

Environment Secretary speech on biodiversity: 24 September 2020

I would like to thank Minister Huang and Vice-Minister Luo for hosting this important discussion.

I am pleased to speak to you on behalf of the UK about how we can increase the pace of action to help nature recover.

When we destroy nature, we undermine our very foundations. That is why the UK Government is committed to building back better and greener as we recover from the Coronavirus pandemic.

The scale of biodiversity loss is clear.

By the time I finish speaking, the world will have lost forever forest land equivalent to 150 football pitches.

Reports published this month show that populations of animals have declined by two thirds in my lifetime.

So we need to work together to stem the tide of loss. And all of us can make a difference. At next year's conferences in Kunming and Glasgow, we have the opportunity to bring the world together to commit to reversing biodiversity loss, and to make protecting and conserving nature part of tackling climate change and poverty too.

I am pleased that Minister Huang has agreed with my colleague Alok Sharma, the UN climate COP President Designate, that our two countries should work together as incoming presidents for ambitious, integrated outcomes at both summits.

One of the ways we have committed to doing this is by making 'nature' a major theme of the climate COP in Glasgow.

We are determined to secure international action to tackle biodiversity loss, and will channel finance into the nature-based solutions that could provide a third of the cost-effective climate change mitigation we need – while helping people adapt to become more resilient. We are committed to the adoption of an ambitious post 2020 global biodiversity framework at COP-15, and the UK Government is asking other governments to bring ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions under the UNFCCC.

And the UK welcomes China's announcement this week on achieving carbon neutrality before 2060 and enhancing its own NDC – so we look forward to hearing more and to working together. Action for nature must also be ambitious.

And we must also put our words into action – and in this area the UK is keen to play its part, both at home and around the world.

We have been working with other nations to create a bold 'Leaders' Pledge for Nature' which commits countries to take ten urgent actions to put biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030.

And I look forward to working with countries around the world to make good on the Pledge's commitments. The UK will be spending more of our International Climate Finance on nature – and we encourage others to do the same.

We are committed to ocean health, and we will establish a £500 million Blue Planet Fund. The ocean supports the livelihoods of one in every ten people, including some of the poorest and most vulnerable worldwide.

So a quarter of our waters are protected, and we are on course to protect an area the size of India around the UK Overseas Territories.

30 countries have already signed up to a UK-led Global Ocean Alliance of countries committed to protecting at least 30% of the ocean in Marine Protected Areas by 2030.

On land, forests are home to 80% of biodiversity. Yet the scale of global deforestation makes it a leading cause of global emissions.

Through the Just Rural Transition, we are helping communities around the world shift towards sustainability. And in the UK, we are replacing destructive agricultural subsidies with a system that rewards environmental stewardship – and encouraging other countries to do similarly.

In the UK, we are also setting environmental targets to accelerate action to improve the state of UK nature and help us make progress towards our commitment to reach net zero by 2050.

And we are committed to shrinking our environmental footprint beyond our shores.

So we are consulting on legislation requiring larger businesses operating in the UK to carry out due diligence on forest risk commodities in their supply chains, to show that they were produced in line with local laws.

And I commend China for taking steps to exclude illegal forest products from its supply chains. In conclusion, at COP26, we want to convene a global government-to-government initiative on sustainable land-use and trade in forest and agricultural commodities between producer and consumer countries.

The first regional events will be held in October and it would be great if China participates.

We encourage every nation to put nature at the core of their recoveries now and to agree an ambitious post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework underpinned by robust implementation and accountability mechanisms.

The UK and China have key roles to play in making 2021 the turning point in our relationship with the natural world – for the sake of every generation to come.

And I hope you will all join us.

Thank you.