

# **UK Biodiversity Framework**

**JNCC**  
**on behalf of the Four Countries' Biodiversity Group (4CBG)**

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The Four Countries' Biodiversity Group (4CBG) is the lead governance body for the *UK Biodiversity Framework*. Membership is comprised of representatives from: Defra, Scottish Government, Welsh Government and DAERA. JNCC provides an independent Secretariat to support the work of the 4CBG.

# 1 Context

The world's natural environment is under serious threat from many pressures including habitat degradation and loss, overexploitation and unsustainable practices, climate impacts, invasive alien species and pollution (IPBES 2019). This brings implications for the ecosystem services upon which we depend, with 14 out of 18 services assessed globally being in decline (Dasgupta 2021). Biodiversity itself is in decline, as conservation action to date has been insufficient to bend the curve on biodiversity loss (Almond *et al.* 2020). Alongside biodiversity loss, a changing climate and increased extreme weather events has led to disasters across the globe (IPCC 2021). The UK is within the lowest 10% of countries globally on the Biodiversity Intactness Index (Phillips *et al.* 2021), and biodiversity assessments show negative trends for many species (Burns *et al.* 2023). As a consequence, urgent and transformational action is essential in order to tackle the linked crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.

The UK is committed to taking positive action and is party to Multilateral Environmental Agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). The *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* (GBF), agreed at the CBD's Fifteenth (15<sup>th</sup>) Conference of the Parties (COP 15) sets out its purpose as '*aiming to catalyze, enable and galvanize urgent and transformative action by Governments, and subnational and local authorities, with the involvement of all of society, to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, to achieve the outcomes it sets out in its Vision, Mission, Goals and Targets...*' (Convention on Biological Diversity 2022).

Integration (mainstreaming) is needed across government policies to promote better consideration of nature as we address other important societal needs. We note the significant linkages and impacts of nature on other policy areas such as finance and trade, human health, food and energy security, flood risk management, and carbon storage, and note the need to work across policy areas for mutual benefit. Action will need to come not only through governments and public bodies, but also through businesses, landowners/land users, environmental NGOs, and wider society.

In the UK, environmental policy is a devolved function, and whilst specific policies and practices may vary, the countries share their core ambition of nature recovery and meeting the UK's international commitments. Each of the four countries of the UK have, and continue to develop, domestic policies and strategies to protect and restore nature, to manage natural resources sustainably and to respond to climate change and other environmental challenges. Additionally, the UK Marine Strategy (UKMS) co-ordinates actions to achieve good environmental status of our seas. Collectively, these will all contribute to delivering our international commitments.

However, the countries of the UK also recognise the value of sharing knowledge to promote their shared ambition, and to work together on activities that benefit from co-operation at a UK level. This is typically where common approaches or principles are required and/or where working at the UK-scale is more efficient, for example cross-border issues, species' surveillance and biodiversity reporting. It is also important to note that whilst the devolved governments have responsibility for

implementing any international obligations, they are negotiated and entered into on a UK-wide basis and there are obligations to co-operate, communicate and report at the UK-level.

The *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* (GBF) is of particular significance in driving transformational change to address the biodiversity crisis and promote nature recovery. The UK played a key role in international negotiations, promoting high ambition in developing targets and establishing enhanced mechanisms for transparency and accountability. The extent of the GBF's implementation is now going to be critical in determining its success. The four countries of the UK have already started looking at how they can meet commitments and are working together on areas of shared ambition where helpful to do so, including co-operating in the implementation of planning, monitoring and reporting requirements.

The principles set out in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) (UK Government 2013) between the UK and devolved governments on joint working enshrine the commitment of the four countries of the UK to effectively work together. Whilst the UK does not have a 'Common Framework' for biodiversity, the existing legal duties and working arrangements ensure we work effectively together on biodiversity issues and should be maintained. In addition, the UK and devolved governments are now confirming and formalising their approach through this new *UK Biodiversity Framework* (UKBF), replacing the former framework (JNCC and Defra 2012) first developed following agreement of the CBD's previous 'Aichi targets' in 2011 (CBD 2011).

This renewed UKBF refreshes the "*broad enabling structure*" of the 2012 framework in the context of our new commitments by:

- Setting out the shared objectives for co-operation and collaboration between the four countries of the UK;
- Establishing a governance structure for overseeing and achieving the shared objectives.

The *UK Biodiversity Framework* (UKBF) facilitates the collation and aggregation of information on activities and outcomes across all four countries. It also provides a means for the four countries to communicate what they are doing individually and collectively to meet the UK's international biodiversity commitments.

The UKBF focuses on activities that provide opportunities for meeting the UK's commitments more efficiently at a UK scale (for example on monitoring, reporting and international representation), on activities that add value to delivery in all countries of the UK (for example, data and knowledge exchange), or on activities that contribute to informing UK positions.

The *UK Biodiversity Framework* will be supplemented by shared actions, including those in the *UK's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for 2030* (UK NBSAP).

## 2 Objectives

This *UK Biodiversity Framework* sets out four objectives for cross-UK work relating to biodiversity policy and supporting evidence.

### 2.1 Objective 1: To contribute to informing and developing the UK's position in international agreements and policy making

The UK Government has overall responsibility for concluding treaties and other international agreements on behalf of the United Kingdom. The UKBF creates the governance structures for each country to contribute to and inform the development of the UK's position in international negotiations and agreements.

### 2.2 Objective 2: To coordinate collective achievement of the UK's international obligations

The devolved governments are responsible for observing and implementing the international obligations of the United Kingdom relating to biodiversity in their country, together with the UK Government which has responsibility for England, and for reserved functions.

This objective recognises there is added value in undertaking work at a UK-scale in some circumstances, such as the licensing regime for CITES, evidence provision, the setting of UK-level targets, and resource mobilisation and other support for developing countries and UK Overseas Territories. In other cases, whilst implementation is the responsibility of the four countries and they may take different policy approaches, there may be value in agreeing common principles or co-ordinating actions. An example is the collaboration between the four countries to develop approaches to recognising other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) in terms of the commitment to protect 30% of land and of seas for nature by 2030.

### 2.3 Objective 3: To enable and support country input to reporting required under the UK's international obligations

Effective international communication and reporting requires the aggregation, integration and synthesis of information from all four countries. Shared assessment frameworks and indicators are essential components for flexible and efficient UK- and country-level reporting. This objective recognises that some of these will be informed by a shared evidence base which operates most efficiently at a UK scale. For example, many monitoring and species' surveillance schemes are undertaken at a UK scale because of the significant economies of scale and the organisation of volunteers. To meet requirements under the GBF there are now additional needs for consistent use of agreed headline indicators and other aspects of monitoring and reporting.

## **2.4 Objective 4: To inform each other of domestic policy developments and collaborate to achieve shared aims where there is benefit in doing so at a UK level**

The UKBF facilitates the sharing of ideas, policies and good practice between the four countries. The countries will work together on cross-border matters and on other shared issues where there is benefit in doing so. In addition, co-operation or consultation between the governments of the four countries is required on the following matters:

- Managing and adapting the national/UK network of European sites, which are also part of the Emerald Network of the Bern Convention.
- Consultation on cases involving priority habitats or species where an opinion is sought on Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest.
- Amending the annexes to Directives and the Schedules to Regulations.
- Compilation of UK composite reports, for example, under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended).

## **3 UK and country strategies and policies**

The four countries of the UK are each responsible for developing their own policy approaches towards meeting international biodiversity commitments together with their domestic priorities and these sit outside of the UKBF. In each case, protecting and recovering nature is considered as part of a wider set of interrelated policies covering, for example, climate change, health and wellbeing, green recovery, blue and green finance, sustainable resource management, land use and fisheries.

The UK NBSAP will provide a summary of the UK's implementation of the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* based on the individual strategies and delivery plans of the four governments of the UK, this *UK Biodiversity Framework* and other relevant strategies including the UK Marine Strategy. As these domestic strategies and plans develop over the lifetime of the UKBF, the [UK Clearing House Mechanism](#) will act as a repository for the up-to-date country strategies and UK NBSAP. The UK will communicate national targets and other commitments to the CBD Secretariat using the standardized template adopted in Decision 15/6.

The governments are held accountable for delivery of their domestic plans and strategies, as well as the implementation of environmental law, by environmental governance structures: the Office of Environmental Protection in England and Northern Ireland; Environmental Standards Scotland; and the Interim Environmental Protection Assessor for Wales (which is providing advice on the functioning of environmental law until the establishment of a permanent body).

Responsibility for climate change adaptation is devolved across the four countries of the UK, including ensuring that policies related to biodiversity and nature restoration are prepared for current and future climate change risks. The UK Climate Change Act (2008) and Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 set out statutory requirements in relation to climate adaptation, including five-year cycles of UK-wide Climate Change Risk Assessments (CCRAs). The third Risk Assessment (CCRA3) was

published in January 2022 and sets out the latest and most detailed understanding of climate change impacts to the UK, including to the natural environment (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2022a). These form the basis of National Adaptation Programmes (NAPs) for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales.

### 3.1 England

The Environment Act 2021 builds on existing legislation and strategies to provide a legislative basis for nature recovery as well as wider environmental priorities and governance. This includes giving powers to the Secretary of State to set long-term, legally binding targets, for priority areas including biodiversity, together with a range of other measures to achieve nature recovery. In December 2022 world-leading legally binding targets were published including a target to halt the decline in species' abundance by 2030 with a target to reverse that decline, alongside a further target to reduce the risk of species' extinction. This was supported by a target to restore or create more than 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat, which will also help the UK to meet its international commitment to protect 30% of its land and ocean by 2030.

The Act requires the creation of 'Environmental Improvement Plans' (EIPs). The 25 Year Environment Plan (25YEP) is considered the first such plan and was refreshed in 2023 to form the subsequent EIP (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2023). The 25YEP committed to publishing a strategy for nature to replace England's previous strategy, *Biodiversity 2020*, and to implement new commitments under the GBF. The EIP 2023 sets out these plans and actions.

### 3.2 Northern Ireland

The first *Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland* will set out Northern Ireland's environmental priorities for the coming decades. The Strategy has been consulted on and is at final draft stage (Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs 2021), awaiting Executive approval. It will form the first Northern Ireland Environmental Improvement Plan under the Environment Act 2021. It will provide a coherent response to the global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss and will form part of the Northern Ireland Executive's Green Growth Delivery Framework. It will include a mix of both existing and new environmental targets/objectives and assist Northern Ireland in meeting international commitments arising from the UNFCCC and the CBD's *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*.

The Strategy will focus on delivering six environmental outcomes:

- Excellent air, water, land & neighbourhood quality.
- Healthy & accessible environment & landscapes everyone can connect with & enjoy.
- Thriving, resilient & connected nature and wildlife.
- Sustainable production & consumption on land and at sea.

- Zero waste & highly developed circular economy.
- Fair contribution to UK net zero greenhouse gas emissions & improved climate resilience and adaptability.

In tandem with the *Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland*, DAERA is developing a revised biodiversity strategy to take forward the agreed GBF targets. This new Nature Recovery Strategy to 2032 will include the suite of actions and commitments to restore terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems in Northern Ireland, to build the necessary evidence base for action and reporting, and to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. The document is being developed through a co-design process involving stakeholders through the Northern Ireland Environment Link.

### 3.3 Scotland

The Scottish Government's Environment Strategy to 2045 (*The Environment Strategy for Scotland*, Scottish Government 2020) creates an overarching framework for Scotland's existing environmental strategies and plans. It describes Scotland's long-term strategic ambitions and policy priorities for the environment and focuses on delivering six shared outcomes:

- Nature is protected and restored with flourishing biodiversity and clean and healthy air, water, seas and soils.
- Tackling the global climate emergency and limiting temperature rise to 1.5 °C.
- Use and re-use of resources and an end to the throw-away culture.
- A thriving, sustainable economy which conserves and grows Scotland's natural assets.
- A healthy environment that supports a fairer, healthier, more inclusive society.
- Responsible global citizens with a sustainable international footprint.

In addition, the Scottish Government published the draft *Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045* in December 2022 (Scottish Government 2022). It forms part of a Strategy Delivery Framework which includes:

- The *Scottish Biodiversity Strategy*, which sets out the high-level Vision and Outcomes.
- A Natural Environment Bill which will include Statutory Targets for nature restoration and potential protected areas reform to enable achievement of 30 by 30.
- Delivery Plans to be reviewed every five years which set out detailed actions.
- An Investment Plan – costing the actions and to drive investment in delivery.
- A monitoring and reporting framework.

Further information concerning the environment and biodiversity in Scotland, including links to key documents such as the biodiversity strategy, can be found on the [Scottish Government website](#).



### 3.4 Wales

Welsh Government declared a biodiversity emergency alongside the existing climate change emergency in recognition that it is vital that these emergencies are tackled together. Their Programme for Government commits them to embed their response to the climate and nature emergency in everything they do. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 provide a legislative basis in Wales to enable nature's recovery in the context of the wider sustainable development agenda. National milestones and indicators have been developed to support the delivery of the Resilient Wales and Globally Responsible Wales goals embedded within the Well-being legislation.

The *Natural Resources Policy* (Welsh Government 2017) set outs the national priorities for the sustainable management of natural resources:

- Delivering nature-based solutions.
- Increasing resource efficiency and renewable energy.
- Taking a place-based approach.

Nested within the *Natural Resources Policy*, the Nature Recovery Action Plan (Welsh Government 2015) is Wales's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and forms part of Wales's delivery under the Convention on Biological Diversity. Both the *Natural Resources Policy* and the National Biodiversity Strategy (currently the *Nature Recovery Action Plan*) will be refreshed to reflect the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework* and the recommendations from a Biodiversity Deep Dive undertaken by the Minister for Climate Change in 2022. The action-focused Biodiversity Deep Dive considered Wales's implementation of Target 3, the 30 by 30 target, to protect and effectively manage at least 30% of terrestrial and inland water areas, and of marine and coastal areas for nature by 2030 (Welsh Government 2022).

The Programme for Government outlines a commitment to establish statutory nature targets to protect and restore biodiversity. The Deep Dive also recognised the need for these nature targets to be focused on achieving environmental outcomes and delivering Wales's contribution to the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*.

### 3.5 UK Marine Strategy

The UK Marine Strategy Regulations 2010 require the UK to take the necessary measures to achieve or maintain Good Environmental Status (GES) through the development of a UK Marine Strategy.

The UK Marine Strategy is a key pillar of UK marine policy. It applies an ecosystem-based approach to managing the marine environment and provides the framework for setting out how we are delivering a number of national and international commitments, including the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals and the OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the North-East Atlantic. The criteria and indicators are used as the basis for the UK Biodiversity Indicators, the Scottish Marine Assessment and the Outcome Indicator Framework for the EIP in relation to

the protection and sustainable use of the marine environment. The framework it sets out is welcomed by both industry stakeholders and environmental NGOs.

The three parts of the UK Marine Strategy provide a comprehensive framework for assessing, monitoring and taking action across our seas to achieve the UK's shared vision for 'clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse ocean and seas'.

- Part 1: UK updated assessment and GES (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2019).
- Part 2: UK updated monitoring programmes (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2022b).
- Part 3: UK programme of measures – currently being reviewed (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2015).

It is the combination of these three parts that make up the 'UK Marine Strategy'. Each component is reviewed over a six-year cycle. The governments of the four countries work closely with scientists in delivering these 6-yearly reviews.

## 4 Shared priorities

This UKBF sets out the objectives for shared work across the four countries of the UK. Each of the countries will develop their national strategies and action plans in response to the GBF and their domestic objectives. Although policies and approaches will differ to meet the needs and priorities of each country, there is likely to be value in sharing information, knowledge and experience on some activities in support of delivering one or more of the objectives in Section 2. Actions already underway in each country illustrate themes which are common across the four countries, including:

- **Protecting and restoring nature:** protecting and recovering nature is at the core of each of the four countries' policies. The importance of protected areas, as core sites of biodiversity, and the need to improve their quality is recognised in conjunction with building resilient nature networks across our land and sea, reducing pressures and adapting to climate change.
- **Sustainable use and resource management:** recognising the services that flow from our natural resources and utilising these resources sustainably is at the heart of nature recovery and will bring benefits for communities, the economy and the environment.
- **Mainstreaming and Finance:** responding to the interrelated crises of biodiversity loss and climate change requires a holistic response across multiple sectors and financing, both from governments and the private sector, to enable transformational change.

Activities may stem from this which could be priorities for cross-UK work – be that either directly collaborating towards joint outcomes, sharing good practice, or agreeing common principles to inform country-level implementation and ultimately reporting. This will be considered in more detail in the UK NBSAP (see Section 7).

Underpinning these policies is the need for high-quality evidence and, where it is efficient to collect this at a UK level, the four countries will work together to review

and deliver evidence needs. For example, the UK Biodiversity Indicators help to track the progress of the respective commitments in each country and across the UK. They include a range of indicators across the three shared priorities and inform international reporting. The suite of indicators has been under review following agreement of the GBF.

## **5 Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies**

The geographic scope of the UKBF is focused on biodiversity within England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and does not extend to the UK Overseas Territories or Crown Dependencies. Defra and the UK Overseas Territories are working collaboratively, with the support of JNCC, to develop a new Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy, designed to benefit all of the UK Overseas Territories, and to guide future investment and support by His Majesty's Government (HMG).

## **6 Governance overview**

The Four Countries' Biodiversity Group (4CBG) is the lead governance body for the UK Biodiversity Framework. It provides a forum through which to take forward substantive and policy-development issues common to all four countries to meet the objectives set out in Section 2. The 4CBG will establish the UK NBSAP (Section 7) and monitor progress. Open-Ended and Time-Limited 4CBG Working Groups may be created at any time to support specific areas of 4CBG work and activities in the UK NBSAP or related to wider UKBF implementation.

## **7 UKBF Implementation**

The four countries will work together to meet the objectives of the UKBF and there are already a range of established mechanisms for this.

The four countries will agree on activities where joint action between the four countries is required to implement the *Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework*. One such activity will be to publish the UK NBSAP that summarises how the countries of the UK will together deliver/implement the GBF.

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