

World-leading new law to protect rainforests and clean up supply chains

Plans to clamp down on illegal deforestation and protect rainforests have been published by the government today (25 August) as it consults on a world-leading new law to clean up the UK's supply chains.

The proposals would prohibit larger businesses operating in the UK from using products grown on land that was deforested illegally. These businesses would be required to carry out due diligence on their supply chains by publishing information to show where key commodities – for example, cocoa, rubber, soy and palm oil – came from and that they were produced in line with local laws protecting forests and other natural ecosystems.

Businesses that fail to comply would be subject to fines, with the precise level to be set at a later date.

Protecting forests is central to tackling climate change, with [deforestation accounting for 11% of global greenhouse gas emissions](#). The vast majority of deforestation – 80% – is caused by the [production of agricultural commodities](#) and most deforestation – up to 90% in some countries – is illegal. The destruction and degradation of these vital habitats also increases the risk of extreme weather events, drives biodiversity loss, and exacerbates the spread of infectious diseases.

This approach is designed to work in tandem with the existing efforts of governments, communities and business in producer countries to enforce national laws, benefiting law-abiding producers and companies. The proposed legislation makes clear that illegally produced commodities have no place in the UK market, as we build back greener from coronavirus.

International Environment Minister Lord Goldsmith, said:

We have all seen the devastating pictures of the world's most precious forests being cleared, often illegally, and we can't afford not to act as a country. There is a hugely important connection between the products we buy and their wider environmental footprint, which is why the government is consulting today on new measures that would make it illegal for businesses in the UK to use commodities that are not grown in accordance with local laws.

Ahead of hosting the UN Climate Change Conference next year, the UK has a duty to lead the way in combatting the biodiversity and nature crisis now upon us.

There has been a lot of progress already to make the UK's supply chains more sustainable, but more needs to be done. We will continue to work closely with farmers, business and governments

around the world to ensure that we can protect our vital forests and support livelihoods as we build back greener from coronavirus.

Today's move follows the establishment of Government's independent taskforce – [the Global Resource Initiative \(GRI\)](#) – formed in 2019 to consider how the UK could 'green' international supply chains and leave a lighter footprint on the global environment by slowing the loss of forests.

Sir Ian Cheshire, the chair of the independent taskforce, said:

Every day, British consumers buy food and other products which are contributing to the loss of the world's most precious forests.

We need to find ways of reducing this impact if we are to tackle climate change, reduce the risks of pandemics and protect the livelihoods of some of the poorest people in the world.

I'm delighted to see the Government respond to one of the key recommendations of the Global Resource Initiative. Starting a discussion on how changes in UK law could help us all to reduce our global footprint. I would encourage as many people as possible to respond to this important consultation.

Ruth Chambers, from the Greener UK coalition, said:

This consultation is a welcome first step in the fight to tackle the loss of our planet's irreplaceable natural wonders such as the Amazon and in the pursuit of supply chains free from products that contribute to deforestation.

The evidence linking deforestation with climate change, biodiversity loss and the spread of zoonotic diseases is compelling. A new law is an important part of the solution and is urgently needed.

The proposal must now be tested thoroughly to ensure it will deliver the Government's domestic and international environmental leadership ambitions.

The consultation will run for six weeks and seek views from UK and international stakeholders, and will take into consideration potential impacts on businesses and other interests. As part of its Presidency of COP26, the UK will continue to support a discussion between governments from around the world to tackle this important issue.

The Environment Secretary recently [set out plans to deliver both for people and nature after the UK's exit from the European Union](#), reaffirming that the government's ambitious environmental programme will put nature at the heart

of the UK's green recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

Today's move builds on the government's recent [commitment to double the UK's contribution to International Climate Finance](#) to £11.6bn from 2021-2025, including for nature-based solutions. In June, the [government committed a further £16 million of funding](#) to help scale up environmentally-friendly farming, forest conservation and replanting in the Amazon.

Feedback for the [consultation is to be submitted online](#) or via post. The Government is committed to addressing all major challenges identified in the [GRI report](#) and will set out our formal response later this year, showing leadership on these issues.