

9 December 2021

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Seacole Block
2 Marsham Street
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Cc: The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park

COP15 – the UN Biodiversity Conference

Thank you for your letter regarding COP15 dated 11 November.

We are grateful for the consideration that you have given to our recommendations. We strongly welcome the Government's focus on nature at COP26 and the outcomes this secured. We also welcome your continued work on important aspects of the COP15 negotiations.

However, as we noted in our first letter, biodiversity is declining globally at an unprecedented rate.¹ Countries must reach an agreement at COP15 which strengthens efforts to halt the biodiversity losses occurring across the world's flora and fauna, including the large declines of familiar bird species like the house sparrow and the starling in Europe,² and of many other species at home and abroad. At present this is far from guaranteed.

As we say we welcome the work you are undertaking, but we would like to emphasise three main concerns arising from your response and from recent developments:

1. There continue to be major disagreements threatening the success of COP15 and an absence of collective ambition on key issues. The Government should provide leadership at a senior political level in the final months of preparation and at COP15 Part Two. This should include high-level diplomatic outreach on key sticking points—such as funding for biodiversity action and Digital Sequence Information (DSI)—and intensified work with a range of international partners including China on translating the nature-related commitments achieved at COP26 into progress within the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD). We caution against devoting too much of the Government's diplomatic efforts towards promoting a single target, like 30by30, as success at COP15 will depend upon progress across a range of issues. The

¹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/6943/documents/72688/default/>

² <https://community.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/b/science/posts/dramatic-declines-in-eu-birds>



Government should also provide an early confirmation of who will represent the UK in Kunming at the highest political level.

2. We reiterate our views that action on biodiversity must be delivered through the trade and environmental sustainability structured discussions (TESSD) at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and through the Forest, Agriculture and Commodity Trade (FACT) Dialogue, and that protecting and restoring biodiversity should be a central consideration in the negotiation of new trade deals, including our own. We were glad to see the statements at COP26 on forests, the FACT Dialogue, and agriculture. It is imperative that these statements deliver concrete outcomes.
3. We are disappointed by your letter's limited response on public engagement regarding biodiversity. It falls far short of a serious communications campaign to engage the public on biodiversity before and after COP15, which we have called for. The Government has adopted a strong agenda on nature protection, and it will be a missed opportunity not to use the run up to COP15 to enlist the necessary support of the public to achieve nature goals, in the way the Government choreographed public communications in advance of COP26. Whilst we are not the host nation, increased public engagement can support a positive outcome at COP15 and will be a key condition for successfully delivering on what is agreed in Kunming.

We are grateful for your letter's update on the development of the Environmental Land Management schemes (ELMs) and note the information recently published on how the Sustainable Future Incentive scheme will work in 2022. While some progress is being made, this must be accelerated and with more ambition if we are to address at sufficient pace the twin crises of nature loss and climate change. As we said in our last letter—the schemes must deliver on the environmental improvements that the Government has promised.

The remaining months before COP15 must be used productively. We hope this letter will be received in a spirit of cooperation and would like to invite you and the Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park to come before the Committee after the rescheduled meetings of the COP15 subsidiary bodies to discuss the Government's plans for final COP15 preparations and negotiations. The Committee Clerk will be in touch to discuss this with your officials.

Yours sincerely,

Baroness Kate Parminter

Chair, Environment and Climate Change Committee