

UK Minister for the Pacific and Environment visits Costa Rica in first overseas visit after COP26

Lord Goldsmith concluded his visit to Costa Rica on 27 January – celebrating their pioneering leadership on climate and the environment, and developing the close partnership between the two countries just a few weeks after the UK hosted the UN climate conference.

Environment Minister Andrea Meza and Lord Goldsmith travelled across the country, to see some of the scalable work that is underway.

Together, they visited indigenous peoples, national parks, research centres and farms – and saw how Costa Rica's Earthshot Prize-winning programme is paying people for the benefits they can provide by managing land sustainably.

They saw the positive impacts of bringing Costa Rica's decarbonisation plan to life – with an ambitious transport electrification plan building on the success of running the country on over 98% renewable energy for seven consecutive years.

And Lord Goldsmith heard about Costa Rica's Natural Asset Company initiative, an innovative financial mechanism that will incentivise conservation and sustainable land use.

Over a quarter of Costa Rica's land is protected. The country contains 5% of the planet's biodiversity in just 0.03% of the earth's landmass, and more than half of Costa Rica is under canopy – the result of a national campaign to double the rainforest in a generation.

During his visit, Lord Goldsmith commended President Alvarado on the expansion of the Cocos Island National Park, making Costa Rica one of the first countries in the world to protect 30% of their waters.

And alongside Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama, Costa Rica made headlines at COP26 when the four countries announced that they are now working together to protect some of the world's most important and biodiverse environments in the Eastern Pacific Tropical Marine Corridor – set to become the largest transboundary marine protected area in the world.

Lord Goldsmith praised their leadership and announced that the UK will provide an initial £2m as part of the newly established Blue Planet Fund – financed through UK Aid, and drawing on decades of experience gained through the Blue Belt that protects an area of ocean larger than India around the UK Overseas Territories.

Costa Rican President Carlos Alvarado thanked the UK for their support and said:

We must move ahead with actions to protect our planet, and in this particular case, the oceans. Protecting nature is a fundamental step in combatting climate change. Healthy oceans are vital to protecting hundreds of marine species that are important for ecosystems and for the people in our region.

Costa Rica continues to work hand in hand with the UK in this year of the COP26 Presidency – building on months of cooperation ahead of the conference in Glasgow, and during negotiations behind the scenes.

And ahead of the CBD COP15, the UN biodiversity conference, the UK and Costa Rica are asking the world to sign up to ambitious targets that will put the natural world on the road to recovery during this decade.

The UK and Costa Rica co-lead global alliances committed to significantly increasing protection of the world's land and ocean that now represent 120 countries and counting, over 40% of global GDP, and almost a third of the world's population.

And together with France, the UK and Costa Rica lead the High Ambition Coalition for Nature and People campaigning for the protection of at least 30% of the planet's land and ocean by 2030.

UK Minister for the Pacific and Environment, Zac Goldsmith, said:

From the Osa Peninsula to Sarapiquí, it has been a privilege to see Costa Rica's immense natural beauty first-hand. It is rightly a huge source of national pride. At COP26 in Glasgow, it was the leadership of nature-rich countries like Costa Rica that helped the UK presidency bring nature from the margins of the conversation on climate change into the heart of our response.

And I am delighted that the Glasgow commitment to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030 was signed by 141 countries representing over 90% of the world's forest cover – including Costa Rica.

The UK committed £1.5 billion to support countries in their efforts to protect and restore their forests, and empower the indigenous people and local communities for whom they are home.

Costa Rica is set to tap into the Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest Finance coalition that has already mobilised \$1 billion, including an initial £200m from the UK.

And through our new Blue Planet Fund, the UK will provide an initial £2m of scientific and technical assistance to help Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador, and Panama expand and connect marine protection covering over 500,000 km² of ocean in the Eastern Tropical Marine Corridor, including key migratory routes for sea turtles, whales, sharks, and rays.

Reconciling our lives and our economies with the natural world around us is the defining challenge of our age – and I am pleased that the UK is working ever more closely with leading countries like Costa Rica to make that happen.

Costa Rican Environment Minister, Andrea Meza, said:

Visits like Minister Goldsmith's have allowed us to show what Costa Rica is doing to make nature part of our development model as well as the significance of protected areas. Visiting indigenous peoples helps us understand the role of these communities, how we can benefit when we protect nature, and what the critical needs are that we need to address.

Similarly, we can demonstrate what we're doing with the Payment for Environmental Services programme, and how important this resource mobilisation is for these families – to be able to continue implementing strategies to diversify their income, and adopt more sustainable productive practices. We are really grateful to have a strategic partner like the UK.

Speaking at a meeting of the Forum of Ministers for Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean in San Jose on 27 January, Lord Goldsmith and Minister Meza urged leaders from across government, sectors, and society to work together – to make sure that everyone feels the benefits of accelerating the transition towards a decarbonised, net-zero, nature-positive global economy.