



Environment Links UK | September 2021

30 x 30: Land and Sea for Nature's Recovery

Context

A global target to protect 30% of the planet by 2030 (known as '30 by 30' or '30x30') is expected to be included in the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, to be agreed at the forthcoming Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15) in Kunming. Parties will be expected to contribute to this global goal through domestic action to increase coverage of effectively managed protected areas.

Although the UK will be expected to deliver 30 by 30 as a single party under the Convention, each of the four UK countries must play a part. The UK government does not have the powers or resources needed to achieve 30x30 across the UK and must rely on close cooperation with the governments in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland to achieve the target. Without 30x30 commitments in each country, with a compatible approach to measurement and monitoring, there is a serious risk that the UK will fail to meet its target. Shortfall in any of the four countries may be difficult to make up for in the other jurisdictions. With this in mind, the Governments should agree on a common approach. The most reliable way to ensure success is for each country to adopt its own 30% commitment, with common criteria for what kinds of protection should be counted.

Here we set out a shared position on effectively protecting and managing 30% of land and 30% of sea for nature across the UK by 2030. Effective delivery of the 30 by 30 target will result in significant improvement of biodiversity across the four countries of the UK, but only if the criteria set out are met. 30 by 30 should protect and deliver gold standard outcomes for nature in the most important terrestrial and marine habitats in the UK.

1 | Land

How should the 30% target be defined on land?

In order for an area of land to count towards 30%, it must meet the following criteria:

1. **Protected for nature in the long-term:** the entirety of the 30% should be afforded long-term effective protection for nature which includes long-term protection against damage, for example, from pollution, overexploitation, invasive species, habitat destruction and development.
2. **Well managed, regularly monitored and in good or recovering condition:** land that counts towards the 30% should be well-managed for nature and must be regularly monitored at appropriate intervals as part of a programme of appropriate management and investment. This monitoring should show clear evidence both of good management for nature and that the land is either in good condition for nature or is showing demonstrable signs of ecological recovery. Monitoring data should be publicly available to facilitate good management for nature.

What should count towards the 30% target on land?

1. **Robust legal protections for nature's finest sites on land:** Our existing protected areas network needs to be strengthened and expanded through a programme of new designations to provide statutory protection for nature's last enclaves and to significantly increase the area of land protected. As a starting position, the 30% target should be met through enhancing the protection, management and condition of: Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)/Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) (in NI) and Ramsar sites. A first step to increasing the area of land under these protections should be completing the suite of terrestrial protected areas designated for a range of internationally important species and habitats, including implementation of the outstanding recommendations of the SPA reviews and increasing protections of undesignated irreplaceable habitats like Ancient Woodlands and Peatlands. Furthermore, the SSSI/ASSI designation selection process needs to be expanded to include all areas that meet selection thresholds. However, the clear priority should be on improving the management and condition of these sites so that they can all count towards the 30% target and fulfil their potential in recovering nature.¹
2. **Strengthened landscape designations:** Designated landscapes such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks have the potential to contribute significantly to nature's recovery. However, they have not been equipped with the statutory aims and tools or resources to meet the two tests set out above. Therefore, only those sections, rather than their entirety, that meet the criteria of long-term effective protection and management for nature, and good or recovering condition, should count towards 30%. Reforms should be taken forward so that larger areas of land meeting these tests can be secured in these landscapes.
3. **Other areas protected and effectively managed for nature on land:** other protected areas have the potential to contribute to meeting the target. Again, only those that meet the criteria of long-term effective protection and management for nature, and in good or recovering condition, should count towards the 30%.

¹ **Strict protection for nature's finest sites on land:** The debate around protecting 30% of the planet has included calls to strictly protect 10% of land and sea. However, exactly what constitutes 'strict protection' is yet to be defined, with work ongoing to define what it means in practice. Please see individual briefings for country specific details: [Scotland](#), [England](#), [Wales](#), [Northern Ireland](#).

2 | Sea

How should the 30% target be defined at sea and what should count towards it?

England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have each already designated over 30% of their seas as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). However, the vast majority of MPAs remain in unfavourable condition. Also, whilst the UK committed to achieving Good Environmental Status (GES) of its waters by 2020, currently only 4 out of 15 GES indicators for healthy seas are being met.² We propose the following 30 by 30 targets for each of the four countries:

- **England:** By 2030, at least 30% of England's seas should be within fully or highly protected MPAs, within the context of wider ecologically coherent networks. By 2030 this should entail at least 10% of English seas being within fully protected areas.
- **Scotland:** By 2030, at least 30% of Scotland's seas should be highly protected, at least a third of which are fully protected from destructive and extractive activities.³
- **Wales:** By 2030, at least 30% of Wales' seas are within fully or highly protected MPAs, within the context of wider ecologically coherent networks. By 2030, at least 10% of Wales' seas should be within areas fully protected.
- **Northern Ireland:** The 2020 target of delivering an Ecologically Coherent Network of well-managed MPAs should be completed as soon as possible. Before 2030, at least 30% of NI seas should be highly protected, and at least 10% of NI seas should be fully protected.

Fully protected is defined as 'no extractive or destructive activities are allowed, and all impacts are minimized'. Highly protected is defined as 'only light extractive activities are allowed, and other impacts are minimized to the extent possible'.⁴

In conjunction with the above, further key targets are:

- **Legal underpinning of targets for ocean recovery:** There must be a statutory requirement to recover ocean health, with all waters achieving GES as soon as possible, in addition to the commitment to delivery in the subsequent National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs).
- **Completion of all designations and implementation of management measures:** Completing integrated, ecologically coherent networks that are well managed, monitored and enforced.
- **Sustainable fisheries management:** Fisheries management must be nature friendly, taking an ecosystem-based approach that prioritises sustainability.
- **Policy and Resourcing:** The environment must be at the core of policy creation and decision making, with effective marine plans implemented and well resourced.

² [Marine strategy part one: UK updated assessment and Good Environmental Status](#)

³ [An Ocean Recovery Plan for Scotland](#)

⁴ [Protected Planet Marine Protected Areas Guide](#)

Conclusion

The endorsement of, and current commitments to 30 by 30 are welcome.⁵ However, formal commitments and effective delivery plans are needed from each of the four countries of the UK to halt the decline of nature and restore ecosystem function.

Delivery of 30 by 30 should create an ecologically coherent and representative network, building on existing protected areas, with good or recovering condition ensured and robust legal protection enforced, including through sufficient funding and the implementation of clear and effective restoration.

Protected areas, managed well, regularly monitored and protected in the long term, should form the backbone of nature recovery networks throughout the UK, embedded within wider landscapes that also deliver for nature. A strategic, integrative approach must be taken to managing other areas of land and sea not formally included within the 30% in a nature-positive way, helping to expand areas of good quality habitat, join them up and increase permeability.

Both on land and at sea, the 30 by 30 target should not be seen as a ceiling but as a minimum achievement required to contribute towards nature's recovery across each country, the UK and globally. Transboundary cooperation is essential across the UK countries, the island of Ireland, and the broader global community. Nature and the environment are global assets, benefiting us all, but affected and managed by the laws and policies of individual jurisdictions. Actions to address nature's recovery and climate change require a transboundary approach, not just with those either physically or geopolitically closest but internationally.

By restoring and completing the protected network of our last remaining natural habitats, strengthening existing designations, identifying a range of new areas most important for nature's recovery, and ensuring sustained, effective monitoring and management, resulting in good or recovering condition, delivery of the 30 by 30 commitment can help to reverse the long-term decline of nature across the four countries, and set the UK on the path to a nature-positive economy.



⁵ <https://niassembly.tv/question-time-agriculture-environment-and-rural-affairs-tuesday-25-may-2021/>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-commits-to-protect-30-of-uk-land-in-boost-for-biodiversity>, <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-biodiversity-strategy-post-2020-statement-intent/pages/1/>