

World-leading Environment Act becomes Law

Legislation that will protect and enhance our environment for future generations has now passed into UK law.

Through the Act, we will clean up the country's air, restore natural habitats, increase biodiversity, reduce waste and make better use of our resources.

It will halt the decline in species by 2030, require new developments to improve or create habitats for nature, and tackle deforestation overseas.

It will help us transition to a more circular economy, incentivising people to recycle more, encouraging businesses to create sustainable packaging, making household recycling easier and stopping the export of polluting plastic waste to developing countries.

These changes will be driven by new legally binding environmental targets, and enforced by a new, independent Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) which will hold government and public bodies to account on their environmental obligations.

Environment Secretary George Eustice said:

The Environment Act will deliver the most ambitious environmental programme of any country on earth.

It will halt the decline of species by 2030, clean up our air and protect the health of our rivers, reform the way in which we deal with waste and tackle deforestation overseas.

We are setting an example for the rest of the world to follow.

The Environment Act includes a new legally binding target on species abundance for 2030, which will help to reverse declines of iconic British species like the hedgehog, red squirrel and water vole.

The UK will now be able to go further than ever before to clamp down on illegal deforestation and protect rainforests, through a [package of measures](#) will ensure that greater resilience, traceability and sustainability are built into the UK's supply chains.

The Act will crack down on water companies that discharge sewage into rivers, waterways and coastlines. It will see a duty enshrined in law to [ensure water companies secure a progressive reduction in the adverse impacts of discharges from storm overflows](#). New duties will also require the government to publish a plan to reduce sewage discharges from storm overflows by September 2022 and

report to Parliament on the progress towards implementing the plan.

Natural England Chair Tony Juniper said:

It is imperative that we step up action to boost nature recovery if we are to tackle the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change.

This landmark Act will give us more of the tools and the momentum we need to really put nature on the road to recovery during this decade, enabling us to have more, better, bigger and connected areas of natural habitats, bringing a range of practical benefits and permitting more people to enjoy the wonders of the natural world, while improving wider environmental quality at the same time.

We will work across Government, industry and society to help make it happen. The creation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies will be key in helping us to build a Nature Recovery Network across the country, backed by other measures in the new Act, including mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain for built development and a healthier freshwater environment.

Emma Howard Boyd CBE, Chair of the Environment Agency, said:

We need strong laws, investment by the private sector and clear, well-funded regulation to protect the environment. Without this, we will not see the progress we all want.

The new legal targets for water in the Environment Act today will help wider efforts to tackle pollution, reduce demand for water and secure clean and plentiful water for all.

It is good to see these laws pass as we work to protect the natural world, help people to stay safe from flooding and support communities, businesses and government to make the country more resilient to climate shocks.

Forestry Commission Chair Sir William Worsley said:

As the government's leading forestry experts, the Forestry Commission supports the new measures included in the Environment Act which gives our woodlands much needed protection, so we can ensure they live on and continue to bring benefits to people, nature and climate.

We are excited about new measures that will improve Forestry Commission's enforcement powers to help us further protect

England's woodlands from illegal felling, including our most precious ancient woodlands.

Increasing tree planting now is an important step towards creating a more wooded country, and we look forward to working closely with the government as they consider a long-term tree target, which could be introduced through the new powers in the Environment Bill.

Work on implementing Environment Act policies is well underway. We have started work on developing legally binding environmental targets, and launched [consultations on the deposit return schemes for drinks containers](#), [extended producer responsibility for packaging](#) and [consistent recycling collections](#) which will transform the way we deal with our rubbish.

We have also published a [draft Principles Policy Statement](#) which will put protecting the environment at the heart of future policy.

The [Office for Environmental Protection was set up in an interim, non-statutory form in July](#), providing independent oversight of the Government's environmental progress and accelerating the foundation of the full body. The OEP will formally commence its statutory functions shortly.

Dame Glenys Stacey, Chair of the OEP said:

The Environment Act is a cornerstone of the government's ambitions to tackle ever more pressing environmental issues.

I am delighted that the Act creates the independent Office for Environmental Protection, and gives us the tools for our job – to protect and improve the environment by holding government and public authorities to account. We are well underway with establishing a functionally independent, fully operational OEP from early in the new year.

There has never been a more crucial time for us all to work to protect and improve our environment. The OEP will play its full part.

The Environment Act has become law during the UK's hosting of the COP26 summit in Glasgow, during which the UK has brought the world together to secure ambitious commitments to tackle climate change.

Nick Molho, Executive Director at the Aldersgate Group, said:

The passage of the Environment Act into law marks a major milestone for the UK, particularly as it hosts the important COP26 climate summit. Having a framework which supports nature restoration and looks at the whole of the environment – including land as well as sea – is a key step forward in efforts to reverse the decline of

nature.

Businesses have long supported an ambitious and robust Environment Act, and having legally binding long-term targets will play a significant role in making continuous improvements to the natural environment.

Dr Richard Benwell, CEO of Wildlife and Countryside Link, said:

Becoming the first country with a legal target to halt wildlife decline by 2030 is a world-leading innovation and testament to the huge public and parliamentary demand to improve our state of nature.

Now there's no time to lose for action. 2030 is an ecological heartbeat away, so the whole of Whitehall must work together on a scientifically sound plan to meet this "net zero for nature", so that England can lead the way ahead of next year's global nature negotiations.

Further information

The Environment Act will deliver:

- Long-term targets to improve air quality, biodiversity, water, and waste reduction and resource efficiency
- A target on ambient PM2.5 concentrations, the most harmful pollutant to human health
- A target to halt the decline of nature by 2030
- Environmental Improvement Plans, including interim targets
- A cycle of environmental monitoring and reporting
- Environmental Principles embedded in domestic policy making
- Office for Environmental Protection to uphold environmental law

WASTE & RECYCLING

- Extend producer responsibility to make producers pay for 100% of cost of disposal of products, starting with plastic packaging
- A deposit Return Scheme for single use drinks containers
- Charges for single use plastics
- Greater consistency in recycling collections in England
- Electronic waste tracking to monitor waste movements and tackle fly-tipping
- Tackle waste crime
- Power to introduce new resource efficiency information (labelling on the recyclability and durability of products)
- Regulate shipment of hazardous waste
- Ban or restrict export of waste to non-OECD countries

CLEAN AIR

- Require Local Authorities to tackle air quality
- Simplify enforcement within smoke control areas

NATURE

- Strengthened biodiversity duty
- Biodiversity net gain to ensure developments deliver at least 10% increase in biodiversity
- Local Nature Recovery Strategies to support a Nature Recovery Network
- Duty upon Local Authorities to consult on street tree felling
- Strengthen woodland protection enforcement measures
- Conservation Covenants
- Protected Site Strategies and Species Conservation Strategies to support the design and delivery of strategic approaches to deliver better outcomes for nature
- Prohibit larger UK businesses from using commodities associated with wide-scale deforestation
- Requires regulated businesses to establish a system of due diligence for each regulated commodity used in their supply chain, requires regulated businesses to report on their due diligence, introduces a due diligence enforcement system

WATER

- Effective collaboration between water companies through statutory water management plans
- Drainage and sewerage management planning a statutory duty
- Minimise damage water abstraction may cause on environment
- Modernise the process for modifying water and sewerage company licence conditions