

# Essential Environment: Land & nature policy

Latest developments and  
implications for professionals

December 2025



[the-ies.org](https://the-ies.org)

The Institution  
of Environmental  
Sciences

# Contents

4	Introduction
6	Horizon scanning and new policy developments
6	Environmental Improvement Plan for England
7	Planning & infrastructure
9	Environmental Outcomes Reports
9	Land Use Framework for England
10	Environmental Land Management Schemes
11	Nature Recovery Network
12	Biodiversity Net Gain
12	Devolution Bill
14	PFAS Plan
14	Across the devolved nations
17	Policy and governance context
22	Further information

# Acknowledgements

**Authors:** Joseph Lewis

**Design:** Bea Gilbert & Lucy Rowland

**Acknowledgements:** Special thanks are due to the Land Condition Community, which connects members to share expertise, shape resources, and drive standards across the sector. Its Early Careers Network supports those starting out with mentoring, learning, and peer connection.

The Community leads the annual Land Condition Symposium, runs webinars and discussions, develops professional guidance, and contributes to policy and consultation responses.

Through collaboration with partners, the Community champions best practice and strong professional standards in the sector.

The National Contaminated Land Officers Group (NCLOG) is also part of the IES family, providing a home for land contamination professionals working in local authorities across the country.

## 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.

Registered charity no. 277611

## Image credits:

**Cover Image** – © sergnester | Adobe Stock

**p. 16** – © Lois GoBe | Adobe Stock

**p. 23** – © MNStudio | Adobe Stock

# Introduction

Since the election of the new UK Government, environmental issues have seen significant policy developments, so there are plenty of opportunities to engage.

The IES has created this briefing paper as an introductory reference on environmental policy relating to land and linked issues, including land-based biodiversity and ecosystems.

We hope the paper will help IES members to stay up-to-date on relevant policy issues, supporting horizon scanning and identifying opportunities for our expert members to engage with decision makers and the public. We publish updates to this paper on an annual basis.

You may also be interested in our horizon scanning papers on water policy and clean air, which will be published shortly.

## Where to find out more

- If you want to stay up-to-date with the latest developments, make sure you are subscribed to [Essential Environment](#).
- For more information about the latest developments in land condition, find out

more about the [Land Condition Community](#).

- For local authorities working in land contamination, see the [National Contaminated Land Officers' Group \(NCLOG\)](#) and our [Environmental Policy Implementation Community](#).
- For more information about environmental impacts, join our [Environmental Impact Assessment \(EIA\) Community](#).



# Horizon scanning & new policy developments

In the UK, the new Government has steadily announced updates to land and nature policy since the 2024 General Election.

## England's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP)

Most of the new Government's approach to policy around land and nature is set out in its [Environmental Improvement Plan](#) (EIP), though the scope of most policies in the EIP is contained to England.

In December 2025, the new Government published [revisions to the EIP](#), providing new commitments and an overview of the current state of environmental policy and government plans over the coming years.

Key developments for land and biodiversity on land in the EIP include:

- Reiterating the commitment to a [Land Use Framework](#) to manage trade-offs for land use, including nature, with a specific role in informing spatial planning for LNRS and Spatial Development Strategies.
- A new commitment to produce a PFAS Plan in 2026, as part of wider action to address chemicals, pollutants, and

legacy contamination, including through [UK REACH](#). These proposals replace a commitment to publish a Chemicals Strategy, which will no longer happen.

- A promise to review the delivery of the contaminated land regulatory regime by assessing the use of existing powers and local authority performance through a new [State of Contaminated Land Report](#) in 2026, as well as a survey of English local authorities with outcomes due to be published in early 2027.
- Commitments around soil health, with a goal to bring at least 40% of England's agricultural soil into sustainable management by 2028, increasing to 60% by 2030. This will be supported in 2026 by principles of sustainable soil management and a methodology and guidance for consistent soil health monitoring, with an ambition to establish a soil health baseline for England by 2029.
- More details on the farming roadmap, which will be published in 2026, and [Biodiversity Net Gain for Nationally-Significant Infrastructure Projects](#), which will be implemented by mid-2026.

- Commitments to deliver existing biodiversity targets, including the **30x30 target**, an increased contribution from protected landscapes, protected site strategies for up to 12 sites, and action through the **Nature Restoration Fund**.
- Measures to address trees and woodland, such as a new Trees Action Plan, due to be published in 2026, supported by a target for improved woodland condition and woodland management.
- Incentives for nature-friendly farming and agri-environment schemes to provide hedgerow habitats and improve the condition of woodlands, alongside the **Restoring Meadow Marsh and Reef** project.
- Action to halt the decline of species and protect threatened species, including a new 2026 Pollinator Action Plan and efforts to improve the evidence base around delivering species targets.
- Commitments to give everyone access to green or blue spaces, with implications for protected landscapes and the government's approach to spatial planning.
- Measures to address climate change with implications for land use, in line with existing commitments under the **Carbon Budget Delivery Plan** and **National Adaptation Programme**.
- Many other commitments and policies with implications for land, land use, and biodiversity on land.

Find out more by reading the **revised Environmental Improvement Plan for England**.

## Planning & infrastructure

One of the Government's main areas of focus has been planning reform, which has had significant implications for the environment.

These changes have been primarily realised through the **Planning & Infrastructure Bill**, which is due to become law in early 2026.

The Bill aims to speed up the planning process, particularly for new homes and the delivery of critical infrastructure. It contains five core parts:

### 1. Part 1 on infrastructure, which includes:

- Changes to **Nationally-Significant Infrastructure Projects** (NSIP) to (i) ensure national policy statements are regularly updated, (ii) increase flexibility around consenting by allowing the Secretary of State to direct some projects out of the NSIP regime, (iii) amend the requirements for consultation reports to make them shorter and simpler, and (iv) further change judicial review and consultation processes to speed them up.
- Reforms to electricity network connections with a view to increasing and expediting grid connectivity.
- Updates to the Scottish process for consenting around electricity infrastructure, including mandatory pre-application requirements to engage statutory consultees earlier and increased charging powers for authorities to account for costs.
- A 'cap and floor' mechanism for long duration electricity storage, providing

a minimum and maximum revenue for investor returns to encourage more investment in storage infrastructure.

- e. New consumer benefits for transmission projects near homes, as an increased incentive for communities.
- f. A longer commissioning period for offshore electricity transmission systems, to account for the increased complexity and time delays around projects.
- g. Reforms to several existing laws to facilitate energy generation, transport connectivity, electric vehicle chargepoints, and other important infrastructure.

## 2. Part 2 on Planning, which includes:

- a. New powers to ‘sub-delegate’ the setting of planning fees to Local Planning Authorities to cover the costs of applications.
- b. Reform the planning committees with the goal of delegating some activities to planning officers to speed up the process of planning.
- c. The introduction of **Spatial Development Strategies** (SDS), based on London’s approach to planning, which will introduce a strategic level of spatial planning, with the goal that local plans will need to align with the relevant SDS.

## 3. Part 3 on Development and Nature Recovery, which includes:

- a. Significant reforms to the way that nature recovery and environmental protections interact with the planning

process, with the goal of speeding up delivery.

- b. A new **Nature Restoration Fund** (NRF), which would allow developers to contribute towards the fund instead of undertaking assessments or carrying out interventions on site, as long as an **Environmental Delivery Plan** (EDP) has been produced by Natural England (or another relevant body) that sets out strategic actions that can be carried out through the fund. This shifts the focus of nature recovery and environmental protections from mitigation and prevention to recovery after the fact.
- c. Commitments were made during the Bill’s passing that this would not lead to environmental regression, despite the advice of the **Office for Environmental Protection** (OEP).

## 4. Part 4 on Development Corporations, which includes:

- a. New powers for development corporations, with the intention that this will facilitate the development of new towns.
- b. The basis of a framework for development corporations to unlock housing development in new places and in new ways.

To learn more about how Nutrient Neutrality rules are affected by the Bill, [read the briefing paper](#) from the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology.

The **Planning & Infrastructure Bill** has been controversial, especially when it comes to nature recovery.

By deciding to allow developers the opportunity to circumvent on-site interventions, the Bill effectively jumps over several steps in the mitigation hierarchy, creating substantial risks of environmental regression and posing particular risks for the connectivity of nature and particular habitats and ecosystems.

At the end of 2025, the Government announced further proposals for planning, including revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

These changes follow a previous [consultation on the NPPF](#) in 2024, which led to a series of updates to planning policy. You can find out more about those changes by reading our [response to the consultation](#) and the [subsequent government commentary](#).

The latest changes make further updates, including:

- Reform to planning processes, with the aim “to make the system clearer, more predictable, and faster to build 1.5 million new homes”.
- A default approval for certain developments, including suitable homes built near rail links and upwards development in towns and cities.
- The introduction of a new ‘medium site’ category with more proportionate restrictions to promote these kinds of development.
- Measures to encourage high density housing and greater diversification of housing.
- Support for new builds to be more nature-friendly, including around the

inclusion of swift bricks, albeit without any mandatory requirements, effectively making the policy unenforceable.

- Preferential treatment for developments with social or economic benefits to the local community.
- Changes to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), including an exemption for small sites and more details of how BNG will apply on brownfield land and NSIP projects, which are set out in detail later in this chapter.

Learn more about the latest announcements by reading [the Housing Secretary’s statement](#) and the new [consultation on the NPPF](#).

You can find out more about the risks associated with the Government’s new approach to planning by reading:

- The [OEP’s letter on the risk of environmental regression](#)
- The House of Commons Library’s [briefing on the Planning Bill](#)’s passage through Parliament
- A [joint letter, signed by the IES](#), addressing the implications of exemptions to BNG on small sites

For more information about planning in Scotland, consult the [Fourth National Planning Framework](#), which deviates from the new approach being taken in England.

## Environmental Outcomes Reports (EORs) & EIA

Despite the focus on planning reform and increasing the speed and certainty of planning processes, there are still large



questions around [Environmental Impact Assessment](#) (EIA) that remain unanswered.

In 2023, the [Levelling-Up & Regeneration Act](#) (LURA) proposed to reform Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs), leading to a consultation in 2023 on the proposed replacement regime: [Environmental Outcomes Reports](#) (EORs).

Responding to the consultation, several concerns were raised about how EORs would work in practice, including by the IES, which led to the transition to EORs being paused.

The 2024 general election created further delays, and the new Government has not fully revealed its plans for implementing EORs, beyond the broad commitment that this is still expected to take place.

You can find out more by reading:

- The IES [response to the Levelling-Up consultation](#) in 2023
- The IES response to the [consultation on Environmental Outcomes Reports](#)
- Our 2025 [article on the state of EORs in Essential Environment](#)

## Land Use Framework for England

The [Land Use Framework](#) (LUF) is a strategic policy intended to support multiple objectives for the use of land in England.

After considerable delays, the final LUF is due to be published in late 2025 or early 2026.

The Government published a consultation on land use in early 2025 to inform the development of the Land Use Framework.

The consultation document set out a vision for land use change, focusing on delivering a land use transition to:

- “Make space for nature recovery, water, and emissions reduction;
- Support sustainable and resilient food production;
- Deliver new infrastructure and housing;
- Fix the foundations for resilient long-term economic growth; and
- Co-create plans for delivery.”

The consultation also confirmed that the Framework will include principles for the Government to apply around land use considerations, descriptive analysis on levers for developing and adapting land use change, and a release of land use data to support spatial decision making.

In the consultation, the draft principles were:

1. Co-design
2. Multifunctional land
3. Playing to the strengths of the land
4. Decisions fit for the long-term
5. Responsive by design

One question in the consultation asks whether the principles should apply beyond government departments, which will be essential to drive meaningful land use decisions across the country.

Given past commentary from the Government, it is anticipated that the approach of the LUF will be limited, only applying to government decisions.

Despite the limited scope of how the Framework is expected to work in practice, questions remain about what forms of land use will be addressed, which will be crucial to determining if the LUF actually leads to multifunctional solutions in practice.

Ultimately, many issues are mentioned in the consultation documents, yet details of how these forms of land use will be addressed are either scarce or seemingly limited to the application of broad principles for the Government's decisions.

Find out more in our [briefing on the Land Use Framework](#). The IES also responded to the Government's [land use consultation](#), offering our views on current proposals.

If you are interested in how Scotland handles the same questions of strategic land strategy, read about [Scotland's Third Land Use Strategy](#).

## Environmental Land Management Schemes

[Environmental Land Management Schemes](#) (ELMS) are a key part of land management in England following the UK's exit from the European Union.

Set out under the [Agriculture Act](#), ELMS are intended to provide payments to farmers for nature-friendly farming and over public goods achieved through agricultural land.

The [Sustainable Farming Incentive](#) (SFI) is the primary mechanism for payments,

alongside other schemes which include countryside stewardship and landscape recovery.

Since ELMS were originally proposed, the implementation of the policy has struggled, driven by inconsistent policy approaches, uncertainty around long-term funding and which activities will be rewarded, and poor communication between the Government and farmers.

The [SFI was temporarily closed](#) to applications between 2024 and 2025 as a result of limited funding, but has since reopened. There is still uncertainty about the extent to which the current Government will continue to fund these schemes.

Clarity will hopefully be provided by the [Government's Farming Roadmap](#), which is currently being produced and is expected to be published in 2026. The roadmap is intended to outline a shared vision between government and farmers, addressing delivery challenges around funding in the process.

The Government has made food security a key priority, with the intention that the strategy also delivers for nature. The [revised Food Strategy](#) was published in 2025, though it leaves the implications of food security for strategic land use open.

Ultimately, there are still significant questions about ELMS and the SFI, as well as how nature-friendly farming will be supported in the future.

You can learn more about Environmental Land Management Schemes in our 2025 article for Essential Environment on [ELMS and English farming](#).

## Nature Recovery Network

In the previous Government's [Environmental Improvement Plan](#), it set out a commitment to bring together partners, policies and funding to create a national network of wildlife-rich places to increase and restore nature: the [Nature Recovery Network](#).

A key pillar of this approach was the idea that every area in England would have a [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#) (LNRS), which would target actions to specific areas and create a strategic level approach to nature recovery that could combine into a collective whole at a national level.

While the original scope of the Nature Recovery Network is no longer the approach taken by the current Government, LNRSs are still a crucial policy for delivering nature recovery locally.

The first handful of LNRSs have now been published, leading to a [report by the Office for Environmental Protection](#) (OEP), which sets out the role of LNRSs in helping the Government to achieve its goals.

The Government welcomed the review and agreed with many of the OEP's recommendations, highlighting recent actions that it believes will facilitate the delivery of LNRSs, such as support for local authorities.

Despite the positive response, questions remain because the strategic delivery of LNRSs depends on other policy documents which have been delayed, such as the [Land Use Framework](#) (and until recently the revised EIP).

The EIP once again passes the responsibility for linking up LNRSs to the Land Use

Framework, which will not have a crucial role to play in making the most of the strategies.

Given that the Government has indicated its intention for the [Land Use Framework](#) to be mostly advisory, it will be difficult to achieve this strategic delivery role in practice.

Find out more about the OEP's report on Local Nature Recovery Strategies and the Government's response in our 2025 [article for Essential Environment](#).

You can also read about Local Nature Recovery Strategies and how they can deliver for nature in [EPIC's 2024 briefing on LNRSs](#).

## Biodiversity Net Gain

Mandatory [Biodiversity Net Gain](#) (BNG) is a world-leading piece of legislation that aims to ensure development delivers for nature.

It came into force for major developments in England at the start of 2024, requiring each of these developments to leave behind a positive impact on biodiversity.

Since the policy was implemented, it has faced challenges for delivery, as well as new policy that threatens to undermine its potential.

At the start of 2025, our [Environmental Policy Implementation Community](#) (EPIC) worked with the [Association of Local Government Ecologists](#) to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the challenges faced in the implementation of mandatory BNG over its first year.

The [research](#) resulted in more than 20 recommendations, including:

- The need for a systems approach
- Closing loopholes in exemptions
- Applying modern data standards to address information and monitoring gaps
- Greater support for small developers
- More investment in Local Planning Authorities
- Improved monitoring to ensure that gains are actually being made
- A BNG regulator to enforce the policy

Since the report came out, the Government has addressed some of these concerns, though it has also begun to consider new exemptions and a less systemic approach through planning reform, going against the evidence in the process.

In December 2025, the [IES joined voices from across the environment sector](#) in calling for the protection of BNG.

Planned exemptions by the UK Government could have removed as many as 97% of planning applications from BNG requirements. In the end, the Government was forced to reach a compromise after strong pressure from businesses, lawyers, and environmental groups, [announcing an exemption for smaller sites](#) up to 0.2 hectares.

The Government also [announced plans](#) to run a short consultation in 2026 on BNG for brownfield land, while also planning to deliver BNG for Nationally-Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP).

These proposals still significantly threaten the power of BNG to support nature recovery,

so the IES and other organisations are continuing to share expertise with government, to support a more evidence-based approach to planning policy.

More information on proposed and recent planning reforms is available earlier in this chapter.

For more information about the current state of Biodiversity Net Gain, read our report on [BNG in Practice](#) and find out about our [BNG event series](#).

## Devolution Bill

The [English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#) (or ‘the Devolution Bill’ in shorthand) began consideration in Parliament in late 2025.

It is expected to become law in 2026 and applies almost entirely to England.

The Devolution Bill intends to deliver several commitments made in the Government’s [2024 election manifesto](#), including its pledge to “transfer power out of Westminster, and into communities, to ensure those places have the strong governance arrangements, capacity, and capability to deliver, providing central support where needed.”

Several of the Bill’s most relevant provisions for the environment include:

- **Strategic authorities:** A new tier of local authority would cover all of England, either as a [Mayoral Strategic Authority](#), a Foundation Strategic Authority, or an Established Mayoral Strategic Authority.
- **Unitary restructuring:** The Government wants to reorganise local government to

restructure all two-tier areas of England, leaving the country entirely covered by unitary authorities. The intention is that new unitary authorities will cover a population of 500,000+, with the goal of delivering high quality public services, meeting local needs, supporting devolution, and strengthening community empowerment.

- **Standardising devolved powers and functions:** The intention of the Bill is to create greater parity between all authorities at the strategic level. Areas of competence would include transport and local infrastructure, skills and employment, housing and strategic planning, economic development and regeneration, environment and climate change, health and wellbeing, and public safety (though not all of these areas receive new powers from the Bill).
- **Environmental powers:** In its [2024 white paper](#), the Government proposed new environmental powers for strategic authorities, including responsibility for warm homes and public sector decarbonisation grants. The Bill does not provide these powers, but the Government has noted its intention to continue exploring opportunities.
- **Planning powers:** The Bill proposes to provide strategic authorities with development management powers similar to those held by the Mayor of London, such as the [power to 'call in'](#) applications that have strategic significance.
- **Integrated settlements:** The Bill includes new powers for strategic authorities to gather funding, including through council tax precepts, transport levies, and

permitted borrowing, with the intention to move towards integrated settlements as the default route for grant funding.

- **More power for Mayors:** One of the key themes of the Bill is the transfer of power towards Mayors. Mayors would also be able to propose new powers and receive a public response from the Secretary of State, effectively opening the door to innovative approaches and pilot schemes for new devolved powers.

Many of these proposals present an opportunity for more consistent local governance, with greater empowerment to communities.

There are also risks, particularly that the consolidation of authorities could lead to fewer environmental roles or costs being cut at the expense of the ability for local authorities to carry out their statutory roles.

You can learn more about the Devolution Bill in our 2025 article for Essential Environment on [devolution and community empowerment](#).

## PFAS Plan

One new pledge in the Government's 2025 revisions to the [Environmental Improvement Plan](#) was the promise of a new plan on [per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances](#) (PFAS).

Details of the plan have not yet been fully outlined, but the EIP says that it would “set out a range of regulatory and non-regulatory interventions, measures and initiatives with specific actions and delivery milestones.”



The goals of the PFAS plan would be to:

- Raise understanding and awareness of PFAS in the environment
- Identify and address releases of harmful PFAS
- Protect people and the environment from harm relating to PFAS exposure

Without full details of what the PFAS plan will include, it is not yet possible to determine its effectiveness, but this is a critical step towards addressing the **risks associated with PFAS**. The plan is due to be released in 2026.

## Across the devolved nations

While these developments are ongoing in England, Northern Ireland published its long-awaited **Environmental Improvement Plan** (EIP) in 2024.

Northern Ireland's Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) was required to publish the plan under the **Environment Act 2021**, but its publication was delayed due to the suspension of the Executive.

The plan is a strategic document setting out Northern Ireland's approach to the environment, so will play a key role in driving delivery of the Executive's commitments.

It draws together existing strategies and policies and grounds the actions it contains in the context of sustainable development and natural capital.

DAERA's EIP also sets six Strategic Environmental Outcomes, which are the primary objectives of the plan. One of these

is 'Excellent Air, Water & Land Quality' and several of the others relate to land and nature, such as 'Thriving, Resilient & Connected Nature & Wildlife' and 'Net Zero GHG Emissions & Improved Climate Resilience & Adaptability'.

Many of the goals and policies are already set out in Northern Ireland's existing legislation, which also delivers the protected site network of Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, and Areas of Special Scientific Interest.

Commitments highlighted by the EIP include:

- Complete a landscape policy and legislation review by the end of March 2027, potentially alongside a Landscape Strategy.
- Develop a multi-year Landscape Action Plan by December 2025 (though this has not yet been published).
- That at least 30% of land and freshwater will be protected, connected and managed for nature by 2030, with measures to support delivery of 30x30 and the **Kunming-Montreal Framework** by 2026.
- Publication of the **Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy** to 2040.
- Develop and put into operation a Nature Recovery Plan to support nature recovery and climate resilience.
- Achieving sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources including soils and water.

To find out more about Northern Ireland's environmental commitments, read the

## Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland.

Throughout 2025, Scotland has been consulting on [proposals for land reform](#), culminating in the Land Reform Bill.

While these proposals primarily affect rights around how land is used, they have some implications for community decision making around land use.

Since the start of 2024, Wales has been working to develop a framework for environmental governance following the UK's exit from the European Union.

The primary policy instrument for these changes has been the [Environment \(Principles Governance and Biodiversity Targets\) \(Wales\) Bill](#), along with several consultations.

Broadly, these changes will deliver a governance framework that contains many of the classical elements of environmental governance, including targets, principles for decision making, and a governance body.

While the final outcome of these developments is yet to be determined, the broad details are set out in the [public notes on the Bill](#).

For more information, see chapter two on existing [policy and governance context](#).

**“Biodiversity Net Gain is a potentially world-leading approach. Since it was implemented, it has faced challenges for delivery, as well as new policy that threatens to undermine its potential.”**



# Policy and governance context

While policy and regulation for land and nature are subject to ongoing changes, many existing policies are still important.

This section signposts key environmental policy developments over the past decade, particularly relating to environmental governance changes following the UK's exit from the European Union.

For information on England's revised EIP, and how it governs the approach taken to environmental policy, see the relevant section of [chapter one on recent policy developments](#).

## Environmental principles

The [Environmental Principles Policy Statement](#) (EPPS) took effect in 2023, requiring Government Ministers to have due regard to a set of environmental principles when making decisions.

The role of the principles is to ensure that environmental considerations are factored into cross-governmental decision making, so that decisions by one department or Minister consider the broader environmental context and do not unnecessarily produce negative effects on the environment.

There are five environmental principles:

- The Integration Principle
- The Prevention Principle
- The Rectification at Source Principle
- The Polluter Pays Principle
- The Precautionary Principle

Ministers are expected to iteratively apply the principles throughout policy development, from the outset through any subsequent stages, subject to a degree of proportionality.

This process should identify potential positive or negative environmental effects with the goal that the principles should inform the design of policy.

Following the application of the principles, the EPPS suggests that Ministers could act by amending or reframing a policy, ensure the future application of the principles by embedding one or more of them in policy, or delay the delivery of a policy to gather more implementation before acting.

Wales has proposed its own approach to applying the same environmental principles, which is set out in the [Environment](#)



(Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Bill.

For more information about [the EPPS and its application](#), read the IES's 2023 primer on environmental governance: '[Progressing or regressing: The future of environmental science under new UK governance](#)'.

## Environmental targets

In 2022, the Government published a framework of long-term legally-binding environmental targets, as required under the [Environment Act 2021](#).

Several of the targets have implications for land and nature, including those which directly address biodiversity. [The EIP](#) also sets out a suite of interim targets to support progress towards the long-term targets, and to support the plan's wider goals.

The long-term targets for biodiversity and land use are:

- **Species' extinction risk:** reduce the risk of species' extinction by 2042, when compared to the risk of species' extinction in 2022
- **Restoration or creation of wildlife-rich habitat:** in excess of 500,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats are to be restored or created by 31st December 2042
- **2030 species abundance target:** the overall relative species abundance index on 31st December 2030 indicates that the decline in the abundance of species has been halted

- **Reverse the decline of species abundance:** the overall relative species abundance index by 31st December 2042 is (a) higher than the overall relative species abundance index for 31st December 2022; and (b) at least 10% higher than the overall relative species abundance index for 31st December 2030
- **Marine Protected Areas (MPAs):** before the end of 31st December 2042 (a) the number of protected features which are in favourable condition within all relevant MPAs is not less than 70% of the total number of all protected features within relevant MPAs; and (b) all other protected features within relevant MPAs are in recovering condition
- **Woodland and trees:** by the end of 31st December 2050 at least 16.5% of all land in England is covered by woodland and trees outside woodland

Interim targets for biodiversity include:

- Restore or create a total of 250,000 hectares of a range of wildlife-rich habitats outside of protected sites by December 2030
- By December 2030, 50% of Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) features to have actions on track to achieve favourable condition
- By 2030, double the number of farms providing sufficient year-round resources for farm wildlife, compared with 2025
- Reduce the rate of establishment of invasive non-native species (INNS) by at least 50% by December 2030, compared to 2000 levels



- Increase England's tree canopy and woodland cover by 0.33% of land area by December 2030 from the 2022 baseline of 14.9%. (Equivalent to a net increase 43,000 hectares.)
- At least 49% of Marine Protected Area (MPA) protected features are in favourable condition and at least 46% in recovering condition, by December 2030

Outside of these specified targets, several of the other targets also present the possibility of risks or co-benefits for land or biodiversity. These include:

- **Agriculture and water:** the load of each of the following (a) total nitrogen, (b) total phosphorus, (c) sediment, entering the water environment through agricultural diffuse pollution is, by 31st December 2038, at least 40% lower than agricultural diffuse pollution in the year from 1st January 2018 to 31st December 2018
- **Residual waste:** by the end of 31st December 2042 the total mass of residual waste for the calendar year 2042 does not exceed 287 kilograms per head of population in England

Importantly, these targets act in conjunction with existing targets and limit levels enshrined in UK legislation.

Most of these existing objectives are explicitly **listed in the EIP**, such as the commitment to publish LNRS to cover the whole of England, the forthcoming **Land Use Framework for England**, and plans to reform UK REACH and deliver a new PFAS plan.

## The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP)

The **OEP** is an Arms-Length Body responsible for protecting and improving the environment in England and Northern Ireland, which it achieves by holding to account public authorities and the Government.

It was created by the Environment Act 2021 as part of the environmental governance arrangements which emerged from the UK's exit from the European Union (EU).

Covering a range of functions, the OEP is responsible for scrutiny and advice to the Government, monitoring and reporting on environmental plans and law, and investigations and enforcement in cases where public bodies fail to comply with environmental law.

Despite this array of functions, the OEP is not a direct successor organisation to the roles played by the European Commission during the UK's membership of the EU, with limited functions by comparison.

Where environmental laws are implemented, primarily by Defra and delivery agencies, the OEP has a role to ensure compliance with environmental law by government and public bodies, as well as the capacity to investigate suspected serious breaches and take action where needed.

The enforcement role of the OEP is focused on public bodies and regulation of private entities remains the responsibility of the Environment Agency (or other relevant bodies, such as Ofwat).

For more information about the OEP and how its role differs to that of the European

Commission, read the IES's 2023 primer on environmental governance: '[Progressing or regressing: The future of environmental science under new UK governance](#)'.

You can also find out more about the OEP's comments on environmental policy by reading recent articles from [Essential Environment](#):

- [Ghosted by government? Responses to the OEP reports](#)
- [Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland 2024](#)

## Governance in the devolved administrations

The devolved administrations of the UK operate under similar yet different systems of governance.

Some elements of the [Environmental Principles Policy Statement](#) apply outside England, though the majority of environmental decisions are devolved to the relevant administrations.

Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have equivalent duties to consider environmental principles in their governance regime following the UK's exit from the EU.

Equivalent organisations to the [Office for Environmental Protection](#) in the devolved administrations have subtly different remits and approaches.

In Scotland, [Environmental Standards Scotland](#) (ESS) plays the same role as the OEP, though the [Scottish Environmental Protection Agency](#) (SEPA) serves as Scotland's primary environmental regulator

and functions alongside ESS in Scotland's environmental governance landscape.

In Wales, these functions are primarily fulfilled by the [Interim Environmental Protection Assessor for Wales](#) (IEPAW).

At the start of 2024, the Welsh Government consulted on [new environmental governance rules](#).

The proposals set out how the Welsh equivalent to the environmental principles would be embedded in law, how environmental targets and biodiversity restoration duties would be introduced, and proposals for a new environmental governance body, the Office for Environmental Governance Wales, which will replace the IEPAW and expand upon its powers and duties.

These proposals are intended to be realised through the [Environment \(Principles Governance and Biodiversity Targets\) \(Wales\) Bill](#).

You can find out more information on the Bill in [chapter one on recent policy developments](#).

## The Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework

In December 2022, the [fifteenth Conference of the Parties](#) (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was held in Montreal, culminating in the publication of the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#).

The Framework sets out post-2020 targets to address biodiversity loss. The original targets, set in 2010 in Aichi, were due to be met in 2020 but were universally unmet. The new Framework has been considered to

be ‘a Paris Agreement for nature’ but will require a significant degree of implementation to deliver on its ambition for nature.

The Framework contains four long-term goals, as well as 23 targets. The goals provide a vision for biodiversity and global action with a view to 2050, whereas most of the targets focus on the 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. 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**).

COP15 was followed in late 2024 by **COP16**, which was intended to progress negotiations on the delivery of the Kunming-Montreal Framework and further action on biodiversity.

Progress was made on a number of issues, including the creation of the **Cali Fund**, a mechanism under which profits from genetic resources can be levied towards conservation.

Further progress was made including agreements to **link up biodiversity action**

**with action on climate change and health**, as well as procedures to describe ecologically significant marine areas.

Ultimately, a consensus could not be reached during the summit on key implementation issues such as funding for nature, leaving a significant degree of uncertainty around the future of global action on biodiversity. These questions will be at the centre of the upcoming COP17 summit on biodiversity.

Find out more in our **briefing on COP16**.

## Assessments for biodiversity

At the start of 2025, two major assessment reports were published by the **Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services** (IPBES):

- The **Nexus Assessment**, which examines the links between biodiversity, water, food and health (along with linked issues)
- The **Transformative Change Assessment**, which sets out the evidence for a transformative response to biodiversity loss.

These reports have advanced the evidence for global action on biodiversity loss, though more must be done to reflect their insights in policy decisions.

IPBES will hold its **12th plenary** in the UK in early 2026, which will offer the chance to continue these conversations, while putting a spotlight on the role that business can play to support nature.

Find out more in our analysis from January 2025 on the **latest evidence from IPBES**.

# Further information

## Influencing policy decisions

Our IES member briefing note: '[Influencing the UK Parliament](#)' provides an overview of how environmental professionals can influence Parliament and legislation.

For best practice on engaging with policy, see our [collection of case studies](#).

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

In the UK, many issues of environmental policy are devolved.

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](#).

## Find out more

Learn more about existing legislation & policy on this topic:

- [Environmental Improvement Plan for England](#)
- [Planning & Infrastructure Bill](#)
- [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#)

Read other briefings from the IES:

- [Land Use Framework for England](#)
- [BNG in Practice Report](#)
- [Introduction to environmental policy briefing series](#)
- [Priorities for the UK Government, 2024-2029](#)

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](mailto:joseph@the-ies.org)) to let us know your thoughts on potential topics for future briefings, or with your suggestions for other content.



**“Our choices about how we use land have profound effects ... they determine whether or not we live in a country with thriving people, a healthy economy, and a flourishing environment.”**

Joseph Lewis, IES Head of Policy





