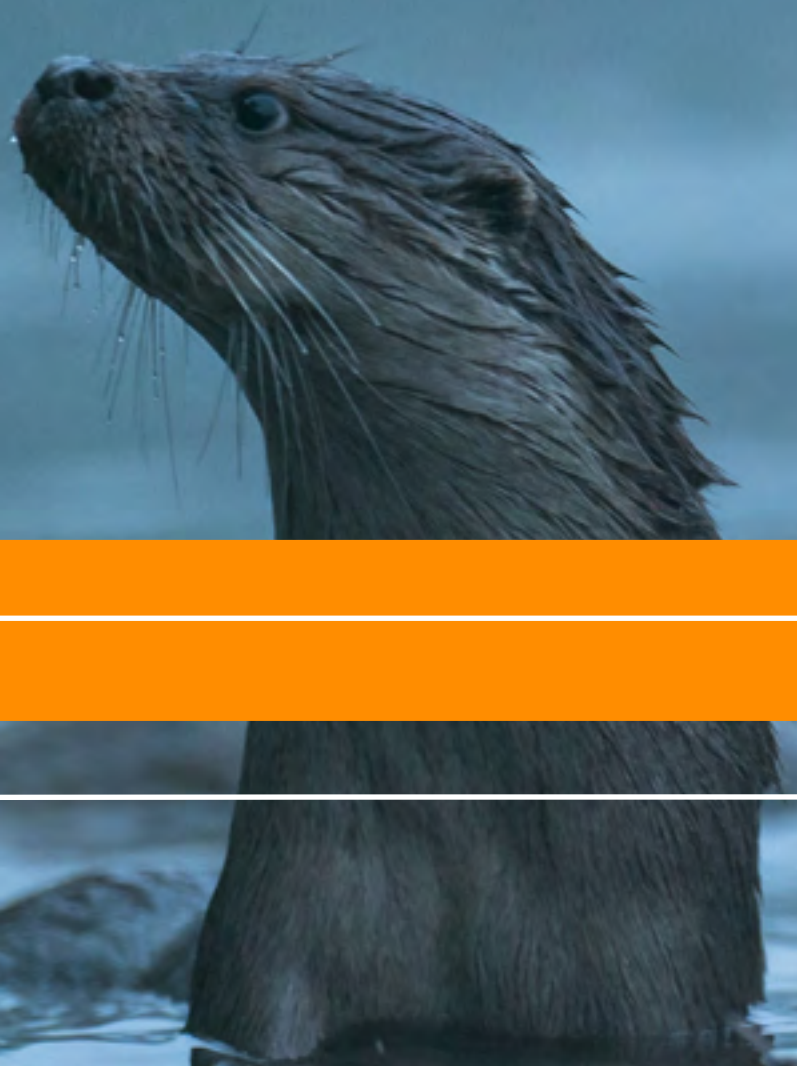


COP16: Biodiversity

Implications for policy & environmental science

December 2024



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The Institution
of Environmental
Sciences

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About the Institution of Environmental Sciences

The Institution of Environmental Sciences (the IES) is at the forefront of uniting the environmental sciences around a shared goal: to work with speed, vision and expertise to solve the world's most pressing environmental challenges, together.

As the global professional membership body for environmental scientists, we support a diverse network of professionals all over the world – and at every stage of their education and careers – to connect, develop, progress and inspire.

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Specialism-specific relevance

Specialisms which may be affected by the subject-matter of the briefing include:

- Built environment
- Climatology
- Conservation & ecology
- Environmental management
- Forestry & Landscaping
- Impact Assessment
- Sustainability

Ultimately, this subject is likely to affect any professional whose work concerns conservation, natural systems where biodiversity is present, or consenting and planning.

Background

[COP16](#) was the sixteenth conference of the parties to the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) (CBD), held in Cali, Colombia between 21st October 2024 and 1st November 2024.

Summits for the CBD are less frequent than for the equivalent climate change treaty, the UNFCCC, though no less important in securing positive environmental and social outcomes.

The summit should have been a crucial opportunity to move forward global action on biodiversity loss following the pivotal agreement of the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) at COP15 in 2022.

Ultimately, it was not possible to reach a final agreement at COP16, leaving the future of the Framework's delivery uncertain, both internationally and on the national level.

This briefing sets out the details of what was agreed at COP16, the implications of the summit for environmental science, and how COP16 fits into the wider context of biodiversity on an international and national level.

What happened at COP16?

While the full range of issues linked to biodiversity were discussed throughout [COP16](#), some topics played a more significant role in the negotiations than others.

Following the agreement of the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) in 2022, a key focus for COP16 was implementing the Framework through finance and national plans.

This was especially pertinent given the failure to meet the previous biodiversity [targets set in Aichi](#).

Finance for nature

One of the primary outcomes of COP16 was the creation of [the Cali Fund](#), a mechanism through which the benefits of digital sequence information (DSI) on genetic resources can be shared equitably.

Put simply, industries relying on the use of genetic resources (such as pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, and animal and plant breeding) will be asked to contribute towards the Fund based on their profits.

Companies are asked to pay 1% of the profits from the use of these resources, or 0.1% of their total revenue, with the aim to

target the largest corporations and raise as much as 1 billion USD each year.

The intention of the Cali Fund is that those who most financially benefit from the use of biodiversity should make some contribution towards its conservation. It also contributes to the ongoing objective to ensure that DSI remains available for use in research.

The agreement includes that at least half the fund should be devoted to indigenous peoples and local communities, through a range of mechanisms. In part, this is intended to increase equity and capacity-building.

Despite the positive agreement around the Cali Fund, more must be done to finalise the details and implement it in practice. In particular, the Fund is currently voluntary, allowing a high degree of variance in how it is implemented.

In addition to the Cali Fund, discussions continued on broader funding for biodiversity through the [Global Biodiversity Framework Fund](#) (the GBF Fund).

The expansion of the Fund, initially proposed following discussions at COP15, brings the Fund to a total of 163 million USD, which is still significantly smaller than will

be required for effective implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework.

The Framework targets [200billion USD](#) annually to address the biodiversity crisis, including public and private funding. Developed countries have pledged to provide [20billion USD](#) in biodiversity financing to developing countries per year by 2025.

The current state of nature funding is still significantly below both figures. The challenge for the coming years will be to ensure that this funding materialises, alongside support for implementation.

Indigenous peoples and local communities

One of the major victories of COP16 related to the inclusion of indigenous peoples and local communities.

This included the landmark establishment of a new [Subsidiary Body of the Convention on Biological Diversity](#), alongside a new work programme and capacity-building efforts.

The intention of these developments is to strengthen the role of indigenous peoples in negotiations, providing greater opportunities for consistent engagement and involvement.

It is expected to play a key role in supporting the implementation of the Framework.

Implementing the Global Biodiversity Framework

Following the agreement of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at COP15, one of the main challenges for

COP16 was to oversee and negotiate efforts to implement the Framework and achieve its ambitious targets.

Ultimately, there was no final outcome declaration to support this goal, with limited progress overall.

Out of the hundreds of countries that are party to the Convention on Biological Diversity, only 44 updated their [National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans](#), which are the key mechanisms for implementing the Framework in practice.

Additionally, 119 countries have uploaded their national targets onto the online portal, though scrutiny of those targets has been limited.

National reports will be due for the first time in 2026, facilitating a [Global Review of Implementation in 2026](#) and then subsequently in 2030.

Marine biodiversity

Oceans and seas were a key feature of discussions at COP16, with a focus on improving marine biodiversity, particularly in protected areas.

The most substantial development for marine biodiversity was the agreement of procedures to describe and identify [Ecologically Biologically Significant Areas](#) (ESBAs), with the goal of identifying new ESBAs and updating the existing approach.

This development will be especially important for delivering the [Treaty on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdictions](#) and the ambition (both in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and in the UK's biodiversity targets) for protecting 30% of the ocean by 2030.

Taking an integrated approach

Given the significant pressures responsible for climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution, it is imperative that the global response takes an integrated approach.

Recognising the need for such an approach, COP16 agreed a [Decision on Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss](#), emphasising the need for aligned efforts across environmental challenges.

Ultimately, the call for an integrated approach on climate change and biodiversity was not subsequently realised at COP29 on climate change, where nature was not brought to the forefront of negotiations.

For more information, read the [IES briefing paper on COP29](#).

Another key development was the [Global Action Plan for Biodiversity and Health](#), which called for greater recognition of the interlinkages between biodiversity and health, alongside voluntary actions to support an integrated approach.

Other outcomes of COP16

Although an ambitious consensus could not be reached on key implementation issues such as funding for nature, there were a range of other key developments supporting action on biodiversity.

Some of the key developments included:

- A [decision on invasive alien species](#), proposing management guidelines and

emphasising the importance of capacity-building, cooperation, and technical support

- Capacity-building efforts to support implementation of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
- A newly operationalised [network of regional Centres for Scientific and Technical Cooperation](#)
- The launch of the [Benchmark Assessment for Nature Action 100](#), an investor-led initiative to address nature and biodiversity loss
- A [decision on sustainable wildlife management](#), including research on zoonotic diseases. The decision emphasises the importance of monitoring and inclusive participation for indigenous peoples and local communities
- New [voluntary guidance on the assessment of risks posed by living modified organisms](#), released by parties under the Cartagena Protocol

Additionally, major assessment reports are due to be published imminently by the [Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#) (IPBES), which may offer a chance for further reflection ahead of future negotiations.

For further information:

- [IES Briefing on COP29](#)
- [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#)
- [Transforming the planet: Our vision for the future of environmental science](#)

“It is imperative that the global response ... to climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution ... takes an integrated approach.”



Recap: COP15 & the Global Biodiversity Framework

[COP15](#) was a global summit for the parties to the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), which is its key environmental treaty for addressing biodiversity loss at a global level.

The summit held in 2022, COP15, was particularly important as it produced a post-2020 framework of targets and rules to address biodiversity loss.

The [first set of targets under the CBD](#), set out in 2010 in Aichi, Japan, were due to be met in 2020 and were universally unmet. COP15 was scheduled to take place in line with the expiry of the first set of targets to negotiate a new series of targets and to advance action on biodiversity loss.

After a series of negotiations, COP15 eventually created what some commentators have referred to as having the potential to become a 'Paris Agreement for nature', the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#).

What was agreed at COP15?

During COP15, six agreements were adopted, including the Global Biodiversity Framework,

which has become the key framework for coordinating action to address biodiversity loss on a global level.

The Framework itself contains four overarching long-term goals, as well as 23 targets. The longterm goals address a vision for biodiversity and global action with a view to 2050, whereas the majority of the targets focus on the next seven years until 2030.

The global goals address:

1. The integrity, connectivity, and resilience of ecosystems, as well as the threat of human-induced extinction of species;
2. The sustainable use and management of nature and its contributions to people;
3. The fair and equitable utilisation of genetic resources for monetary and non-monetary benefits; and
4. The implementation of the Framework, including funding, capacity, technical and scientific cooperation, and access to technology.

The targets address how the global community must achieve those goals,

including a crucial commitment that at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and coastal & marine areas will be effectively conserved and managed by 2030 (known as [the 30x30 initiative](#)).

The Framework agreed at COP15 promised to raise ambitions to realise the goal of halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030.

For this to succeed, national targets must be fully aligned with the Framework to drive action on the ground.

At a glance: The 23 targets

Reducing threats to biodiversity

1. Spatial planning and effective management
2. Restoration of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems
3. Management and integration of terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems
4. Halt human-induced extinction and support recovery
5. Sustainable use and trade of wild species
6. Addressing the impacts of invasive alien species
7. Addressing the impacts of pollution (including nutrients, pesticides, and plastic)
8. Addressing the impact of climate change and ocean acidification

Meeting people's needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing

9. Sustainable management of wild species for social, economic, and environmental benefits
10. Sustainable agriculture, fisheries, forestry for biodiversity and food security
11. Restore, maintain and enhance ecosystem services
12. Increased area and quality of green and blue spaces in urban environments with biodiversity-inclusive urban planning
13. Measures to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits of genetic resources

Tools and solutions for implementation and mainstreaming

14. Integration of biodiversity into policy, regulation, planning, EIA, and national accounting across all levels of government
15. Facilitate businesses engagement in monitoring, transparency, compliance and other means of ensuring sustainable consumption
16. Encourage and enable sustainable consumption choices and halve global food waste
17. Establish measures for biosafety in the context of biotechnology
18. Identify by 2025 and eliminate, phase out, or reform biodiversity-harming subsidies (reducing them by at least \$500bn per year by 2030)

19. Increase financial resources mobilizing at least \$200bn per year by 2030 (including finance from developed to developing countries should be \$20bn per year by 2025 and \$30bn per year by 2030, national biodiversity finance plans, private and blended finance, innovative financial tools, co-benefits and synergies with climate finance, and collective and non-market actions)
20. Strengthen capacity building and development, including through technology transfer
21. Ensure availability of data, information and knowledge
22. Justice, representation, and participation in decision making
23. Gender equality and equal rights in implementation

For the full goals and more information on what they cover, see the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#).

For more information about COP15 and its implications for environmental science, read the [briefing from the IES](#).

“For [the Global Biodiversity Framework] to succeed, national targets must be fully aligned with the Framework to drive action on the ground.”



In the UK: the latest developments on biodiversity

In the UK, the most immediate factor affecting new policy developments is the change of UK Government, with the new Labour administration having come to power at the 2024 general election.

Manifesto commitments

The new Environment Secretary [commented before the election](#) that “nature underpins everything, but we stand at a moment in history when nature needs us to defend it.”

This comment echoes the new [Government’s election manifesto](#), which committed to:

- “tackle the ... nature emergency, including the unforgivable pollution of our rivers and seas”
- “take steps to ensure we are building more high-quality, well-designed, and sustainable homes and creating places that increase climate resilience and promote nature recovery”
- “improve access to nature, promote biodiversity, and protect our landscapes and wildlife”
- “deliver for nature, taking action to meet our Environment Act targets, and ... work in partnership with civil society, communities and business”

- “create nine new National River Walks ... and establish three new National Forests in England, whilst planting millions of trees and creating new woodlands” and
- “expand nature-rich habitats such as wetlands, peat bogs and forests”

Despite this strong support for action to protect nature, the Government’s policy agenda around the environment is primarily focused on energy system decarbonisation.

The Government has [stated its desire](#) to work with environmental NGOs, though concerns have also been raised that the current approach may falsely suggest that environmental and economic outcomes are incompatible.

In December 2024, the Government published changes to the [National Planning Policy Framework](#). The changes were released shortly after the Prime Minister’s [description of a bat mitigation measure](#) as “absurd”, prompting concerns about the Government’s approach to nature.

The Government has repeated its desire to find solutions which deliver both economic growth and protections for nature, so scrutiny will be important to ensure that rhetoric against conservation does not jeopardise the possibility of a holistic approach to developments.

In its 2024 [message to the new UK Government](#), the IES set out priority recommendations to deliver such an approach to environmental crises, as well as how it can lead to thriving people, a healthy economy, and a flourishing environment.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Though the Government has changed, existing policy is still relevant in many cases. Most pertinently, [Biodiversity Net Gain](#) (BNG) remains a crucial mechanism for ensuring the protection and enhancement of nature.

While the implementation of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain continues, it is vital to monitor progress to assess whether it is working in practice.

To that end, the IES's [Environmental Policy Implementation Community](#) (EPIC) and the [Association of Local Government Ecologists](#) (ALGE) have been conducting interviews and have surveyed over 120 of their members on how mandatory BNG is working in practice.

Commenting on some of the initial findings [in EnvironmentAnalyst](#), IES Policy Officer Ellie Savage said: “BNG is a world-leading policy on paper, but our research points to early warning signs that there are currently significant problems in practice.”

“DEFRA’s latest comments assure us that the system is working as intended, but it is hard to tell without better data. We also need a clearer understanding of how many planning applications DEFRA expected to be subject to BNG, compared to the less than 1% reported so far.”

“DEFRA should reconsider the issues caused by the exemption for custom and self builds. Scrutinising these applications is a large burden on already stretched LPAs, as they are at particular risk of being abused.”

“It is great to hear DEFRA highlight the work LPAs are doing to boost their local BNG market, and they should consider how to support more LPAs to do this, especially to service small sites that only require a fraction of a unit. DEFRA will also need to address the elephant in the room - how onsite gains are realistically going to be monitored and enforced - to ensure BNG actually delivers in the long term.”

To find out more about the state of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain, read the early findings of the research in [environmental SCIENTIST](#), or learn more about the [EPIC-ALGE project](#).

Local nature recovery

[Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#) (LNRS) are another key policy tool for nature in England. The first LNRS in the country is now in place in [the West of England](#), with many more following in the coming months.

48 local authorities in England are responsible for creating Local Nature Recovery Strategies, which are intended to identify priorities and opportunities, producing a local habitat map to inform decisions.

Informed by best practice, the Environmental Policy Implementation Community has published five key findings on ‘[How to ensure Local Nature Recovery Strategies drive delivery](#)’.

Environmental Land Management Schemes

The third key policy for nature inherited from the previous UK Government is [Environmental Land Management](#) (ELMS), which sets out schemes for environmentally-friendly farming in England.

The delivery of ELMS remains a priority for the new Government, which affirmed in its manifesto that it would “make environment land management schemes work for farmers and nature.”

There are multiple tiers of payments available under ELMS for farmers who participate.

In December 2024, DEFRA published [new guidance and details of payments](#) for the more ambitious tier: the Countryside Stewardship Higher Tier Scheme. Concerns have been raised that the funding being provided may not be sufficient to meet the UK’s [targets for nature](#).

The coming months will be a critical period of time for the adoption of ELMS, to ensure that the mutual goals of food security and the protection of nature are able to be achieved.

The UK at COP16

At COP16, the UK had a significant presence, supported by the attendance of Environment Secretary Steve Reed, Nature Minister Mary Creagh, and the Chair of Natural England, Tony Juniper.

Creagh described it as an opportunity to put the UK “back on the global stage” in terms of nature recovery, highlighting the

importance of international collaboration and national implementation of the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#).

The UK delegation was also joined by the new Special Representative for Nature, Ruth Davis and the Special Representative for Climate, Rachel Kyte.

During COP16, the Government took the opportunity to publish its [Criteria for 30x30 on land in England](#), setting out a vision for how the critical target will be implemented in England.

The UK also participated in the negotiations around the Cali Fund and other key outcomes of COP16. In particular, the UK also worked with Chile on [a pledge](#) to afford the same protections to fungi as are given to plants and animals.

Is the UK on track?

Compared to efforts to address climate change, nature recovery remains nascent in its policy implementation.

Nonetheless, there is a considerable availability of data around biodiversity in the UK, so monitoring and evaluation are especially important to ensure interventions are effective in practice.

In December 2024, the latest [indicators for UK biodiversity](#) were published by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). The latest data includes 15 indicators, comprising 39 data measures.

The key message published in the latest update is that “Overall, while around half of the assessed indicator measures are improving in the long term, in the short term more are either deteriorating or showing little or no change than improving.”

This latest development is a stark reminder that, even with significant efforts to deliver new policy mechanisms for nature protection and recovery, effective implementation in practice remains the critical challenge of the next 10 years.

To get the UK back on track, the Government must urgently ensure that key policies, such as Biodiversity Net Gain, truly deliver, and that voluntary schemes like ELMS are taken up at a sufficient scale.

Early in 2025, the Government is expected to publish a [Land Use Framework](#) for England, addressing the potential for multiple benefits from land use, including food security, conservation, energy, and infrastructure development.

That Framework cannot be another policy that divorces economic and environmental outcomes: it must deliver a holistic approach.

To find out more about the Land Use Framework and how it can support an integrated approach for people, the economy, and the environment, read the [IES briefing paper on the Land Use Framework](#).

As policy implementation remains a key challenge, the role of environmental professionals in securing delivery will be vital. The [Environmental Policy Implementation Community](#) is a key network for professionals to share their experiences and speak with a single voice calling for ambitious and deliverable policy.

For an overview of the current state of the UK's environmental policy, as well as the key actions needed to keep the UK on track, you can [read the priorities for the UK Government](#) published by the IES ahead of the 2024 general election.

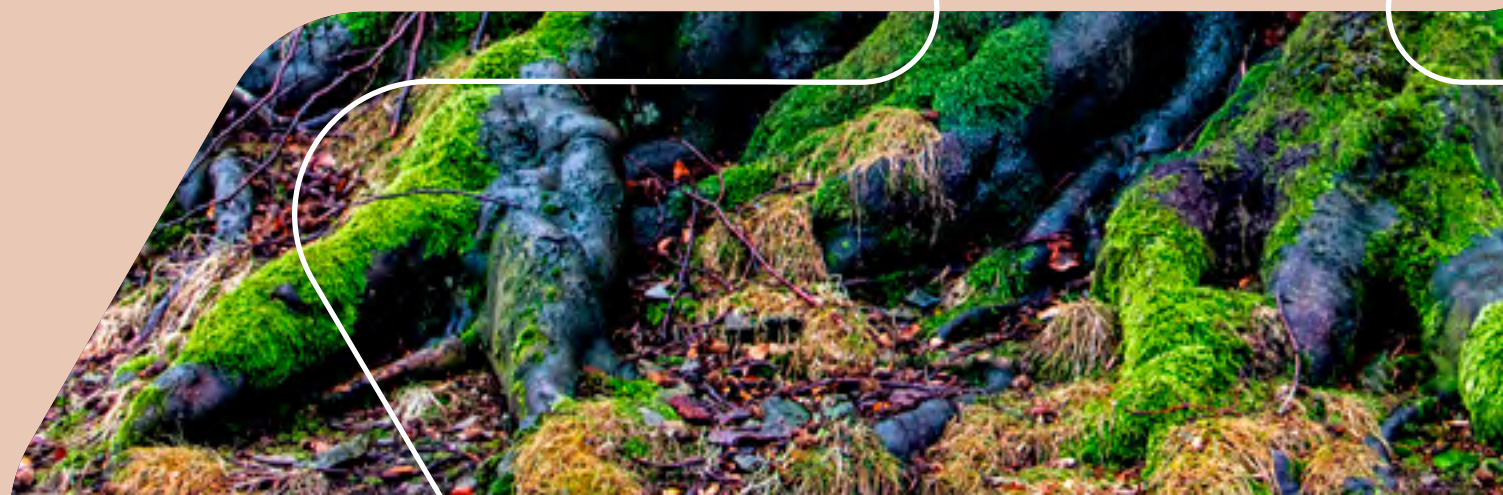
Some of our top recommendations on nature and biodiversity included:

1. Commit to leaving UK nature ... in a better state than it was in 2020, recognising that the current trend of environmental decline means that 'do no harm' is an insufficient approach to preventing long-term damage.
2. Deliver on the recommendations of the NAO's [Implementing Statutory BNG Report](#), including monitoring local authority enforcement of BNG and overall impact to ensure environmental gain in practice.
3. Coordinate nature-based approaches to climate mitigation to maximise the 'ecosystem services' provided. Deliver a consistent approach to ELMS, soil health, and the Land Use Framework, informed by scientific insights.
4. Urgently deliver marine conservation and restoration to increase coastal resilience and meet the UK's commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature.
5. Provide long-term non-competitive environmental funding for local authorities. Commit to funding Local Nature Recovery Strategies for the next 10 years, increasing confidence in their delivery.

The [full report](#) sets out how those recommendations can deliver the Government's missions and how they could be delivered in practice, with additional advice on implementing each policy.

If you require further information about these recommendations, or about the state of UK nature policy, please contact Joseph Lewis at joseph@the-ies.org.

“This latest development is a stark reminder that ... effective implementation in practice remains the critical challenge of the next 10 years.”



Glossary and key concepts

Key concepts

Biodiversity

Biodiversity (or biological diversity) refers to the full range and variety of life found on Earth or in a particular ecosystem, from animals to plants, fungi, and other forms of life.

Biodiversity plays a crucial role in the functioning of the natural world, as well as making vital contributions to human society and the economy.

Biodiversity loss

Biodiversity loss relates to the decline, disappearance, or degradation of biodiversity. Globally, biodiversity is declining faster than at any time in human history.

The [IPBES Global Assessment Report](#) provides full details of the evidence underpinning our understanding of biodiversity loss.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

A requirement of development processes in England, which became mandatory in February 2024. Under BNG, a development must result in 10% more (or better quality) natural habitat than there was before the development.

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is one of three treaties emerging from the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, along with the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention to Combat Desertification.

The CBD is principally responsible for the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable and equitable management of its benefits.

COP16 was a summit bringing together the 196 countries who are parties to the Convention to negotiate how to deliver the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), which was agreed at COP15 in 2021.

The framework includes targets and seeks to guide action to 2030, by which point the international community hopes to have halted or begun to reverse the decline of nature and biodiversity.

Ecosystem services

“A service that is provided by an ecosystem as an intrinsic property of its functionality (e.g. pollination, nutrient cycling, nitrogen fixation, fruit and seed dispersal). The benefits (and occasionally disbenefits) that people obtain from ecosystems.” - [IPBES](#)

IPBES

[IPBES](#) is the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. It is an international organisation established in 2012 to provide scientific support to global efforts to address nature and biodiversity.

Although it is significantly different in its structure and scope, it plays a similar role to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

IPBES has produced crucial evidence such as the [Nexus Assessment](#) on the links between biodiversity, water, food and health and the [Values Assessment](#) on the multiple values of nature and its benefits.

Nature-based solutions

“Actions that protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems, that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits.

These solutions can range from planting forests and mangroves to restoring coral reefs and peatlands.” - [UNFCCC](#)

Transformative change

“A fundamental, system-wide reorganisation across technological, economic and social factors, including paradigms, goals and values.” - [IPBES](#)

Transformative change is distinct from incremental change because it seeks transformation, rather than progress within the same basic system. It is distinct from atomistic change because it seeks to change a whole system, rather than any one element on its own.

Transformative change of global systems of consumption and production, including food, land use, and planning, will be necessary to protect nature and address the interlinking crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution.

Triple crisis

The combined crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution.

Further information

Find out more about influencing policy decisions

Our IES member briefing note: '[Influencing the UK Parliament](#)', first published in 2011 and most recently re-issued in 2022, provides an overview of some of the ways that environmental professionals can influence Parliament and legislation.

The IES also runs training to help environmental professionals learn more about policy, how it affects them, and how they can influence policy decisions. Regular training sessions are available for [sign-ups on the IES website](#).

In the UK, many issues of environmental policy are devolved to national administrations. If you live in Scotland, you can [contact your Member of Scottish Parliament](#) or learn more about [influencing Scottish legislation](#).

If you live in Wales, you can [contact your Member of Senedd Cymru](#) or learn more about the [business of the Senedd](#). If you live in Northern Ireland, you can [contact your local Member of the Legislative Assembly](#) or learn more about [the Assembly's work](#).

Is there a policy-related topic which you would like to see covered by the IES?

Get in touch with Joseph Lewis (joseph@the-ies.org) to let us know your thoughts on potential topics for future briefings, or with your suggestions for other content.

Other relevant legislation & regulations

Find out more about existing legislation & policy on this topic:

- [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#)
- [Environmental Improvement Plan \(EIP\) for England](#)
- [Environment Act 2021](#)
- [UK Biodiversity Indicators 2024](#)

Other relevant reports, briefings, and content from the IES:

- [Transforming the planet: Our vision for the future of environmental science](#)
- [EPIC and ALGE 'Biodiversity in practice' project](#)
- [EPIC: Local Nature Recovery Strategies](#)
- [Environmental Policy Implementation Community](#)
- [IES Briefing on COP29](#)
- [IES Briefing on the Land Use Framework for England](#)
- [Priorities for the UK Government, 2024-2029](#)

More analysis and insights are available on the [IES website](#) and [YouTube channel](#).

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