detail on the machinery of government points, as you put it, Lord Whitty.

On the international stage, on the ODA budget, the lead department on that is FCDO, but Defra is fully integrated on the decisions pertaining to the environment, whether they be projects linked to climate change in the round or, in particular, when they come to the £3 billion commitment on nature. It will be between Defra and the FCDO to develop the specific programme of projects over the next five years on the commitment on the ICF.

Domestically, it will be a Defra lead when it comes to the targets that we will set under the Environment Bill. In many of the policies that we will set, including through things like biodiversity net gain in the planning system and a big change to our agriculture policy, we will both set the targets framework and develop the policy programme that will enable us to hit those targets. Then, there will be a requirement on government in the round to apply the environmental principles, albeit, as was highlighted earlier, with the absence of a couple of departments.

Your second point, relating to the WTO, is, I think, an important issue that the world is starting to recognise and come to terms with. If some developed countries in the world really take their responsibilities seriously, and take what are often quite difficult and costly actions to deal with climate change and reduce their carbon emissions, how do you reconcile the concept of free trade in a world where there may be other countries that are perhaps not pulling their weight or are not taking those difficult decisions? That is why I think that, increasingly, around the

world, and it will take some time to effect, there is growing interest in the notion of a carbon border tax, particularly in the context, possibly, of emissions trading schemes and so forth. If you are going to have that, you would need to recognise the carbon differential through the international trading system. It is a complex area, but I know that it is something that both BEIS and the Department for International Trade are looking at. It would obviously be better if it could be done with a degree of international agreement, rather than set unilaterally.

A modern trade agreement is about so much more than just commerce and commercial transactions; it is about joint working on things like the environment and animal welfare, to ensure that we are making progress on those fronts.

The Chair: Secretary of State, Lord Lilley has his hand up for one last question. We have a couple more minutes, so if you can both be brief, we can probably just get it in.

Lord Lilley: Thank you very much. You mentioned, Secretary of State, that poor people and poor countries would lose most from loss of biodiversity, and that seems to be a statement that is generally assumed to be correct, yet the whole thrust of most policy is based on the assumption that poor countries cannot be relied on to look after their own biodiversity, and that they must, by a mixture of carrots and sticks, be compelled to do so, the carrots being money and the sticks being trade sanctions, through tracing back supply chains and so on, and not buying from countries that are thought not to be compliant.

I had always assumed that we had assumed that countries were responsible for their own biodiversity and that this conference would focus on things that transcended national boundaries, such as the atmosphere, migratory birds, animals and insects, or that were outside national boundaries, such as the oceans. Would you like to comment on those observations?

George Eustice: When it comes to climate change and carbon emissions, each nation's emissions contribute to the global challenge. When it comes to biodiversity specifically, it is obviously the case that with some of those habitats, particularly forest, which contains around 80% of terrestrial biodiversity as a habitat, some countries have more than others. Sometimes, those countries have financial pressures and do not have the resources to be able to fully protect those assets. That is where I think there is a role for donor countries, if we want to protect global biodiversity and we see biodiversity as a global resource in which we all have an interest. Biodiversity is what gives life itself resilience, and if you erode biodiversity you are undermining the resilience of life itself. We all have a shared interest in protecting that biodiversity.

I think that is exactly why we have organisations such as the Convention on Biological Diversity to lead international co-operation on these matters. In some ways, the co-operation that donor countries provide often comes down to finance; if we want to protect those habitats, we

have to be willing to put some finance there, because often the countries that host those habitats do not have the finance to do so.

Lord Lilley: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Secretary of State. We have come to the end of our time. I thank both you and Will Lockhart for your frankness today. We look forward to receiving some follow-up information in due course. After the CBD, we hope we might be able to tempt you back to come and talk to us about what was actually achieved. Thank you very much.