Climate and Nature Bill
Second Reading briefing | 09:30, Friday 24 January 2025
Zero Hour, the CAN Bill campaign | parliament@zerohour.uk

ZERO HOUR

Summary

Zero Hour[1] calls on all MPs to support the Climate and Nature Bill and to put in a request to speak in the debate via the Speaker's Office (speakersoffice@parliament.uk).

The Climate and Nature Bill (formerly, the Climate and Ecology Bill) has been before the UK Parliament since 2020. Dr Roz Savage (Lib Dem) is the Bill sponsor, following Alex Sobel (Labour/Co-op) and Olivia Blake presenting the Bill in March 2024 and October 2023 respectively; and before that, by Caroline Lucas in June 2021 and September 2020.

266 Parliamentarians support the CAN Bill, including 191 cross-party MPs. The Lib Dems, Greens, Plaid Cymru, SDLP, Alliance and other parties support the Bill, alongside 1,200 ecologists, climate and conservation scientists; plus trade union, faith, business and NGO leaders; and 385 councils, plus Mayors Khan, Brabin, Burnham and the London Assembly.

Overview

The CAN Bill is a legally-binding mission statement which will deliver integrated, science led and people powered action to tackle the climate-nature crisis; as part of meeting the UK's existing international commitments on nature loss and climate change.

But why is this legislation needed? And doesn't the UK already have sufficient laws, plans and policies in place?

- Recent intergovernmental panels on climate (IPCC) and nature (IPBES) have highlighted significant and accelerating environmental impacts on people and the global economy.

- The IPCC has highlighted that climate impacts have been systematically underestimated, and the *Third Climate Change Risk Assessment* found a significant increase in very high risk events (events with over £1 billion of damage per year to the UK economy) compared to previous assessments.

- Nature continues to be lost rapidly, impacting (among other things) food provisioning, as well as air and water quality.

  The UK remains one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth, while the latest Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) report makes it clear that England is currently off-track on meeting the Environmental Act 2021 targets.

- The real-world impacts of climate damage and nature's degradation are extremely concerning and getting worse each year, yet UK legislation has not kept pace.

- Britain's international targets for climate change and nature restoration are not enshrined in domestic law—and will not be met with current legislation. We need to

[1] Zero Hour is a non-profit climate and environmental campaign advocating for a legally-binding, joined-up and whole-government strategy—to bridge the gap between international ambition and UK delivery—in order to more effectively tackle the root causes of the climate-nature crisis.

increase our ambition and develop strategies that account for the interdependencies between the nature and climate crises.

- The UK's Fourth and Fifth Carbon Budgets were devised 15- and 10-years ago respectively, when 2°C of global warming was considered by many to be 'safe'.

  They are not strong enough to drive meaningful change in the all-important near-term, as they require an annual emissions reduction of 1% per year to 2033.

- A legally-binding framework is essential to drive forward action from industry and provide the necessary certainty to markets, and it is essential that climate and nature delivery is a shared priority across all Government Departments.

- Additionally, embedding international commitments into national legislation will ensure that climate and nature ambition is upheld, prioritised and progressed by successive Governments.

But why do we need to tackle the nature crisis and the climate crisis together?

Unless we act quickly to protect and actively restore nature, we have little chance of limiting warming to anywhere near 'safe' levels; particularly the critical ecosystems that support life, agriculture, and store huge amounts of carbon—such as peatlands, woodlands, seas and wetlands—as well as our oceans, seas, rivers and soils.

Equally, nature will remain under grave threat until we curb greenhouse gas emissions. Other than the Climate and Nature Bill, there is currently no other proposed or actual legislation that addresses the two sides of these intertwined crises together, via an integrated approach.

This is an issue when trying to tackle dual crises, as it creates **implementation gaps** whereby (1) some problems are inadequately tackled by both plans, and (2) solutions developed to tackle one crisis can inadvertently make the other worse.

Achieving our global commitments not only increases the UK's credibility on the international stage, it also increases our opportunities. Action on climate and nature would keep food prices lower, reduce flooding, clean our air and water, and so much more.

By providing a clear, legally binding plan for action, the Climate and Nature Bill will drive innovation across industries, and provide much-needed certainty to markets. This will spur job creation and economic growth in emerging green sectors, improving the welfare of communities across the UK.

Key proposals in the CAN Bill

- Create a **joined-up plan**—as the crises in climate and nature are deeply intertwined, requiring a plan that considers both together.

- Cut emissions in line with our international 2015 Paris Agreement-aligned **Nationally Determined Contributions** (NDCs)—expanded to include **international aviation and shipping.**

- **Halt and reverse ecosystem decline in nature** across the UK by 2030—in line with the mission of the 2022 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

- Take responsibility for Britain's **overseas footprints**—both emissions and ecological.

- **Prioritise nature in decision-making**—and end **fossil fuel** production and imports as rapidly as possible.

- Ensure no-one and **no community is left behind** in the nature-positive just transition needed—through fairness provisions.

- **Involve the public**—giving people a say in finding a fair way forward through a Climate and Nature Assembly.

Fundamental principles

The CAN Bill requires the Government to develop a strategy, in consultation with the public, and the support of expert/advisory bodies, guided by these fundamental principles:

1. Reduce emissions in line with our **international commitments**—expanded to include the UK's contribution to **international aviation and shipping emissions**.[2]

2. Reduce emissions caused in the **manufacture of the goods we import**, in line with UK territorial emissions.

3. Reduce emissions of **other greenhouse gases** (including methane), at rates consistent with our international commitments.

4. Ensure the end of the exploration, extraction, export and import of **fossil fuels** by the UK, as rapidly as possible.

5. Ensure that **steps taken to mitigate emissions minimise damage** to ecosystems, food and water availability, and human health, as far as possible.

6. Restore and expand natural ecosystems, and enhance the management of cultivated ecosystems, as part of **'bending the curve' of biodiversity loss**.

7. Adopt the **Mitigation and Conservation Hierarchy** so that any development or activity that threatens nature uses this framework to prioritise its protection.

[2] This is less ambitious than the earlier version of the (Alex Sobel MP version of the) CAN Bill, but it is nevertheless sufficient for driving meaningful action in the all-important near term.

8. Address the UK's entire **ecological footprint** at home and overseas by taking steps to avoid the adverse impacts of activity relating to the UK's production and consumption of goods and services including the extraction of raw materials, deforestation, land and water degradation, pollution and waste production.

Key clauses in the CAN Bill

The CAN Bill has two complementary targets on climate and on nature, and proposes a strategy for meeting them via an integrated, whole-goverment approach.

1. Climate target

This target would ensure that the UK (via clause 1(2)(a)) reduces its overall contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions to net zero at a rate consistent with—

(i) achieving current and future NDC pledges made under the Paris Agreement, expanded to include the UK's contribution to international aviation and shipping emissions;

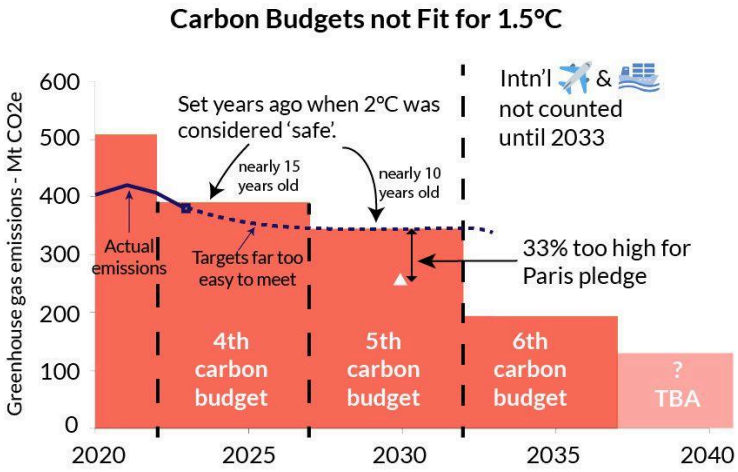
(ii) fulfilling its obligations and commitments under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, taking into account the United Kingdom's and other countries' common but differentiated responsibilities, and respective capabilities, considering national circumstances.

Why do we need more ambition on climate?

Our current targets in the Climate Change Act (2008) were groundbreaking at the time but are now out of date (see this video).

The Fourth (2023-27) and Fifth (2028-32) Carbon Budgets were devised 14 years ago, well before scientists understood how serious impacts of rising global temperatures would be at just 1.5°C of warming.

This was also before the UK adopted its net zero by 2050 target, and before the UK committed to its 2030 Paris Agreement target.



This means that current Carbon Budgets are unambitious in the near term—and that progress since 1990 has been incremental. In fact, our carbon footprint has fallen by less than 1% a year on average, once we account for all the manufacturing that has been offshored.

The Fifth Carbon Budget should have been tightened when we made our Paris commitment, but it wasn't.

It is 33% too high to meet the UK's 2030 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), made in 2020—i.e. we did not bring our international commitment into domestic law (see, this video, here). Furthermore, international aviation and shipping are not included in the UK's current Carbon Budgets until 2033. The UK's 2035 NDC is aligned with the Sixth Carbon Budget, but it is very unlikely that this will be met, without amending the Fifth Carbon Budget to drive serious near-term reduction in emissions.

There are no specific targets for methane and other non-CO_2 warming gases.

Methane is responsible for a huge 0.5°C of the 1.2°C of global warming seen to date. Even though there are international agreements to reduce methane emissions by 2030, current UK policy sets no individual targets for methane or other non-CO_2 warming gases. The Climate and Nature Bill would require individual targets be set for methane and the two other main greenhouse gases, nitrous oxide and f-gases (see, clause 2(6)(c)).

There are too many promises for the future, and not enough action now.

The UK's current approach is heavily focussed on the relatively distant net zero date of 2050. This means we are not only gambling on speculative technologies to deliver large emissions cuts in future, but we are missing out on the huge opportunities of more rapid action to build a stronger clean energy economy.

It is the total amount of emissions that matter, and delaying action several years before more extreme cuts nearer 2050 means more climate damage and greater costs. Ambition must be raised now via the CAN Bill, so that emissions drop faster in the near-term.

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2. Nature target

The CAN Bill's nature restoration target would ensure that the UK (via clause 1(2)(b)) halts and reverses its overall contribution to the degradation and loss of nature in the United Kingdom, overseas, and in the oceans, by—

(i) increasing the health, abundance, diversity, and resilience of species, populations, habitats, and ecosystems; as part of

(ii) fulfilling its obligations under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity and its protocols, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework 2022, and the commitments set out in the Leaders' Pledge for Nature 2020; and

(iii) following the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Why do we need more ambition on nature restoration? The Environment Act 2021 currently encapsulates the UK's ambitions on nature recovery. Current targets associated with this Act focus on species abundance (rather than both species and ecosystems), and do not

address ecosystem resilience and recovery. They do not address the UK's impact on nature outside of Britain's borders (see, the next section on the UK's ecological footprint for more information).

The UK adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) in 2022, setting out 23 UK biodiversity targets for 2030, which are closely aligned to the wording of the global targets. These targets are more ambitious than the Environment Act 2021 targets, yet, to date, the UK Parliament and Devolved Legislatures have not enshrined these crucial targets in law.

We do not have nature targets that holistically approach the restoration and protection of entire ecosystems across the UK, on land, or at sea. Doing so would ensure that we consider actions that address the overall health and integrity of ecosystems, which support all life—wildlife and people—with a range of critical ecosystem services.

The Environment Act apex target—its species abundance target— relates to halting the decline of a limited number of species for which good data exist by 2030 and then improving their status by 2042. However, the list of designated species does not currently include species that make up critical soil biodiversity—the basis of all terrestrial food chains. To include them would require increased efforts to better monitor these species (such as earthworms) as well as monitoring more easily counted species (such as birds and butterflies.)

The Environment Act commits England to restore or create more than 500,000 ha of wildlife-rich habitat by 2042. Such wildlife-rich habitat includes land as well as freshwater and coastal marine systems. However, 500,000 ha is 3.8% of land in England and 2% of land in the UK; and as a comparison, currently golf courses cover around 2% of England. The Global Biodiversity Framework's 2030 targets are more ambitious and integrated, and call for the restoration of at least 30% of all degraded ecosystems by 2030 and to conserve 30% of land, waters and seas.

The gap between our international ambition and domestic legislation is clear.

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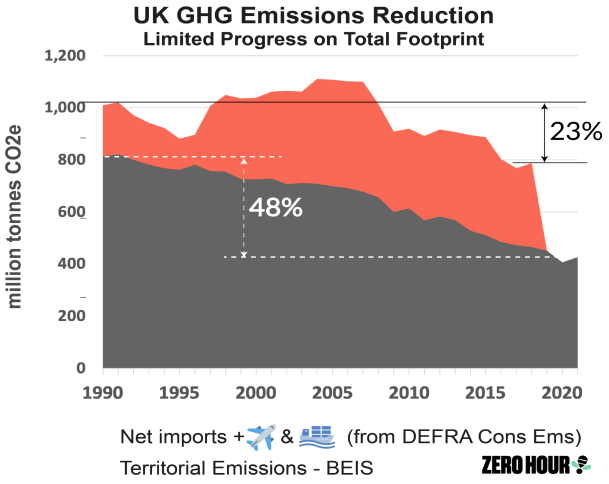
3. Accounting for the UK's emissions and ecological footprints

The UK is a large importer of products from many areas of the world. These products are manufactured in other countries on our behalf, yet the emissions and ecological damage involved in their production are not generally included in decision making.

Why do we need to account for the UK's emissions footprint? The CAN Bill accounts for emissions created outside the UK via imports to the UK by:



2(6)(b) reducing emissions of carbon dioxide in respect of imports to the UK, at the same percentage rate each year as the annual reduction of the United Kingdom's total emissions of carbon dioxide

The UK has done well to reduce its territorial emissions by 48% since 1990 (see, the grey area, right). But that picture changes when we include the emissions caused in the manufacture of our imports, and our share of international and aviation emissions (see, the red emissions, right). This is a major issue for the UK as the largest net importer of CO2 emissions in the G7.

When accounting for these other emissions, the UK's carbon footprint has fallen 23% since 1990—less than 1% a year. This is a long way from the rapid far-reaching and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society, as called for by the IPCC. However, there is much more awareness about these emissions now. Companies and cities take responsibility for these emissions and it's time that countries do too.

Why do we need to account for the UK's ecological footprint? The CAN Bill accounts for ecosystem damage created outside the UK via imports to the UK by:

2(6)(e) ensuring that steps taken under the strategy to mitigate emissions in the United Kingdom and overseas minimise damage to ecosystems, food and water availability, and human health, as far as possible;

The UK and EU are responsible for 25% of global ecological damage. A large proportion of this is driven by our overseas ecological footprint, especially in our food imports; and we import around 50% of our food. The UK's overseas land footprint for just seven commodities takes up a land area almost equal to the size of the UK itself (including beef, leather, cocoa, palm oil, pulp, paper, rubber, soy and timber).

This footprint is largely driven by the more than 50% of UK purchases that are ultra-processed (compared to 14% for France and 13% for Italy) and/or livestock products which have large impacts. This leaves our economy highly dependent on these commodities and exposed to supply disruption, causing shortages and price rises—as shown by the wheat shortage due to the Russian war in Ukraine and pressure from climate change in India and Canada.

Resource consumption in the UK and other large consumers must be reduced by around 70% in order to protect and restore nature. A nature-positive economy can create significant opportunities and benefits; generating new jobs, innovations and wider economic gains. The Government recognises the need for a circular economy, but mainly in the context of energy saving and waste reduction. It does not, however, commit to addressing the extent to which we are depleting domestic and global natural resources.

5. Ensuring a just transition and involving the public

Leaving no-one behind in a nature-positive transition to a clean energy economy, see 2(8)(a), (b) and (c)

It is important to ensure that sections of society are not left behind in the transition away from fossil fuels—both for moral reasons, but also out of economic national interest. That

is why the CAN Bill strategy contains the financial support and retraining to enable people to transition from working in high-emissions and high-impact industries to new jobs in the low carbon economy; and measures to ensure a positive and fair impact on local communities with high levels of deprivation.

Building consensus (see, clause 3)

Achieving a broad public consensus on the way forward will be essential in rising to the "greatest, long-term, global challenge we face" (according to the 2024 Labour manifesto). It is vital that the British public is fully informed about, and consulted on, the changes needed—rather than having the sense that changes are being imposed in a 'top down' way.

The Bill proposes a temporary and representative Climate and Nature Assembly to advise Government and Parliament on the strategy. The Assembly would be made up of ordinary citizens, randomly selected to represent all sections of society; and would hear evidence from a wide range of experts, deliberate on the options, and make recommendations. The strategy would include the most popular recommendations proposed by the Assembly, where those recommendations are also jointly proposed by the Climate Change Committee and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

The Assembly would not override our democracy. Parliament will remain sovereign at all times and has to approve the strategy. However, it would provide visible, meaningful democratic legitimacy for the changes that will be required to tackle the climate-nature crisis. It would provide robust support for Ministers when communicating changes to the public, which would inevitably be challenging for some people. A robust example of such an assembly was *Climate Assembly UK*, which was established by Select Committees in 2019 to help them understand public preferences on how to tackle climate change.

Community energy projects and local support (see, clause 2(6)(i))

In the CAN Bill, as published by Roz Savage MP on 22 January, a new subclause has been added in clause 2 ('Climate and nature strategy'). Its purpose is to promote community energy projects up to 100MW, and with respect to projects over 100MV, would require local residents to be both consulted on the project, and to have expressed their support.

Devolution (see, clause 5)

The CAN Bill proposes a UK-wide, co-operative approach between all UK Administrations, via a process that respects matters of devolved legislative competence. As some climate (i.e. energy) and environmental matters are devolved issues, and the responsibility of the Scottish Parliament/Government, Senedd Cymru/Welsh Government, and Northern Ireland Assembly/Executive, the measures in the strategy relating to devolved matters require approval from these Devolved Administrations.

In addition, the joined-up strategy proposed by the CAN Bill will be developed with the input of citizens—representative of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland—ensuring that the voices of citizens across the UK nations are taken into account, as part of co-creating the strategy.