

Wildlife & Countryside Link
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The Prime Minister
Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
10 Downing Street
London SW1 2AA

CC Rt Hon George Eustice MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

9 June 2021

Dear Prime Minister

Three weeks ago, the Environment Secretary announced a “legally binding target for species abundance for 2030, aiming to halt the decline of nature”. He said it would be a “net zero for nature”.

We were unreserved in our praise.

A target to halt the decline of nature by 2030 would be a truly world-leading response to the ecological emergency and live up to your commitment in the Leaders’ Pledge for Nature and the G7 environment communiqué to “bend the curve of biodiversity loss by 2030” and reduce the UK’s ecological footprint on the Earth.

Unfortunately, the amendment introduced in Parliament yesterday to give effect to that announcement falls far short of the expectations set by the Secretary of State’s positive speech at Delamere Forest on 18 May and the expectations of almost 200,000 people and over 60 nature charities who have campaigned for a target to improve the State of Nature.

Rather than introducing a firm commitment to halt the decline of species by 2030, the proposals set no clear date to stop nature’s decline. Instead, they would ensure only that the target furthers that general objective. This is not a “net zero for nature”.

This misses the tremendous opportunity that a firm commitment to halt nature’s decline would bring: the regulatory certainty that could inspire businesses to invest in nature at scale; the political certainty needed to rally the whole government to the task of creating a sustainable economy; and the international credibility needed to show leadership on the international stage. Most importantly, it misses this unique legislative chance to ensure that our country will be passed on to future generations richer in nature, with all the wonderful benefits that would deliver.

At the same time, new amendments have been introduced to the Environment Bill that could be used to weaken the Habitats Regulations, the UK’s most important rules to protect wildlife sites and species. The stated justification was to bring those Regulations into line with the new species abundance target—a target we now know is extremely weak. This profoundly undermines public confidence in the Government’s approach to protecting the best places for nature at the very moment you are championing the protection of 30% of land for nature by 2030.

The Environment Bill can still make a truly positive contribution to environmental law, domestically and even internationally. At the moment, however, it remains a run of the mill Bill, far from the groundbreaking legislation the Government has promised.

One simple way to strengthen the target would be to replace the proposed requirement to “further” the objective of halting a decline in wildlife with a clear requirement to “meet” the objective of halting the decline in the diversity and abundance of species.

With the Bill reaching its final stages in Parliament, we urge the Government to set an unqualified target to halt the decline of species by 2030, backed by strong laws for the protection of both sites and species. Otherwise, this flagship Bill will surely flounder.

Yours sincerely

Beccy Speight, CEO, RSPB

Craig Bennett, CEO, The Wildlife Trusts

Dr Darren Moorcroft, CEO, The Woodland Trust

Ian Dunn, CEO, Plantlife

Katie White, Executive Director, WWF UK

Harry Bowell, Director of Land and Nature, The National Trust

Mark Lloyd, CEO, The Rivers Trust

Dawn Varley, acting CEO, The Badger Trust

John Sauven, Executive Director, Greenpeace UK

Andy Atkins, CEO, A Rocha UK

Dr Mark Avery, co-founder, Wild Justice

Martin Janes, Managing Director, the River Restoration Centre

Nick Measham, CEO, Salmon & Trout Conservation

Julie Williams, CEO, Butterfly Conservation

Dr James Robinson, Director of Conservation, WWT

Mary Rice, Executive Director, Environmental Investigation Agency UK.

Martin Sims, Director of Investigations, League Against Cruel Sports

Will Travers OBE, Co-Founder and Executive President, Born Free Foundation

Kit Stoner, CEO, Bat Conservation Trust

Sally Hamilton, Director, ORCA

David Bunt, Chair, Institute of Fisheries Management

Jill Nelson, CEO, People's Trust for Endangered Species

Kate Ashbrook, General Secretary, Open Spaces Society

Dr Jeremy Biggs, CEO, Freshwater Habitats Trust

Tony Gent, CEO, Amphibian & Reptile Conservation

Anita Konrad, Chief Executive, Campaign for National Parks

Steph Wray, Chair, The Mammal Society

Paul Cox, Managing Director, The Shark Trust

Caroline Ruane, CEO, The Naturewatch Foundation

Tanya Curry, Interim Chief Executive, Ramblers

Chris Sherwood, CEO, RSPCA

Matt Shardlow, CEO, Buglife

Chris Butler-Stroud, CEO, Whale and Dolphin Conservation

David Balharry, Chief Executive, John Muir Trust

Hugo Tagholm, Chief Executive, Surfers Against Sewage

Dr Richard Benwell, CEO, Wildlife & Countryside Link