

COP17: Convention on Biological Diversity

Implications for environmental experts

September 2026

the-ies.org

The Institution
of Environmental
Sciences



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Acknowledgements

Authors: Joseph Lewis

Design: Bea Gilbert & Lucy Rowland

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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Background

COP17 will be the seventeenth conference of the parties to the [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) (CBD), which will be held in Yerevan, Armenia between 19th October and 30th October 2026.

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.

COP17 follows two major summits of the CBD in the last five years: COP15 in 2022 and COP16 in 2024. COP15 saw the pivotal agreement of the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#), which COP16 should have helped to deliver. Ultimately, COP16 was not able to reach a final agreement during the summit.

Since then, the future of the Framework's delivery has been left uncertain, both internationally and on the national level. COP17 will be a crucial opportunity to get global action on biodiversity loss back on track.

This briefing sets out background information on COP17, the implications of the summit for environmental science, and how the work of the Convention on Biological Diversity fits into the wider context of biodiversity on an international and national level.

It has been written to support [IES Members](#) attending COP17, though this subject is likely to affect any professional whose work interacts with biodiversity, nature recovery, conservation, or the wider context of addressing environmental challenges.

If you want to support the work of the IES, you can [become an affiliate](#), or if you're a professional in the environmental sector working with science, consider [joining the IES](#).

For more information on environmental policy or the work of the IES to stand up for science, scientists, and the natural world, please contact Joseph Lewis, Head of Policy (joseph@the-ies.org).

Looking ahead: What to expect at COP17

COP17 will be a crucial opportunity to get global action back on the right course.

It represents an unmissable chance to take a joined-up approach to climate, nature, and pollution in a way that works for local communities and delivers a world with thriving people, a healthy economy, and a flourishing environment.

Key themes

After COP16 struggled to make progress on implementing the [Global Biodiversity Framework](#), the most pressing issue at COP17 will be improving delivery and building a stronger consensus for acting on ambitions.

Inevitably, that will also include conversations about nature finance and joint efforts to pursue climate and biodiversity targets at the same time. With a significant nature finance gap and ongoing challenges for negotiating the delivery of international climate commitments, both issues are likely to be key parts of implementing the Global Biodiversity Framework as well.

More technical aspects of delivery, like capacity-building, science, and monitoring,

will also be core parts of the agenda, building on the expertise developed through the [Kunming Dialogue](#), which reconvened in early September.

As 2026 marks a mid-point between the inception of the Global Biodiversity Framework and the deadline for its most critical targets, which are due in 2030, COP17 will host a review process which will be intended to put the course of implementation back on track for the next four years.

Provisional agenda

While the final details of what will be discussed at COP17 are yet to be confirmed, the provisional agenda includes:

1. Administrative issues, including the dates and venues for future events
2. Resource mobilisation and financial mechanisms
3. Implementation review and monitoring for the Global Biodiversity Framework
4. Implementation of Article 8(j) on indigenous peoples and local communities (including the new Subsidiary Body and its work programme)

5. Digital sequence information on genetic resources
6. Support mechanisms and capacity-building for the Global Biodiversity Framework, including cooperation with other international organisations
7. Gender Plan of Action
8. Synthetic biology
9. Review of scientific and technical needs to support the implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework, including work on forest biodiversity, protected areas, and areas for future work
10. Other scientific and technical issues for implementation, including climate change; wildlife management; marine, coastal, and island biodiversity; agriculture; invasive alien species; and links with health
11. Concluding matters, including the adoption of a report from the conference of the parties

For the latest documents on COP17 and news on the thematic agenda, see the [COP17 website](#).

Our work on biodiversity

The IES is an observer to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and IPBES, the [Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#). We send observers to relevant summits and meetings, and will be represented at COP17.

In addition to our involvement in international meetings on biodiversity, we engage in policy

work at a national and local level to support the delivery of commitments like the Global Biodiversity Framework in practice.

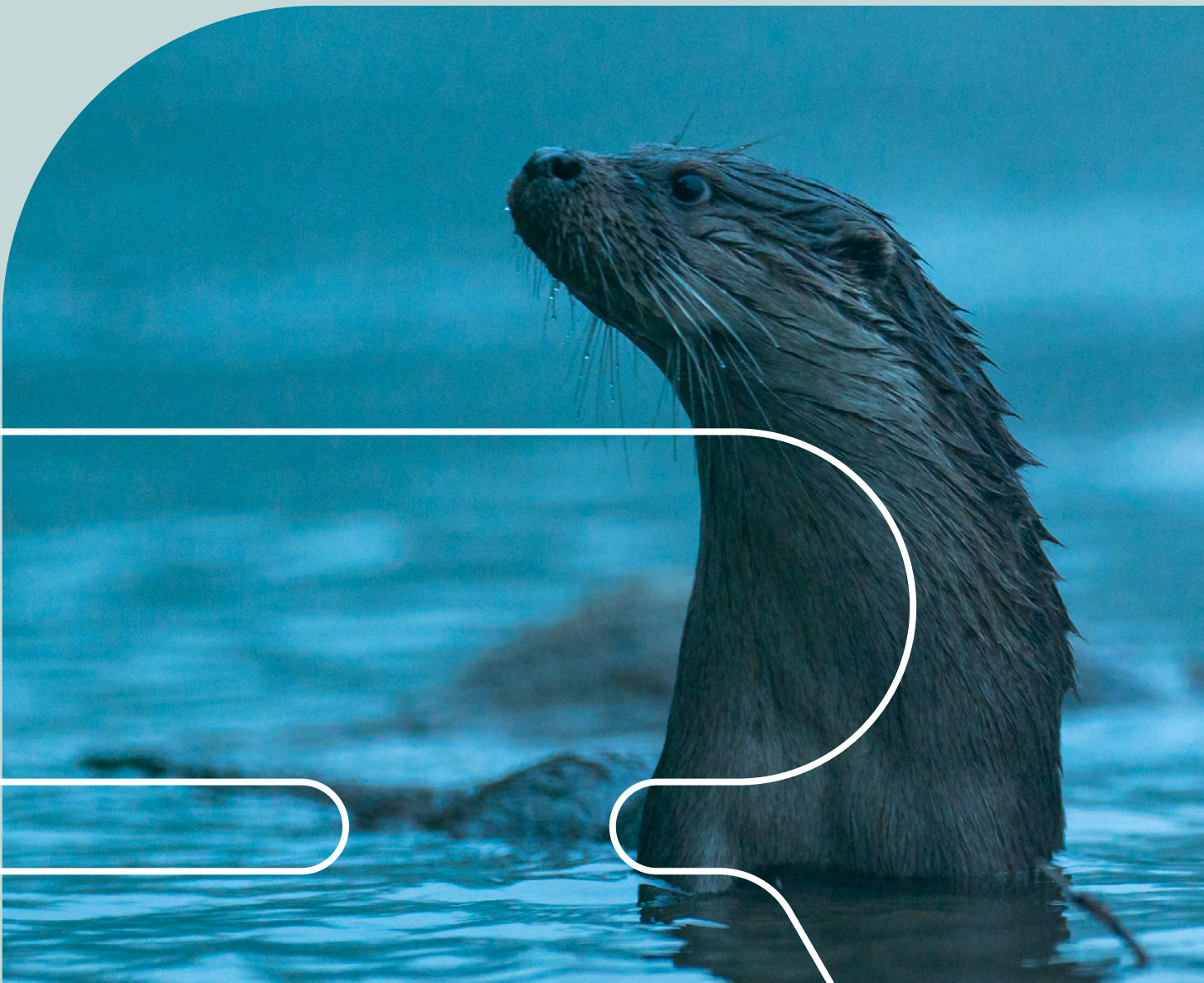
Our [Environmental Policy Implementation Community](#) (EPIC) connects nearly 1000 members focused on solving the challenges that make delivery difficult.

EPIC members are local authority officers and others delivering action on air quality, climate, contaminated land, noise pollution and nature recovery. They share solutions and work to improve the local delivery of policies like the Global Biodiversity Framework.

Our priorities for COP17

1. COP17 should take an integrated, interdisciplinary approach to delivering the Global Biodiversity Framework alongside other targets. [One coordinated approach](#) to climate, nature, and resilience would provide a clear vision that could be more effectively and efficiently realised than many small, messy transitions.
2. COP17 should chart a clear course to delivery with a '[Golden Thread](#)' approach to reconnecting environmental targets to credible outcomes.
3. Work towards a [positive vision](#) of what delivering the framework could achieve, recognising the contributions that biodiversity makes to sustainable well-being, and showing the [benefits for businesses](#) and communities.
4. Take an evidence-led approach, informed by experts across disciplines, like the IES [Climate Action Community](#) and [EPIC](#).

**“COP17 will be a crucial chance
to get global action back on
the right course ... it represents
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Context: The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

The **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** is the central pillar upon which most recent international biodiversity policy has been constructed. It was agreed at COP15 in 2022 as a post-2020 framework of targets and rules to address biodiversity loss.

COP15

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 **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 referred to as having the potential to become a '**Paris Agreement for nature**', the Global Biodiversity Framework (hereafter referred to as 'the framework').

What was agreed at COP15?

During COP15, six agreements were adopted, including the 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 long-term goals address a vision for biodiversity and global action with a view to 2050, whereas the majority of the targets focus on the 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](#).

Recap: What happened at COP16?

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.

Following the agreement of the **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework** in 2022, a key focus for COP16 was delivering the framework through finance and national plans. 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.

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.

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 included that at least half the fund should be devoted to indigenous peoples and local communities, through a range of mechanisms. In part, this was 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 was voluntary at the point of its creation, allowing a high degree of variance in how it is implemented and adopted in practice.

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, brought the Fund to a total of 163million USD, which was still significantly smaller than 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 pledged to provide **20billion USD** in biodiversity financing to developing countries per year by 2025. This goal was not reached.

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 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 was to strengthen the role of indigenous peoples in negotiations, providing greater opportunities for consistent engagement and involvement. Another goal was for the body 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** at COP16, which are the key mechanisms for implementing the Framework in practice.

Additionally, 119 countries uploaded their national targets onto the online portal by the time the summit ended, leaving only limited opportunities for scrutiny of those targets.

National reports were due for the first time in 2026, facilitating a **Global Review of Implementation in 2026**, which will be followed by another 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 was seen as especially important for the delivery of 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.

Integrated approaches to nature and climate

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.

IPBES assessments

After COP16 itself was held, international discussions on biodiversity continued across a number of venues.

One of the most important developments came shortly after the summit, as major assessment reports were published by the [Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#) (IPBES), offering a chance for further reflection ahead of future negotiations.

First agreed in Windhoek, Namibia at the end of 2024, two landmark reports were published by IPBES early the following year: the [Nexus Assessment](#) and the [Transformative Change Assessment](#).

Those reports marked the culmination of five years of work across countries and disciplines, drawing together knowledge on the interactions between biodiversity, food, water, health and climate change, and how broader systems change can happen in ways that can enhance nature and its contributions to people.

For full details of the two assessments, you can read our analysis on the [IPBES Nexus and Transformative Change Assessments](#).

A year later, in early 2026, IPBES published the [Business and Biodiversity Assessment](#), a major report that outlines the role business plays in nature's decline, as well as the benefits of nature for businesses.

The overall message of that report was clear: all businesses depend on biodiversity, all businesses have impacts on biodiversity,

and all businesses have the power and responsibility to address those impacts.

To learn more about the Business and Biodiversity Assessment and the latest developments from IPBES, read our [analysis for Essential Environment](#).

Find out more about COP16

For further information, read the IES [briefing on COP16](#), and for the latest developments in the UK, read our briefing on [land and nature policy](#).

You can also learn more with these related resources:

- [IES briefing on land and nature policy](#)
- [IES briefing on COP30 for climate change](#)
- [Analysis on the latest IPBES plenary](#)
- [Analysis on the 2024-25 IPBES reports](#)
- [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#)
- [Transforming the planet: Our vision for the future of environmental science](#)

In the UK: The latest developments for biodiversity

In the UK, a steady stream of policy affecting biodiversity has been announced since the 2024 General Election.

England's Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP)

Most of the new Government's approach to policy around on nature and biodiversity 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 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.
- 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.

- Many other commitments and policies with implications for nature, conservation, and biodiversity on land.

Find out more by reading the [revised Environmental Improvement Plan for England](#) and our [briefing on land and nature policy](#).

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) published the plan as a strategic document setting out Northern Ireland's approach to the environment.

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](#) and our [analysis for Essential Environment](#).

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](#)) [Act](#), 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.

In the medium term, the Act will also lead to new biodiversity targets for Wales, with a sound foundation in the legislation.

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 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 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 has been left under a degree of doubt following an inconsistent policy approach in recent years.

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](#).

30by30 delivery plan

In July 2026, the Government published its long-awaited [30by30 on land delivery plan](#), setting out how it intends to protect and improve 30% of England's land for nature by 2030.

Given its complex strategic role, the delivery plan brings together a range of existing initiatives with a view to their combined contribution to meeting the 30by30 target.

The plan also introduces some new initiatives, including a tiered approach to recognising progress towards 30by30, with land categorised as Bronze, Silver or Gold according to how closely it meets the criteria and its contribution to nature recovery.

It additionally sets out three delivery themes: (1) clearer pathways to eligibility, (2) easier routes to delivery, and (3) inspiring participation and leadership.

Taken as a whole, the plan provides many of the building blocks for delivery but does not yet provide enough detail to demonstrate that its actions will add up to 30by30.

It creates a strong framework for participation but does not sufficiently set out a clear, quantified, and accountable route to protecting and improving 30% of England's land for nature.

For more information, read our [briefing on the 30by30 delivery plan](#) and our [analysis for Essential Environment](#).

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 held short consultations in 2026 on [BNG for brownfield land](#) and delivering [BNG for Nationally-Significant Infrastructure Projects](#) (NSIP), which has been followed by [guidance](#).

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.

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](#).

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 Act](#), which became law in early 2026.

The Act aimed to speed up the planning process, particularly for new homes and the delivery of critical infrastructure. It contains five core parts (as well as a section of general provisions):

1. **Part 1 on Infrastructure**
2. **Part 2 on Planning**
3. **Part 3 on Development and Nature Recovery**
4. **Part 4 on Development Corporations**
5. **Part 5 on Compulsory Purchase**

For all the details of the Planning Act, read our briefing on the latest developments in [land and nature policy](#).

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 Act](#) has been controversial, especially when it comes to nature recovery.

As it created the possibility of developers circumventing on-site interventions, the Act was seen as effectively jumping over several steps in the mitigation hierarchy, creating risks of environmental regression and fragmentation for habitats and ecosystems.

While the Government made some amendments to the final Act, seeking to address these concerns, a number of environmental organisations remain unconvinced that the planning system is striking the correct balance.

In mid 2026, the Government announced further changes for planning, including revisions to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

For more information, see:

- [Our analysis](#) on proposals at the consultation stage, and [our response](#).
- [Our commentary](#) on the final set of changes made to English planning policy.

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](#).

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.

Land Use Framework for England

The **Land Use Framework** is a strategic policy intended to support multiple objectives for the use of land in England, including for nature recovery and several other forms of land use with implications for biodiversity on land.

The framework sets out a strategic-level approach to land use in England across three chapters, which broadly consider:

1. The Framework's goals;
2. The ways it can support better land use decisions; and
3. The ways it will be implemented.

Across those chapters, the substantive content of the framework includes:

- **Seven visions** for specific functions of land use in 2030 and 2050, including:
 - Housing;
 - Energy infrastructure and clean power;
 - Food production;
 - Nature recovery;
 - Resilient landscapes;

- Landscapes for water; and
- Communities.

- **Three insights** from the land use evidence base that inform the framework's approach:

1. 'There is enough land to deliver our objectives';
2. 'Changes should play to the strengths of the land'; and
3. 'Cross-sector opportunities are key to efficiency and growth'.

- **Four principles** to drive land use decisions:

- 'Multifunctionality';
- 'Right use for the right place';
- 'Future-ready decisions'; and
- 'Adaptive by design'.

- **Five actions** intended to drive the implementation of the framework:

- Consistent spatial plans to join-up decisions on land use;
- Support for multifunctional and efficient land use (including through funding for farming, alignment across spatial priorities, and the diversification of land use finance);
- Better use of technology and data to inform land use decisions; and
- Sharing responsibility for the stewardship of land (with specific reference to mayors and local authorities, the government estate,

major landowners, landscape partnerships, and local communities)

While the framework is limited in how widely it will influence decisions about biodiversity on land, much of its success will come down to its delivery, which will be crucial to determining if the framework actually leads to multifunctional solutions in practice.

For the full details of what the Land Use Framework includes, read our [briefing on the Land Use Framework](#) and our [analysis for Essential Environment](#).

If you are interested in how Scotland handles the same questions of strategic land strategy, read about [Scotland's Third Land Use Strategy](#). Throughout 2025, Scotland consulted on [proposals for land reform](#), culminating in the [Land Reform \(Scotland\) Act 2025](#).

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

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, its implementation has struggled, driven by inconsistent policy approaches, uncertainty around long-term funding, and poor communication between the Government and farmers.

The Farming Roadmap was published in mid 2026, seeking to reduce uncertainty and provide a longer-term vision for farming and food security.

Similarly, a [revised Food Strategy](#) was published in 2025, though it leaves open a number of implications, including the strategic reconciliation of food security and biodiversity goals.

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

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 2025, the latest [indicators for UK biodiversity](#) were published by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). The latest data includes a range of indicators and measures.

The key message published in the latest update is that “more indicators are deteriorating or showing no change than improving, over both the long and short term.”

In a [press release on the new indicators](#), the JNCC shared a more in-depth summary:

- “Over the long term, many indicators have shown improvement, reflecting sustained positive changes in some aspects of biodiversity. However, many have also deteriorated, reflecting ongoing pressures on ecosystems. A smaller group of indicators has remained broadly stable over time.
- Of the indicators which are deteriorating in the long term, none are showing improvement in the short term, suggesting that we are yet to reverse the negative trend in many aspects of biodiversity. However, some have stopped deteriorating in the short term, suggesting that some long term negative trends have stabilised.
- Many indicators already showing improvement in the long term continue to improve in the short term. However, some progress has stalled or even deteriorated in the short term.”

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 30by30, truly deliver, and that voluntary schemes like ELMS are taken up at a sufficient scale.

As policy implementation remains a key challenge, the role of environmental professionals in securing delivery will be vital.

The [Environmental Policy Implementation Community](#) (EPIC) is a key network for professionals to share their experiences and

speak with a single voice calling for ambitious and deliverable policy.

Recommendations

Since 2024, the IES has published [recommendations for the UK Government](#), including priorities for nature. Some of our top [recommendations on nature and biodiversity](#) included:

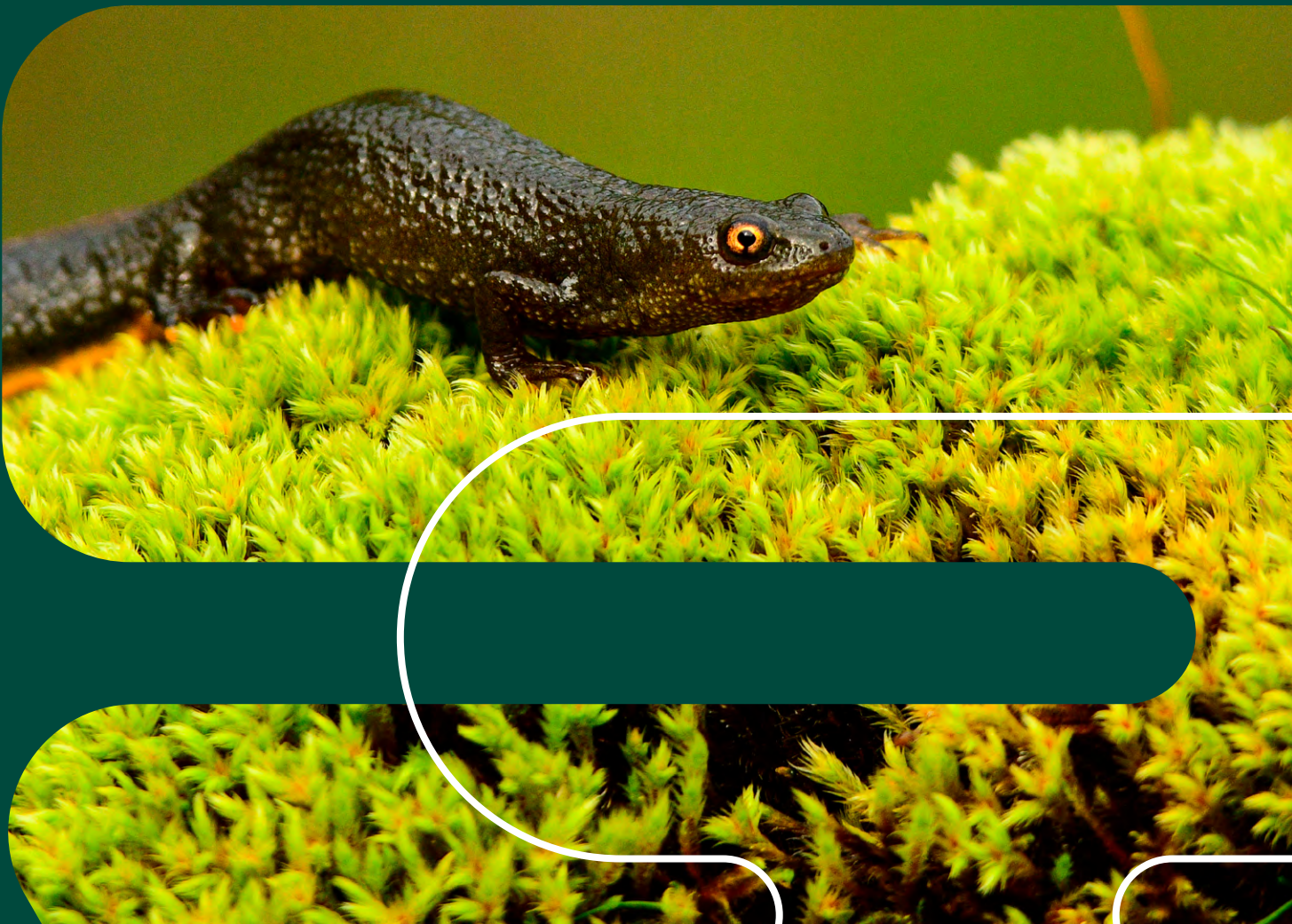
1. Commit to leaving UK nature in a better state than it was in 2020, recognising that the current trend of environmental decline means that ‘do no harm’ is an insufficient approach to preventing long-term damage.
2. Change the narrative on nature. From the highest levels of government, make sure we are thinking about and engaging with nature in a way that reflects its value.
3. Unleash a modern and data driven planning system that delivers high-quality development together with meaningful nature recovery.
4. Make the Nature Recovery Network a reality, creating a strategic, connected and accessible network of nature-rich spaces.
5. Urgently deliver the UK’s existing commitments to protect and restore nature by the end of this decade.

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, IES Head of Policy, at joseph@the-ies.org.

“The UK should commit to leaving nature in a better state than it was in 2020 ... ‘do no harm’ is not enough to prevent long-term damage as the country trends towards environmental decline.”

Joseph Lewis, IES Head of Policy



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.

Other relevant links and resources

How to engage with policy

Policy is increasingly relevant to the work of environmental professionals and having engaged scientists will be vital to creating a [future where people and nature thrive](#).

The IES publishes primers to help member develop their skills around engaging with environmental policy:

- [Policy analysis and awareness](#)
- [Evidence-informed policy making](#)
- [Cost-benefit analysis for policy](#)
- [Influencing the UK Parliament](#)
- [Cross-departmental policy](#)

Specific case studies for engaging with environmental policy are also provided in '[Speaking up for science](#)' which provides examples of how professionals can engage with environmental policy effectively.

The IES also [offers training](#) to help professionals learn more about policy and how they can engage with policy decisions. On-demand training sessions are available for sign-ups [on the IES website](#).

Other links and resources

Find out more about this topic:

- [Global Biodiversity Framework](#)
- [IPBES Business & Biodiversity Assessment](#)

Read other relevant briefings and resources from the IES:

- [Latest developments on land & nature](#)
- [30by30 Delivery Plan for England](#)
- [COP30: Climate change](#)
- [The Golden Thread of Governance: Delivering environmental targets](#)
- [Recommendations for government](#)
- [Environmental Policy Implementation Community \(EPIC\)](#)

To support our work, consider [joining the IES](#) or [becoming an Affiliate](#).

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

