



# Nature Recovery for Our Survival, Prosperity and Wellbeing

*A joint statement by the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies of the UK*

*At COP15 we all have the opportunity to act with courage and vision to restore the ecosystems upon which we all depend. Biodiversity loss is already causing serious harm to people and it is a profound threat to humanity's future. It is not too late to change course, provided we act now.*

With the challenges currently facing the UK, there has never been a more critical or opportune time to invest in nature's recovery.

The evidence is clear. Nature is our life support system and our economy is embedded in nature.

Investing in nature's recovery is investing in our economic prosperity and societal wellbeing. The sooner we act to recover nature, the sooner and greater the benefits we reap.

We know that recovering nature leads to environmental security. Without healthy nature, climate stabilisation, economic security, water security and food security cannot be achieved. By investing in nature within everything we do we are investing in the prosperity and wellbeing of all.

We know the relationship between climate and biodiversity is inseparable and societies must focus on both in tandem. If we fail on one of the biodiversity or climate crises, we fail on both.

We know how to harness nature's ability to increase the prosperity and wellbeing of our four countries and we know that nature is the key to increasing our resilience and improving our environmental security. Working together we will support governments, business, and broader society to achieve nature's recovery by:

- Embedding environmental security and nature's recovery into UK decision-making frameworks. Especially when considering threats to the UK's economic security.
- Supporting the global community to commit to ambitious targets at COP15<sup>1</sup> to increase the health of the world's ecosystems quickly and effectively. Creating a level playing field as all nations work to recover and restore their ecosystems and are held to account for their collective actions.
- Supporting domestic and global monitoring and evaluation to report on progress in achieving these targets.
- Delivering on the UK's COP15 ambitions with impactful policies across the UK that incentivise and drive public and private investment in the protection and recovery of the UK's nature through all our activities.

<sup>1</sup>15th Conference of the Parties of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity in December 2022.

- Supporting governments around the world to transition to nature positive policies and legislation. Making ecosystems everywhere healthier and more productive and enhancing prosperity and wellbeing for all.
- Negotiating sustainable trade agreements that consider their impacts on nature's recovery so that trade increases rather than decreases environmental security. In turn, securing the UK's global supply chains.
- Delivering on the strong ambitions of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to drive public and private investment in nature-based solutions to achieve climate stabilisation.

Standing together as the UK's Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies we recognise the strength and urgency of the evidence. We are speaking with one voice at this time of nature crisis to highlight the need for action to recover nature now, both in the UK and globally. So that the UK's prosperity and wellbeing can be secured into the future.

We stand ready to support the four UK Governments as advisers and delivery partners. To assist the UK in delivering domestically on its ambitious global commitments, to recover the UK's nature and provide a secure, sustainable future for all.

### **Joint Nature Conservation Committee**

Professor Colin Galbraith FRSE, Chair

Dr Gemma Harper OBE, Chief Executive Officer

### **Natural England**

Tony Juniper CBE, Chair

Marian Spain, Chief Executive Officer

### **Natural Resources Wales**

Sir David Henshaw, Chair

Clare Pillman CB OBE, Chief Executive Officer

### **NatureScot**

Dr Mike Cantlay OBE, Chair

Francesca Osowska OBE FRSE, Chief Executive Officer

### **Northern Ireland Environment Agency**

Paul Donnelly, Chief Executive Officer

### **Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside**

Dr Hilary Kirkpatrick, Chair

November 2022



# Nature Recovery for Our Survival, Prosperity and Wellbeing: The Evidence

As the UK's Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies, we outlined the importance and relevance of nature, including positive actions the UK can take, in our Nature Positive 2030 Summary Report and accompanying Evidence Report<sup>2</sup>.

Nature underpins the global markets that supply our goods and services. With species and ecosystems providing the nutrients, oxygen, water, shelter, disease regulation and climate regulation that we need to facilitate our prosperity and our wellbeing.

Biodiversity, including the species and ecosystems that comprise life on Earth, enables nature to be productive. Much like how a diverse portfolio of financial assets reduces risk and uncertainty, a diversity of species and ecosystems provides us with more resilient and productive nature overall.

As HM Treasury's 2021 Dasgupta Review of the Economics of Biodiversity demonstrates, the common assumption that the goods and benefits provided by nature which underpin our economy are unlimited and inexhaustible is wrong.

## Food Security

The 2021 UK Food Security Review states '*the biggest medium to long term risk to the UK's domestic [food] production comes from... environmental pressures like... biodiversity [loss]*'. The report further highlights biodiversity's importance in global food security, stating '*more than 75% of the leading types of global food crops rely to some extent on animal pollination for yields and/or quality*', with a 2019 OECD report to the G7 noting that such crops have a value of between \$235 and \$577 billion annually. HM Treasury's 2021 Dasgupta Review of the Economics of Biodiversity further highlights the importance of soil biodiversity to food production, stating '*If soil biodiversity were completely lost, the land-based food system would cease to function*'.

## Water Security

The recovery of nature to restore natural processes, including natural hydrological processes, can have a profound effect on improving water security. The UK Government's Natural Capital Committee's Third Report to the Economic Affairs Committee found that embracing nature-based solutions through the restoration of wetlands upstream of major towns and cities could yield costs to benefit ratios of up to 9:1. From realising improved water security, reduced water treatment costs and managing flood risks, developing and using natural solutions to help maintain our water supplies is a clear priority for the future.

<sup>2</sup> <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-role/the-uk/nature-positive-2030/>

## Sustainable Economies

Analysis by the UK finance sector's Natural Capital Finance Alliance in 2018 found that '74% of the [FTSE All-Share] Index sectors are potentially highly or very highly dependent on natural capital'. While the Office for National Statistics found the UK's natural capital assets were worth £1.2 trillion in 2019, the World Economic Forum found around half of the world's GDP (\$44 trillion) is highly or moderately dependent on nature and the OECD's 2019 report to the G7 found 'the socio-economic case for more ambitious biodiversity action is clear... the most comprehensive estimate suggests that ecosystem services provide benefits of \$125-140 trillion per year, i.e. more than one and half times the size of global GDP'. Combined, these figures highlight the importance of growing prosperity without undermining the natural foundations on which that prosperity lies.

## Disaster Resilience

Embracing nature-based solutions can provide efficient and effective means of reducing the risk from natural disasters, especially in a rapidly warming climate. The Climate Change Committee's 2021 UK Climate Risk Independent Assessment (CCRA3) report highlights the potential for nature-based solutions to help the UK adapt to the increasing strength of natural disasters in the face of a changing climate. Trees produce welcome urban shade in heat waves, saltmarsh protects coastal communities from rising sea levels, and wetland and riparian habitats reduce the intensity of riparian flooding. The Environment Agency's 2021 report on 'Working with natural processes to reduce flood risk' provides an in-depth overview of the role of nature in reducing flood risk. The 'natural tools' to help the situation exist, they just need to be protected and used.

## Climate Breakdown

Degraded ecosystems are less able to absorb carbon from the atmosphere and more likely to emit carbon into the atmosphere. The relationship between climate and biodiversity is inseparable, fail on one of the biodiversity or climate crises and we fail on both. Restoring half the UK's peatlands would store carbon to the value of £45 to £51 billion according to the Office for National Statistics, while the Committee on Climate Change estimates that restoring half of the UK's upland peat and a quarter of the UK's lowland peat would reduce the UK's emissions by 5 MtCO<sub>2e</sub> by 2050 (equivalent to the emissions of half a million homes). Achieving high nature and low carbon is a clear challenge for the future and is one that we need to play a part in meeting.

## Improving Health and Wellbeing

While reports on the value of nature and time spent in nature to wellbeing have only grown since the pandemic lockdowns, the Office for National Statistics' 2022 Report on the Health Benefits from Natural Capital found that the value of the health benefits from time in nature were between £6.2 billion and £8.4 billion a year. Degraded ecosystems further increase the risk of emerging zoonotic diseases. The 2020 UN Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services' Workshop Report on Biodiversity and Pandemics estimated pandemics and other emerging zoonoses cost the global economy over US\$1 trillion annually, with COVID-19 costing US\$8 to US\$16 trillion by July 2020. Beyond a clear financial analysis, nature is part of our heritage and our culture and is part of who we are. Increasingly, we know that when we harm nature, we harm ourselves.