



House of Commons  
Environmental Audit Committee

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# The UK's footprint on global biodiversity: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report

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**Fifth Special Report of Session  
2021–22**

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 26 January 2022*

**HC 1060**  
Published on 31 January 2022  
by authority of the House of Commons

## Environmental Audit Committee

The Environmental Audit Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider to what extent the policies and programmes of government departments and non-departmental public bodies contribute to environmental protection and sustainable development; to audit their performance against such targets as may be set for them by Her Majesty's Ministers; and to report thereon to the House.

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### **Committee staff during this inquiry**

Martyn Atkins (Clerk), Medha Bhasin (Second Clerk), Amy Brew (Committee Specialist), James Camp (Committee Operations Officer), Nick Davies (Senior Committee Specialist), Marc Geddes (Parliamentary Fellow), Laura Grant (Committee Specialist), Kirsty MacLeod (Committee Researcher), Ben Smith (Committee Support Apprentice) and Jonathan Wright (Committee Operations Manager).

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You can follow the Committee on Twitter using [@CommonsEAC](https://twitter.com/CommonsEAC).

## Fifth Special Report

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On 30 September 2021 the Environmental Audit Committee published its Second Report of Session 2021–22, [The UK's footprint on global biodiversity](#) (HC 674). The Government's response was received on 5 January 2022, and is appended below. In the Government Response, the Committee's recommendations are shown in bold italic type followed by a government response to each one.

## Appendix: Government response

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### Introduction

The UK is committed to continuing to show international leadership on biodiversity, the environment and climate change. We have showcased this most recently as part of our G7 and COP26 presidencies. However, we are under no illusions that the task before us and the global community, to halt and reverse nature's decline and get to net zero, is an easy one. Nevertheless, we are fully committed to meeting these commitments and working with international partners to do so. The government is therefore grateful to the Environmental Audit Committee (the Committee) for its report on the UK's footprint on global biodiversity. We will ensure these recommendations are fully considered and inputted into both our domestic and international work, particularly as we prepare for discussions in spring at the Convention on Biological Diversity's 15th Conference of Parties (CBD COP15).

At the G7 and COP26 in 2021, we made clear that nature and biodiversity loss must be a key international priority. This was reinforced at home by our Integrated Review which confirmed that 'tackling climate change and biodiversity loss [is the government's] number one international priority'.

Under our G7 Presidency, we convened a joint Climate and Environment Ministers' Track and sought to mainstream commitments on nature across the G7 Ministerial Tracks, culminating in the agreement of the 2030 Nature Compact in Carbis Bay. In the Compact, the G7 committed themselves for the first time to the mission of bending the curve of biodiversity loss by 2030 and championing the global target to protect or conserve at least 30 percent of global land and at least 30 percent of the global ocean by 2030 (30 by 30), in addition to achieving this domestically. Alongside these were critically important commitments to support sustainable supply chains that decouple agricultural production from deforestation and forest degradation, and to mainstream nature into financial and economic decision making.

These pledges were further supported by our landmark G7 Climate and Environment Communique, containing over 120 commitments across 14 areas including the illegal wildlife trade, food loss and waste, marine litter, ocean conservation, and many others. Together, these drove momentum ahead of COP26, and have set the bar for achieving a high level of ambition at CBD COP 15 Part 2 this year.

Under the UK presidency, COP26 amplified the critical role of nature and nature-based solutions, secured recognition of the importance of protecting, conserving and restoring nature and ecosystems for climate mitigation and adaptation, and how globally climate change and biodiversity loss are interlinked. We secured endorsements from over 140 countries, covering over 90% of the world's forests, of the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests & Land Use, to collectively 'halt and reverse' net forest loss by 2030. We secured an unprecedented level of financial commitments, including around \$20 billion to protect the world's forests and a commitment from financial institutions with assets worth nearly \$9 trillion that they will align with nature. We also secured a commitment from Multilateral Development Banks, including the World Bank, that they will align their portfolios not only with Paris goals, but with nature as well. 100 high profile companies agreed to work towards halting and reversing the decline of nature by 2030 and committed to being 'Nature Positive'. Eleven paragraphs covering nature were included in the formal cover decisions of the COP agreed by Parties (1/CP.26 and 1/CMA.3), where there had previously only been four.

The UK also led 28 governments (representing 75% of global trade in key commodities that can threaten forests, such as palm oil, cocoa and soya), to come together through the Forest, Agriculture and Commodity Trade (FACT) Roadmap, agreed at COP26, to deliver sustainable trade and reduce pressure on forests, including by providing support for smallholder farmers and improving the transparency of supply chains. We also secured a commitment from the 12 biggest buyers of agricultural commodities, managing over half of global trade in soy, palm and beef, that by COP27 they will lay out a shared roadmap for enhanced supply chain action consistent with a 1.5 degree Celsius pathway.

The UK also announced several new nature and land use-related climate finance packages and commitments at COP26. This includes £1.5bn over five years to support the Global Forest Finance Pledge, including £350m for tropical forests in Indonesia, £200m for the LEAF Coalition, and up to £300m for the Amazon. The UK will also contribute £200m, alongside 11 other donors, as part of a new £1.1 billion (\$1.5bn) fund to protect the Congo Basin, home to the second-largest tropical rainforest in the world which is threatened by industrial logging, mining and agriculture. We are also investing £40 million of climate finance to establish a Global Centre on Biodiversity and Climate, to draw together expertise from across the UK and around the world and help us rapidly scale up investment in the natural world.

A range of new funding announcements were made on ocean action. The UK will invest £6 million in the World Bank's PROBLUE programme supporting the development of the blue economy to act as a driver of growth in small island developing states and coastal least developed countries, alongside an additional £1m for the Global Fund for Coral Reefs and £400k to support the Fiji Blue Bond programme. The Ocean Risk and Resilience Action Alliance, a multi-sector collaboration designed to drive investment into coastal natural capital by pioneering ground-breaking finance products, hosted a finance roundtable with the UK Presidency that saw commitments of at least \$20m. Furthermore, another 11 countries signed up to the 30by30 target to protect 30% of the world's ocean by 2030, a target that is now supported by over 100 countries.

Securing these ambitious outcomes for nature will be hugely beneficial for a range of international negotiations, including COP27 and CBD COP15. Our priority is to continue to ensure there is global recognition that biodiversity loss and climate change are inextricably linked and that action on nature, alongside deep emission cuts in other key sectors, is vital for achieving Paris goals.

The UK has of course continued to be active outside of COP26 and the G7, and has also taken a leading role in drafting and securing agreement to the Leaders' Pledge for Nature at the UN Summit on Biodiversity last year, with its ten urgent actions to put nature on the path to recovery, as well as the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People, championing 30by30 and the Global Ocean Alliance, which is calling for strong ocean targets at CBD COP15.

We share the Committee's disappointment that the Aichi biodiversity targets, adopted by the Parties to the CBD in 2011, were globally not met. However, we are confident that we can still bend the curve of biodiversity loss and we remain committed to playing a leading role in developing a transformative framework that will set us all on a path to halt and reverse biodiversity loss and to achieve the CBD's 2050 Vision of 'living in harmony with nature'. We will work hard with other countries to ensure that the extra time gained from the delay to COP15 negotiations is not wasted in our efforts to secure agreement to ambitious targets that will ensure more of the land and ocean is protected, ecosystems are restored, species population sizes are recovering and that by 2050 human-induced species extinctions are halted. We recognise too that targets alone are not enough, and the lessons we have learnt from the failure of the Aichi targets demonstrate the importance of putting in place the right delivery and support mechanisms to achieve the targets, such as an increase in finance. In recognition of this, in 2021 the Prime Minister committed to spending at least £3 billion of the UK's International Climate Finance (ICF) over the following five years on climate change solutions that protect and restore nature and biodiversity. Part 2 of COP15 is scheduled to take place from 25 April to 9 May 2022 and the UK will continue to develop our approach to implementing our CBD commitments and updating our plans and strategies, include actions across Government.

Defra's ODA investments will increase over the next 3 years. A suite of programmes will help address key drivers of biodiversity loss, data and knowledge gaps, promote systemic change and make a substantial contribution to delivering the government's commitment of £3bn for nature. The portfolio will contribute to restoring critical terrestrial ecosystems including through the Biodiverse Landscapes Fund, whilst Defra's contribution to the Blue Planet Fund will help protect and restore critical marine ecosystems. Flagship UK initiatives such as Darwin and the Illegal Wildlife Trade Challenge Funds will scale up to limit and reverse declines in biodiversity loss, species and wildlife. Defra will also generate and disseminate research including through the establishment of a Global Centre on Biodiversity for Climate. The portfolio also includes support for developing countries to reduce F-gases, helping to mitigate climate change and continued UK contributions to important Multilateral Environment Agreements.

As the Committee highlights, taking action at the international level is only part of how we address the UK's footprint on global biodiversity. We are also taking action domestically on the UK's consumption patterns so that our overall global footprint is nature positive. We already have a wide range of policies and programmes, both in place and planned, to reverse the decline of nature and we have set these out below in response to each of the

Committee's recommendations. Nevertheless, we know that there is still more to do, both domestically and internationally, if we are to achieve the global target to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 as laid out in the Leaders' Pledge for Nature and our G7 2030 Nature Compact. For instance, we are determined to make the UK's supply chains free from illegal deforestation. That is why we are introducing world-leading due diligence regulations for businesses through the Environment Act to increase the traceability and transparency of our supply chains, and ensuring that sustainability is built into them, so that commodities grown on illegally occupied land cannot enter the UK market.

We are also taking action to urgently protect, conserve and restore the unique biodiversity in the UK's Overseas Territories (OTs) in line with the Committee's recommendations. The UK has the world's fifth largest marine estate and through the landmark Blue Belt Programme we have protected over 4 million square kilometres of ocean, from the rich polar waters of South Georgia, to the coral reefs of Pitcairn, and we are continuing to support all OTs to protect and sustainably manage their precious marine environments.

In conclusion, we were the first advanced economy in the world to set a legally binding target to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and our recently published Net Zero Strategy sets out the roadmap for achieving this through a green and just transition of our economy. But we need this economic transition for nature too. The Dasgupta Review, commissioned by the government and published in February 2021, sets out how nature underpins our global economy, our reliance upon its free ecosystem services, and the subsequent urgent need to appropriately value nature in our economic planning. The government has committed to take action in its response to the Review, and has already updated the Treasury's Green Book in 2018 to take account of natural capital impacts, with further work in progress to produce supplementary guidance on Biodiversity Valuation for the Green Book. In taking action to implement both the Strategy and the Review's recommendations, we will enable the UK to change our consumption and production patterns, reducing our footprint on global biodiversity through the transition to a nature-positive pathway.

## Response to the Environmental Audit Committee's recommendations

**1. *We recommend that the Government urgently prioritise the development of the indicator on overseas environmental impacts of UK consumption of key commodities, since a better understanding of the environmental impacts of imported products is crucial to meeting the Government's objectives in this regard. The indicator ought to be prepared for release not later than the date of the next Outcome Indicator Framework update. We also recommend that the Government commit to setting an environmental footprint target using this indicator once developed.*** (Paragraph 25)

When first published in 2019, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Outcome Indicator Framework included a commitment to develop an indicator describing overseas environmental impacts of UK consumption of key commodities (Indicator K1<sup>1</sup>).

We piloted an approach in development of this indicator in 2018 and 2019 and subsequently used this pilot to develop a methodology capable of measuring the overseas environmental impact of UK consumption. This work was undertaken by the Joint Nature Conservation

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan-progress-reports>

Committee (JNCC) and the findings were published in two stages: a first set of results in May 2021<sup>2</sup> and a second set of data published as an experimental statistic on 28 October 2021.<sup>3</sup> The indicator is composed of a range of data including tropical deforestation risk, two separate measures of biodiversity loss and greenhouse gas emissions related to tropical deforestation.

The underlying data is disaggregated by commodity, meaning that the impact of one specific commodity can be understood, as well as allowing us to identify which commodities are causing the most impact. The development of this evidence is world-leading and reflects our desire to further our understanding of our impact on the natural environment, and our commitment to leave a lighter footprint on the global environment as enshrined in the 25 Year Environment Plan.

Work is now underway to translate the outputs of the JNCC-led project into a high-level overview indicator, suitable for inclusion in the 25 Year Environment Plan Outcome Indicator Framework. It is anticipated that the resulting K1 indicator will be included in the next (2022) framework update report and over time will track the impact of UK domestic consumption on the environment overseas linked to the sustainability of the products we import.

The Environment Act (2021) gives the Secretary of State the power to set legally binding targets on any matter relating to the natural environment, or people's enjoyment of it. We believe that the best way to deliver targets is through a robust, evidence-led process and we need to ensure that a target is the right mechanism for driving positive results.

While the above indicator better informs our understanding of the actions that may be needed, the global data landscape is not yet mature enough to monitor relevant progress on many metrics. We want to make sure that any interventions to reduce our global footprint can be effectively monitored and enforced. We will work with others to determine how the results of our indicator work can inform policy going forward. We are committed to leaving a lighter footprint on the global environment and will take decisive action to support this. However, the Government will not consider setting a target until it can be certain that it would be supported by a robust evidence base and not result in unintended consequences, such as potential displacement impacts.

**2. *In the Net Zero Strategy, the Government should commit to evaluating all taxation changes against how well they deliver on the Government's environmental objectives. The Government's approach to how taxation changes will be developed and assessed to achieve this should also be set out in the Strategy.*** (Paragraph 28)

We agree that it is important to consider the environmental impacts of relevant tax changes. As set out previously in our response<sup>4</sup> to the Public Accounts Committee's recommendation on this matter, the government already carefully considers the environmental implications of relevant measures.

2 <https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/709e0304-0460-4f83-9dcd-3fb490f5e676>

3 <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/ukbi-a4-global-biodiversity-impact>

4 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/997065/CCS207\\_CCS0621746140-001\\_Treasury\\_Minutes\\_WebAccessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/997065/CCS207_CCS0621746140-001_Treasury_Minutes_WebAccessible.pdf)

We also publish environmental assessments for relevant environmental tax changes, such as the Plastic Packaging Tax. HM Treasury and HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) will continue to carefully consider options on assessment and publication of environmental impacts, taking into account the relevancy of environmental impacts to the tax measure. In addition, HMRC is exploring options to further strengthen the analytical approach to monitoring, evaluating and quantifying the environmental impacts of tax measures, including their wider impacts. Our approach to this issue will be kept under review, including at future Budgets.

However, it would not be practical, cost effective or beneficial to consider detailed environmental impacts for every tax change, such as any changes to the personal allowances for income tax or employer National Insurance Contributions. We therefore do not agree with the Committee's specific recommendation on this matter.

**3. *The Net Zero Strategy should include an explicit commitment to Net Zero stress test all future fiscal events and a commitment to develop a nature stress test to be used for fiscal events. The Net Zero Strategy must be published before the start of COP26.*** (Paragraph 29)

The Net Zero Strategy was published on 19 October 2021, ahead of the start of COP26. The "Embedding Net Zero in Government" chapter sets out how we will monitor progress to ensure we stay on track for our emissions targets. It includes commitments to "*ensure that decisions taken on government spending are informed by their impact on meeting net zero*" and to "*require the government to reflect environmental issues in national policy making*".

At fiscal events, including the recent Spending Review 2021 (SR21), all government departments are required to prepare their spending proposals in line with the Green Book on Appraisal and Evaluation issued by HM Treasury. The Green Book already mandates the consideration of climate and environmental impacts in spending. It was updated in 2018 to take fuller account of the natural capital impacts, and in 2020 to emphasise that policies must be developed and assessed against how well they deliver on the Government's long-term policy aims such as net zero.

SR21 investment decisions have been informed by data and evidence on the expected contribution of proposals to meeting net zero carbon emissions by 2050 and assessed within the context of the broader suite of policies set out in the Net Zero Strategy.

In addition, the independent Dasgupta Review on the Economics of Biodiversity was commissioned by HM Treasury and published in February 2021. The government agrees with the Review's central conclusion: nature, and the biodiversity that underpins it, ultimately sustains our economies, livelihoods and well-being, and so economic and financial decision making must account for this. HM Treasury has convened a group of experts, including academic economists and scientists as well as practitioners, to produce supplementary guidance on Biodiversity Valuation for the Green Book, in addition to the guidance on natural capital. This will lead to new supplementary guidance to the Green Book for valuing biodiversity as part of appraisal for future fiscal events.

**4. We recommend that sustainability impact assessments be conducted for all future trade agreements and that as part of the Government's Nature Strategy the Government consider how to monitor and deliver environmental net gain in trade deals. In response to this report the Government should set out how it intends to widen participation in the Wildlife Financial Taskforce, whether through proposing a statutory obligation on businesses of a certain size, or through other means.** (Paragraph 36)

We agree that an assessment of the environmental impacts is an important element of all trade deals and to that end we do commission scoping and impact assessments in relation to the free trade agreements which we are pursuing with various partners. Scoping and impact assessments for new Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) post-Brexit include both quantitative and qualitative assessments of the impacts on several aspects of the environment, including greenhouse gas emissions, air and water quality, and biodiversity. The Secretary of State for International Trade will work closely with other government departments to assess the environmental impacts of new FTAs, and to improve their coverage and approach. This includes developing methodological improvements and exploring further qualitative assessments, exploiting new data and evidence.

For example, the UK-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Impact Assessment included estimates of the impact of the agreement on UK greenhouse gas emissions (CO<sub>2</sub> and non-CO<sub>2</sub>), UK transport emissions (aviation and maritime), and domestic consumption of fossil fuels. Relevant government departments contributed to qualitative assessments relating to biodiversity, water use and water quality, air quality, low carbon economy impacts, forestry and timber, resources and waste, fisheries and marine.

We will explore further the complexities of applying net gain to trade and assess its feasibility using analytical evidence. The environmental impacts of trade arise from production, consumption, and transport, by many different actors in a complex supply chain. In addition, under the Agriculture Act, there is a duty for the Secretary of State for International Trade to report to Parliament on whether, or to what extent, measures in new FTAs relating to trade in agricultural products are consistent with maintaining UK levels of statutory protection in relation to human, animal or plant life or health, animal welfare and the environment.

Further, the independent Trade and Agriculture Commission will scrutinise signed FTAs and inform Parliament's understanding of whether the contents of an FTA are consistent with the maintenance of UK levels of statutory protection for the following: UK animal and plant health standards; UK animal welfare standards; and environmental standards as they relate to agricultural products.

We are committed to tackling the illegal wildlife trade, and we are investing over £46m internationally between 2014 and 2022 to counter the illegal trade for the benefit of wildlife and communities. The financial sector has an important role to play in combating the illegal wildlife trade, including through the exchange of financial information to identify and tackle the illicit financial flows associated with illegal wildlife trafficking. The UK Government welcomes the work of the United for Wildlife Financial Taskforce, and as a signatory to the 'Declaration of the United for Wildlife Financial Taskforce', is committed to supporting its work. The United for Wildlife Financial Taskforce is a voluntary private-sector-led initiative and the UK Government cannot impose statutory membership obligations. However, we have encouraged greater participation by promoting the launch

of the Taskforce's regional chapters across Africa and Asia, which bring together relevant stakeholders from across the financial sector, to share information in order to tackle the illegal wildlife trade more effectively.

Furthermore, at the 2018 Illegal Wildlife Trade Conference hosted by the UK Government, His Royal Highness the Duke of Cambridge underlined the importance of the role of the private sector in tackling illegal wildlife trade. Lord Hague of Richmond chaired a panel discussion during which private sector stakeholders were given the opportunity to showcase actions that they, and other private sector stakeholders, could do to help tackle illegal wildlife trade.

Under our G7 Presidency we also secured commitment by the G7 to respond to the proposed actions in the Financial Action Task Force report on 'Money Laundering and the Illegal Wildlife Trade'. This would help to identify, assess and address money laundering risks relating to illegal wildlife trade, and implement and strengthen registries of company beneficial ownership information, in order to provide better access to information for law enforcement agencies and competent authorities in tackling illicit finance.

5. ***To increase sustainability within UK global supply chains, we recommend that:***

- a) ***in its response to this report, the Government should set out a clear and accessible definition of sustainability within the context of the Government Buying Standards;***

We are committed to improving the sustainability of public procurement. Our [Greening Government Commitments Framework for 2021 to 2025](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/greening-government-commitments-2021-to-2025/greening-government-commitments-2021-to-2025)<sup>5</sup> published in October 2021, notes the need for a review of our sustainable procurement commitment during the 2021–25 period and sets out our intentions for further work. The review will consider the work that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Cabinet Office and other departments are leading so that government procurement is aligned with our net zero and environmental commitments. It will factor in the recommendations of the Global Resource Initiative, which is tackling deforestation in government procurement supply chains, specifically for food and agricultural commodity procurement. In addition, as part of this review, we will take into account the Committee's recommendation regarding clear, accessible definitions.

- b) ***the Government reinstate the Greening Government Commitments for mandatory reporting on sustainable procurement as part of the Government Buying Standards by the end of 2021;***

We have recently published the Greening Government Commitments Framework for 2021 to 2025, against which government departments will report from March 2021. This mandates reporting on sustainable procurement and now applies to more of the government estate than ever before. This reporting ensures that departments set out what procedures it has in place to champion, enable and monitor sustainable procurement, embed compliance with the Government Buying Standards (GBS), and

5 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/greening-government-commitments-2021-to-2025/greening-government-commitments-2021-to-2025>

understand and reduce supply chain impacts. During this framework period, we will update these requirements to include a renewed focus on global impacts and government priorities to address sustainability. We are committed to understanding how we can use government spending to further reduce environmental impacts and maximise sustainable outcomes through government contracts.

- c) ***the Government Buying Standards should require all acquired forest-risk commodities (in addition to palm oil and paper) to be certified as sustainably produced;***

We are committed to tackling deforestation and transitioning to more sustainable supply chains across the economy, which is key to protecting ecosystems and preventing biodiversity loss. GBS for furniture and construction projects include the requirement to meet the Government's Timber Procurement Policy (TPP). The TPP is mandatory for all central government departments, executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) in England. The TPP applies to products using virgin timber and wood derived products which must originate from an independently verifiable legal and sustainable source. To this end, we agree that public procurement should evolve to reflect government priorities and latest evidence.

The Government Buying Standard for Food (GBSF) currently includes a mandatory requirement that all palm oil used for cooking, and as an ingredient, must be sustainably produced. We have committed to a consultation on strengthening the GBSF in early 2022. The consultation will seek views on how the GBSF can support the transition to more sustainably and responsibly sourced food products and catering services. This is in line with the Committee's recommendation, and that of the Global Resource Initiative, to strengthen the focus on sustainable procurement across the public sector.

The Environment Act (2021) also helps address illegal deforestation in our supply chains by making it illegal for businesses in scope to use regulated forest risk commodities if they have been produced on land illegally owned or occupied. Businesses in scope will also have to carry out a due diligence exercise, and report on it annually. Where public procurement companies are in scope of the new law, they will have to abide by these requirements.

- d) ***And the Government Buying Standards should be mandatory for all large public bodies, like the NHS and prisons. Annual reporting on compliance against public procurement policies should be mandatory for these large public bodies.*** (Paragraph 54)

The Greening Government Commitments require compliance with Government Buying Standards. This means they apply to 20 core Ministerial and non-Ministerial departments, their executive agencies

and executive non-departmental public bodies (but not advisory NDPBs), unless specifically exempted. We also encourage the wider public sector to specify the minimum mandatory standards in tenders.

For food and catering, Government Buying Standards are obligatory for large public bodies. Meals for Government canteens, public prisons and the armed forces are all subject to the Government Buying Standard for Food (GBSF). The GBSF is also an embedded mandatory requirement within the Hospital Food Standards for NHS England hospitals.

The government recognises the need for a robust process to monitor adoption of the Government Buying Standards. We publish an annual report on progress against the Greening Government Commitments (GGC) including reporting against the sustainable procurement commitment. We are clear that any further reporting should be published, encouraging compliance and best practice sharing.

**6. *Within the National Food Strategy, the Government should consider how a natural capital approach could be adopted without placing a disproportionate financial burden on farmers or consumers.*** (Paragraph 56)

Our forthcoming Government Food Strategy will set out our ambition and priorities for a food system that will deliver for people, nature and climate. In doing so it will support our farmers to continue to produce the high-quality, high-welfare produce for which they are renowned. As part of this, Defra is working with relevant departments across Government to explore options to reduce carbon emissions from food production, incentivise land use change to sequester more carbon and restore nature, and preserve natural resources. We will seek to acknowledge the particular value of natural capital to food security through the strategy.

We are also taking a natural capital approach through our agricultural transition which will reward farmers for providing public goods that improve and protect the environment. We are introducing three environmental land management schemes: The Sustainable Farming Incentive, Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery. Together, these schemes are intended to provide a powerful vehicle for achieving the goals of the 25 Year Environment Plan and our commitment to net zero emissions by 2050, while supporting our rural economy. Further detail on our approach to supporting and enhancing biodiversity in England, including through our reform of agricultural subsidies, is set out in our response to the Committee's first report 'Biodiversity in the UK: Bloom or Bust'.<sup>6</sup>

**7. *To increase the sustainable use of forest-risk commodities we recommend that the Government make it illegal for UK businesses and the finance sector to use commodities linked to deforestation and, at the very least, include the finance sector within the scope of the provisions on forest-risk commodities in the Environment Bill.*** (Paragraph 58)

We are committed to making the UK the best place in the world for green and sustainable investment and were the first country in the world to commit to fully mandatory reporting by businesses across the economy on the financial risks posed by climate change.

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6 <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7463/documents/78144/default>

We are introducing world-leading legislation through the Environment Act (2021) to tackle illegal deforestation in UK supply chains. This legislation is designed for a very specific purpose: ensuring businesses operating in the UK are not using products that have come from illegally used or occupied land. This law will help us ensure there is no place on our supermarket shelves for commodities that have been grown on land that is illegally occupied or used, and to support other countries to strengthen and enforce their forest protection measures.

Our new integrated Sustainability Disclosure Requirements go further by requiring companies, asset managers, asset owners and their investment products to report on the impact they are having on the climate and environment, helping to ensure investors have the information they need to drive positive environmental impact. These disclosures will provide investors and market participants with the information they need to take climate and the environment, including deforestation, into account when making investment decisions.

The UK is also helping to tackle greenwashing by implementing the UK green taxonomy which will create a common definition of environmentally sustainable economic activities for investment purposes for the first time. There are also tools being developed specifically to drive transparency in the financial sector in relation to nature, for example the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD).

These are all parts of a wider package of measures to improve the sustainability of our supply chains and will contribute to global efforts to protect forests and other ecosystems. In the 2030 Nature Compact, we secured the first ever commitment from G7 Leaders to support sustainable supply chains that decouple agricultural production from deforestation and forest degradation. The UK, as COP26 president, has launched the Forest Agriculture and Commodity Trade (FACT) Dialogue, a pioneering campaign to bring governments from around the world together to agree a series of measures to increase the sustainability of agricultural production and in particular reduce deforestation associated with the production of commodities such as cocoa, palm oil and soy.

During COP26, commitments have been made to help alter the financial landscape in order to pave the way to halting and reversing forest loss and land degradation by 2030. 12 countries, including the UK, have agreed to provide £8.75 billion of finance and billions more has been pledged by philanthropic donors. CEOs representing assets worth over \$8.7 trillion have also committed to eliminating investment in activities linked to agricultural commodity-driven deforestation and governments representing 75% of trade in commodities that can threaten forests have signed up to the FACT Statement.

***8. To further improve the state of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories, we recommend that gaps in their protection be rectified. Namely, we recommend that:***

- a) ***Ministers assure and set out the long-term funding plan for the Blue Belt Programme. In response to this report the Government should set out the programme's long term timetable, budget, and status following the Government's 2021 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy.***

We will continue to support the British Overseas Territories to enhance protection for their marine environments, as stated in the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy. We are looking at options to secure funding for the Blue Belt programme for the next three years, now that SR21 has been announced. Blue Belt programme funding will include support for Overseas Territories newly joining the programme, in the Caribbean and elsewhere, as well as those Territories which are already part of the Blue Belt. We have started work to identify priorities and plan proposed activities for the next financial year and future years with the Overseas Territories and UK delivery partners.

- b) ***Ministers review the environmental funding gap implications for the Overseas Territories following the UK leaving the EU. In response to this report Ministers should set out how the UK could fund landscape scale environmental projects with the potential for transformative biodiversity restoration.***

The 25 Year Environment Plan makes clear that public funding will continue to play an important role in protecting and enhancing our natural environment in the Overseas Territories. The announcement to make £10 million per annum available in the Darwin Plus Programme underlines the government's commitment to protect the Overseas Territories' unique environments, including through funding projects to tackle the threat posed by invasive non-native species.

We are working closely with representatives from the Overseas Territories governments to develop the case for restructuring the Darwin Plus Programme to include larger landscape scale environmental projects and smaller capacity building grants for Overseas Territories governments, alongside the established programme of funding. We will continue to engage with the Overseas Territories to ensure that our future plans properly reflect their priorities.

The Government has also continued to support transformative projects such as the RSPB's Gough Island Restoration Programme which has now entered its final phase. We are pleased to report that the eradication of non-native mice has been delivered to the best standards possible and the release programme for Gough bunting is well underway. The Gough moorhens have already been returned to their natural environment and there will be an ongoing monitoring process up until the end of 2023 to validate whether the operation has been successful.

- c) ***In the Government's response to this report, Ministers should evaluate the feasibility of an environmental research portal for Overseas Territories.***

We will initiate a feasibility study for an environmental research portal for Overseas Territories (OTs). We will consult with Overseas Territories representatives at our next OT roundtable in January 2022.

- d) ***Ministers should consider opportunities to use increasing global aerial surveillance capabilities from high altitude or space to monitor the Blue Belt Programme.*** (Paragraph 75)

Under the Blue Belt programme, we have established the Blue Belt Surveillance & Intelligence Hub (BBSIH), using a wide range of satellite systems to assess compliance and detect possible illegal activity across the waters of the Overseas Territories in the programme. The programme uses a suite of satellite (space) systems working closely with the Joint Maritime Security Centre to access Automatic Information System (AIS) intelligence. The programme has a contract with OceanMind for the analysis of Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) data supplemented with Sentinel 1 satellite data, electro-optical imagery and Visible Infrared Imagery Radiometry Suite (VIIRS) satellite data. Lastly, the programme is developing drones, in partnership with Virginia Tech and Loughborough University, and is trialling passive acoustics as a compliance and enforcement capability. The BBSIH uses intelligence from these sources to provide compliance information and recommendations to the Overseas Territories, as well as informing engagement with other states and international organisations.

9. ***We recommend that in response to this report the Government detail how it intends to nature-proof overseas development assistance, and how compliance with this commitment will be monitored.*** (Paragraph 89)

In the Government's response to the Dasgupta Review on The Economics of Biodiversity, the UK committed to ensure all new bilateral official development assistance does no harm to nature. It builds on the commitment we made two years ago to ensure all our aid is consistent with our climate objectives, which led us to stopping new support for the fossil fuel energy sector overseas from March 2021. This announcement is a step towards the Government's aim to integrate nature into decision making.

The FCDO has made it mandatory for staff to assess both environmental impacts and opportunities when designing programmes and to ensure that steps are taken to avoid harm. Compliance is monitored through the project approval process and existing assurance systems, and we will be collating and disseminating examples of best practice.

Further, from protecting mangroves in Madagascar to supporting local farmers in Brazil, Defra's overseas development assistance programmes are already pioneering nature-based solutions which address biodiversity loss and climate change and supporting the transition to sustainable land use, bringing real and tangible benefits for climate, people and biodiversity.

Finally, the Government offers grant schemes for practical projects operating in ODA-eligible countries: the Darwin Initiative that aims to protect biodiversity and the natural environment; and the IWT Challenge Fund which provides funding to practical projects around the world to tackle IWT. Since 1992, the Darwin Initiative has awarded over £168 million to more than 1,162 projects across 159 countries. We are investing over £46 million between 2014 and 2022 to counter the illegal wildlife trade by reducing demand, strengthening enforcement, ensuring effective legal frameworks and developing sustainable livelihoods.

Together with Norway and Germany, we collectively pledged to provide US\$5 billion from 2015 – 2020 to encourage ambitious action from developing countries to protect their forests and promote more sustainable patterns of land use. Defra's contribution is expected to deliver over 500,000 hectares of avoided deforestation and the protection of associated biodiversity.

**10. *In promoting a transformative Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework, we recommend that the UK Government advocate:***

- ***A strengthening of the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework's 2030 mission to align with the Leaders' Pledge for Nature and G7 2030 Nature Compact to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.***

We are seeking a commitment to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 in the post-2020 global biodiversity framework at CBD COP15. Such a commitment is highly ambitious and will require the implementation of transformative changes in the way we use and manage nature globally, including measures to address impacts of climate change on biodiversity.

Under our G7 Presidency, at the Summit in Carbis Bay in June 2021, the G7 Leaders agreed a 2030 Nature Compact, committing to the global mission to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 as well as supporting new global targets to conserve or protect at least 30% of global land and at least 30% of the global ocean. G7 Leaders also agreed to support an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework to be adopted by parties at CBD COP15 which sets ambitious goals, strengthens implementation, and embraces regular reporting and review.

The UK further advocated for a transformative Post-2020 global biodiversity framework during the G20 Environment Ministers meeting and at the G20 Leaders' Summit in Rome. G20 Leaders called on Parties to the CBD to adopt an ambitious, balanced, practical, effective, robust and transformative post 2020 global biodiversity framework. Leaders and Environment Ministers also recognised the efforts made by countries on the Leader's Pledge for Nature (LPN) and to ensure that at least 30 % of global land and at least 30 % of the global ocean and seas are conserved or protected by 2030 and committed to help make progress towards this objective.

The LPN – negotiations on which were co-led by the UK, Costa Rica and the European Commission - sets out ten urgent actions to put biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030, including an explicit commitment (LPN commitment 2) to agree an ambitious post-2020 global diversity framework at CBD COP15. The UK is a key member of the LPN core group and has strongly advocated that the delivery of the LPN commitment 2 is a priority in 2022.

2. Furthermore, in August 2021, at the PreCOP of the CBD hosted by Colombia, the LPN came together with the signatories of the High Ambition Coalition (HAC) and the Global Ocean Alliance (GOA) and presented a joint

statement. In it, members of the three coalitions stated their determination to work together towards CBD COP15 to translate joint commitments into concrete agreements and ambition in the global biodiversity framework.

- ***A more ambitious, SMARTer species goal (Goal A) which commits to stopping human-induced extinctions.***

We agree with the recommendation to support a more ambitious Goal A which addresses conservation of ecosystems, species and genetic diversity, and which includes commitments to significantly reduce species extinction risk and to halt human-induced extinctions. It is critical we act now, internationally and at home, to protect and conserve all elements of biodiversity.

At the same time, we note that supporting healthy and resilient populations of all species and halting human-induced species extinctions are challenging objectives. An ambitious conservation goal of this kind must be supported by correspondingly ambitious targets that tackle all the direct and indirect drivers of biodiversity loss on accelerated delivery timelines. We note in particular that effectively and equitably managed protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) can play a crucial role in addressing biodiversity loss and we therefore strongly support a global target to protect at least 30% of the land and at least 30% of the ocean by 2030.

We agree with the Committee's recommendation that Goal A should be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Ambitious, Realistic and Timebound), and support this objective across the entire post-2020 global biodiversity framework. We are working in pursuit of a post-2020 global biodiversity framework that is based on and supported by the latest scientific evidence and will drive stretching level of ambition. In the ongoing global negotiations, the UK will continue to push for ambitious global targets and goals, supported by increased finance for nature and strengthened reporting and review mechanisms to facilitate achievement. In the 2030 Nature Compact, we secured a commitment from the G7 Leaders to work together to agree and meet targets to increase the abundance of species populations worldwide, significantly reduce overall species extinction risk and eventually stop human-induced extinctions.

We are also continuing to announce actions and commitments in England which will implement some of the measures we want and expect to see under the post-2020 framework. These include, for example, protecting 30% of land and sea, and publishing tree and peat action plans for England. Furthermore, we are already setting key environmental targets in law in England, including for biodiversity. Our announcement that we will set a legally binding target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030 underlines our domestic ambition and our commitment to the CBD. We will use these commitments to encourage international partners to make similarly ambitious commitments.

- ***Inclusion of reference to nature-based solutions in Target 8, so that the UNFCCC and UNCBD processes can be better linked.***

We will seek to negotiate a reference to nature-based solutions in Target 8. We strongly support the inclusion of nature-based solutions in the post 2020 global biodiversity framework in order to emphasise the critical role of nature-based solutions for addressing climate change, biodiversity loss and other societal and environmental challenges in an integrated way. We have actively called for the recognition of the benefits of nature-based solutions and for its inclusion in the global biodiversity framework during the ongoing global negotiations under the CBD.

A key priority for the UK at the resumed session of the Fifth UN Environment Assembly in February 2022 is agreeing consensus on the term 'Nature-based Solutions' through adoption of a resolution on the matter. Securing an internationally agreed definition for the term could help build consensus in the negotiations under the CBD around actions that can be taken to jointly secure objectives of the Paris Agreement and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework.

As the joint Presidents of UNFCCC COP26, we are also actively promoting nature-based solutions as a key solution to tackling both climate change and biodiversity loss. There is a broad body of evidence which demonstrates that nature-based solutions have an essential role in contributing to climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience, addressing biodiversity loss, and providing benefits to people and livelihoods.

The COPs of the 1992 Rio Conventions (UNFCCC COP26, CBD COP15 and UNCCD COP15 on land degradation) are due to fall in close succession to each other ahead of their 30th anniversary in 2022, creating an extraordinary opportunity to emphasise the linkages across their agendas and to address the joint crises of biodiversity loss and climate change, as well as land degradation, in an integrated way. That is why we have initiated the Rio Linkages Initiative (RLI) with the incumbent and incoming Rio Convention Presidencies, as well as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) which finances all three Conventions. The RLI aims to build political will and global momentum on the importance of integration across the Rio Conventions, including by facilitating knowledge-sharing to support integrated approaches such as nature-based solutions.

The UK Presidency placed nature at the heart of COP26. Our priority is to continue to ensure there is global recognition that the biodiversity and climate crises are inextricable, and that action on nature is vital for achieving Paris goals. We have been working with countries and communities to protect and restore forests and critical ecosystems; transition to sustainable agriculture and land use; mobilise and increase the quality and quantity of global financial flows from both the public and private sources for nature and nature-based solutions; and raise political ambition on nature. Securing reference to nature-based solutions in the GBF, in Target 8 in particular, could therefore strengthen the linkages between the Rio Conventions, better

aligning efforts to drive progress on the interrelated issues of biodiversity and climate change and achieve mutually reinforcing outcomes for COP15 and COP26.

- ***Stronger wording on the need to reduce unsustainable consumption and production patterns amongst developed countries.***

We agree that in order to meet the CBD's 2050 vision, we need to reduce unsustainable consumption and production patterns. Within the post-2020 global biodiversity framework we are negotiating targets aimed at governments and the private sector. These targets focus on transitioning towards sustainable sourcing and supply chains and mainstreaming biodiversity within production processes, ensuring nature is embedded into decision making.

As joint COP26 President, we launched the Forest, Agriculture and Commodity Trade (FACT) Dialogue, a ground-breaking partnership between governments of producer and consumer countries committed to taking action to transition to more sustainable commodity production and global trade. At COP26, we announced a roadmap of actions reflecting discussions over the last 18 months, which seek to protect forests whilst promoting sustainable trade and development, in a way that respects all countries' interests and builds on research, development and innovation. We will work with other countries to put these into practice in the coming years. We also recognise the critical role that the private sector must play in addressing biodiversity loss along their value chains.

The UK government is supporting and contributing to the funding of the market-led, global TNFD which is set to provide a risk management and disclosure framework for corporates and financial institutions to report and act on evolving nature-related risks. The taskforce is co-chaired by Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Executive Secretary of the CBD, and the TNFD will support a shift in global financial flows away from nature-negative outcomes and toward nature-positive outcomes.

- ***An ambitious Paris-style review mechanism for biodiversity, which encourages Parties to 'ratchet' the level of ambition of their National Targets at regular review intervals.***

There are a number of existing mechanisms under the CBD that facilitate the planning, reporting, monitoring and review of national and international implementation of the Convention and relevant commitments. The Nature Compact also includes a commitment to review progress, including at the G7 Leaders' Summit in 2026 when the G7 will review options to ratchet up action and ambition, as needed, to ensure delivery of the 2030 vision. However, in order to better hold Parties to account, the UK believes that these existing mechanisms must be strengthened. To increase transparency and accountability, the UK is seeking National Reports format to be revised

and streamlined, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans to be updated without delay, and a clear presentation of each Party's national targets or commitments towards the global goals and targets.

We support an early review of ambition to highlight areas where more efforts may be needed to meet the global goals and targets, and a mid-term review and final review of implementation during the cycle to 2030 (i.e. at 4-year intervals). The UK believes this will build on existing mechanisms and drive Parties to ratchet up both their ambition and implementation where there are gaps. The UK also believes a robust, deliverable and clearly articulated approach to use of indicators is crucial for defining the ambition in targets and monitoring our progress.

The UK, in partnership with Norway, is leading a programme of workshops with Parties to build support for a more ambitious framework of accountability.

- ***A dedicated financial mechanism for the UNCBD.*** (Paragraph 135)

To ensure that the post-2020 global biodiversity framework drives global action, it is essential that it is supported by an uplift in financing for nature. Mobilising resources from all sources (public and private), and at all levels (domestic and international) will be vital to securing global agreement of the framework, as well as supporting implementation of the goals and targets. This includes increasing the amount of public and private finance flowing towards activities that protect and restore nature. It also means changing existing flows of finance to eliminate those that do harm to nature and shift towards nature positive investments.

The GEF was adopted in 1996 by all Parties as the financial mechanism for the Convention, as set out in Article 21. The GEF has consistently performed well in Project Completion Reports (PCRs) of previous replenishments consistently scoring A for the programme overall. It was judged "good" for both its fit with UK development objectives and for its organisational strength in the most recent Multilateral Development Review. GEF has a strong, consistent track record in achieving good project performance with 80% of all projects achieving expected outcomes.

The GEF8 replenishment is currently being negotiated for the period 2022–26. There are strong calls for a robust replenishment, including from the UNFCCC COP26 guidance to GEF, which asked developed country Parties to make financial contributions. Under GEF7 the largest proportion of funding went to biodiversity at 31%. In the GEF8 replenishment negotiations a number of donors have expressed a desire to maintain significant finance for biodiversity.

In accordance with Article 21, the Conference of the Parties will undertake its next review into the effectiveness of the GEF at COP16 and take any appropriate action to improve the effectiveness of the GEF as necessary.

At COP15 Parties will agree the terms of reference for this review. The UK supports the GEF as the agreed financial mechanism for the Convention and its Protocols, and will closely follow the review at COP16.

Aligning financial flows with biodiversity is a crucial action in supporting the protection and restoration of nature and the private sector also has a key role to play in shifting existing flows of private finance towards nature positive activities. We are taking a leading role in facilitating high level exchanges with the financial sector to ensure that the CBD agrees relevant and stretching targets and ambitions, and that the sector is ready to respond.

**11. *To help pair the UNCBD and UNFCCC COPs, we recommend the UK explore opportunities to support China on leading international environmental negotiations. We also recommend that China and the UK collaborate on how to integrate nature based solutions across both COPs; and we recommend that the UK encourage China to sign the Leaders' Pledge for Nature as a demonstration of its environmental leadership ahead of COP15.*** (Paragraph 136)

We know that addressing climate change is not possible without also addressing biodiversity loss, and vice versa. The UK is addressing these dual threats together and placed nature at the heart of our presidency of the UNFCCC COP26. Many of the outcomes from COP26 have positive implications for nature (please see the summary of outcomes listed in part three of HMG's response to recommendation 10). Securing the outcomes on tackling deforestation and land-use change, nature-based solutions, and increasing the finance (public and private) flowing to nature at COP26 will be mutually beneficial for the success of CBD COP15.

As hosts of COP26, we are in a unique position to work with China to integrate global action on climate change and biodiversity to achieve the step-change needed to tackle these global issues. There has been regular and productive engagement between the UK and China in the preparations for COP15 and COP26. For instance, UK COP President Designate Alok Sharma travelled to China in September for extensive discussions with China's Special Envoy for Climate Change, Minister Xie Zhenhua, and held calls with China's Environment Minister, Energy Minister, and Vice-Premier. The UK has worked alongside China on the 'Kunming Declaration', which highlights the synergies between COP26 and COP15 and will help in maintaining global political momentum to adopt an ambitious post-2020 global framework. We will continue to welcome constructive cooperation together with China in this super year for nature.

China has also endorsed the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on forests and land-use, which aims to halt and reverse forest loss by 2030, and the Glasgow breakthrough statements. In our capacity as COP26 President, we are also working with the Rio Convention Presidencies (including China as CBD COP15 President), Secretariats and the GEF on joint activities that promote integrated approaches to tackling biodiversity loss, climate change, and land degradation. These joint activities will take place ahead of, at, and after our respective COPs, to build political will and global momentum on the importance of integration, whilst also facilitating knowledge-sharing on areas including nature-based solutions.

This initiative strongly reinforces the Leaders' Pledge for Nature (LPN) which includes a key commitment to end siloed approaches across interlinked environmental crises and seeks to drive and maintain momentum on nature in advance of, and following, COP26 and COP15. The LPN has so far been signed by 94 world leaders (including the EU) and over 100 non-state actors. Together, these endorsers represent 38% of global GDP and over 2 billion people, signifying a groundswell of ambition to tackle the twin crises of climate and biodiversity loss.

We encourage all countries that have not yet done so to sign the LPN. Although China have not yet endorsed it, we will continue to engage them on the LPN and they remain supportive of the initiative having worked closely with us in their capacity as the incoming CBD COP15 President. H.E. Mr. Huang Runqiu, the Chinese Minister of Ecology and Environment recently spoke at the joint High-Level UNGA76 event 'Transformative Action for Nature & People' in support of the LPN, the Global Ocean Alliance and High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People.