

Additional written evidence from Wildlife and Countryside Link, and The Wildlife Trusts

Re: Additional evidence on a State of Nature target for the Environmental Audit Committee inquiry on Biodiversity and Ecosystems

We are writing on behalf of The Wildlife Trusts and Wildlife and Countryside Link to offer further evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into Biodiversity and Ecosystems. This follows the written evidence submitted in September 2020 and oral evidence provided by The Wildlife Trusts' CEO Craig Bennett in November 2020.

The Wildlife Trusts, alongside a coalition of over 50 nature organisations as part of Wildlife and Countryside Link, have recently called on the Government to back up in law the Prime Minister's commitment to reverse nature's decline by 2030 through a State of Nature target in the Environment Bill. This would be a legally-binding target to halt the decline of habitats and species by 2030 at the latest. We think of it as a "net zero for nature" to ensure that action to solve the ecological crisis has the same statutory force as action on climate change.

Such a target would be transformative for our natural environment and would demonstrate genuine international leadership on biodiversity loss. It would help drive improvements in terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems. We would therefore urge you to consider it as part of your Committee's Biodiversity and Ecosystems inquiry recommendations.

With the Prime Minister a driving force behind the Leaders' Pledge for Nature, which commits to reversing biodiversity loss by 2030, the UK should be a key advocate for translating this into accountable and measurable targets at home. Setting a legally binding target for the government to reverse the decline of nature by 2030, taking into account species abundance, species extinction risk and the extent and condition of habitats, would ensure that words become action and a crucial moment for international nature and climate diplomacy is not missed.

This level of ambition will not only set us on a path to improving our natural environment at home – it will boost the UK's environmental credibility across the world. At this year's Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD COP15) in Kunming, China, the international community is expected to agree a new set of global goals for nature for 2030. By committing in the Environment Bill to a binding 2030 target to halt and begin to reverse the decline in the state of nature at home, the Government can show domestic leadership that could help to secure a global deal.

Without this explicit target in domestic law, there is a risk that the Government's international rhetoric will not ring true.

At present the targets that fall under the Environment Bill's existing framework are too technocratic and slow, and will miss the boat for influencing international negotiations. No targets will be set under the Bill until almost 2023 and the deadline for any targets set cannot be earlier than 2038, as determined by Clause 1. The inability to set any targets for 2030 misses the timescale for both the Leaders' Pledge and the CBD COP 15 talks, meaning the 2030 commitments likely to arise from these negotiations cannot be placed in law through the Environment Bill. The restrictions on targets also prevents the UK from adopting the ambitious goals that we need if we are to play our part in tackling the climate and ecological crisis.

By including a State of Nature target in the Bill, we can ensure that we capitalise on this once-in-a-generation opportunity to pass landmark environmental legislation. It would not only ensure that the UK once again led the world by being the first country to set ambitious targets in law for the recovery of nature, but would firmly guarantee that we hand over the natural environment in a better state to the next generation.

Wildlife and Countryside Link's campaign for a State of Nature target has brought together supporters from across politics and civil society, including Stanley Johnson, George Monbiot and Save the Children. With the Environment Bill delayed until the next session of Parliament, it is vital that we use this additional time to improve the Bill with amendments such as the State of Nature target.

We are grateful for this opportunity to present further evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into Biodiversity and Ecosystems and look forward to seeing the recommendations you will make. If we can provide clarity on any of the issues mentioned in this letter, we are happy to discuss these in further detail.

Yours sincerely,

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The Wildlife Trusts

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