

Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service

10 Downing Street

London

SW1A 2AA

16th December 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

The UK's peatlands store 3 billion tonnes of carbon. Yet, as world leaders take their seats at COP26 next year, south of the border in England the peatlands could be on fire, releasing their carbon into the atmosphere. This would be a national embarrassment as the eyes of the world look to the UK in 2021.

Burning peatlands, whether in a protected area or not, needs to be banned. It has a hugely damaging effect on their ability to store carbon, to retain water (and reduce flood risk) and on their suitability as a habitat for biodiversity. The latest available data (Natural England, 2010) suggests that up to 260,000 tonnes of carbon is released due to peatland burning.

We are extremely concerned that peat burning continues in England. Ending this would be one of the easiest ways to cut out a source of emissions, and would help to meet the UK's climate goals.

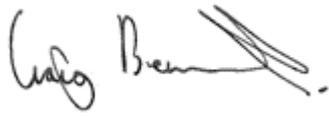
A range of scientific evidence counters the need for burning on peatlands:

- The Climate Change Committee has advised that burning on peatlands should end.
- The International Union for the Conservation of Nature has concluded that healthy, wet peatlands are not at risk of wildfire and don't require managed burning.
- Natural England's own recent assessment of the science suggests that burning blanket bog damages the environment.
- The RSPB has analysed Natural England's data and found that peat burning is the biggest cause of poor condition across England's protected sites for biodiversity (Sites of Special Scientific Interest).

At COP26, the UK will be showcasing international leadership, as demonstrated by the Ambition Summit that you hosted on 12th December. We stake our reputation on our environmental leadership in 2021; that reputation is in jeopardy as we continue to allow our peatlands to be burned.

We urge your Government to publish the England Peat Strategy and use legislation to ensure that peat burning is brought to an immediate end as the first step towards restoring and rewetting our peatlands.

Yours sincerely,



Craig Bennett, Chief Executive, The Wildlife Trusts



Wildlife and
Countryside



Dr. Richard Benwell, Chief Executive, Wildlife and Countryside Link

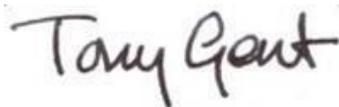


Helen Browning, Chief Executive, Soil Association



Plantlife

Ian Dunn, Chief Executive, Plantlife International



**amphibian and reptile
conservation**



Tony Gent, Chief Executive Officer, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation



Alasdair Roxburgh, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Friends of the Earth

Beccy Speight



Beccy Speight, Chief Executive Officer, RSPB

Julie Williams



Julie Williams, Chief Executive, Butterfly Conservation