

# Statement on the UN Biodiversity COP15 and Climate COP26 Meetings

## Introduction

This year, 2021, needs to be a pivotal moment in history – the year that a transformative and radical change occurs to tackle the twin crises of the climate emergency and loss of biodiversity in a socially just way.

The 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity ([Biodiversity COP15](#)) is due to take place this October in Kunming, China to agree a new Global Biodiversity Framework. The 26<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change ([Climate COP26](#)) will take place this November in Glasgow, Scotland to review progress on the [Paris Climate Agreement](#) and agree next steps. Dialogue at these events must not happen in isolation; they must be integrated with each other because the two crises are linked.

The awareness of climate change and biodiversity loss in the media, and in the public consciousness, over the last few years is an important and potentially game-changing step forward, but only if this is acknowledged and acted upon and not stalled by those who have political and economic power. The UK governments' commitments to new legislation and policies aimed at halting declines in biodiversity, delivering net gains and enhancements for biodiversity, extending the areas of land protected to 30% by 2030 and enshrining commitments to net zero greenhouse gas emissions into law are valuable statements of intent but must now be delivered. Similarly in

Ireland, the government's Climate Action Bill will set the country on the path to net zero by 2050, and ministerial recognition of a biodiversity emergency and support for projects such as the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, a Peatland Restoration Plan, new marine protections and enforcement, and species reintroduction programmes are encouraging progress.

In September 2019, CIEEM – as the professional membership body for ecologists and environmental managers across the UK and Ireland – [declared a climate emergency and biodiversity crisis](#). We declared that the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis are inextricably linked, cannot be addressed in isolation, and require urgent and immediate action. We support all those who have acknowledged that ambitious and urgent action is required to address the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis in a socially just way.

To achieve our own declaration ambitions, CIEEM launched [Action 2030](#): a project which will see us reach net zero carbon emissions by 2030 and lead the way for our profession in taking urgent action to address the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis. To achieve our mission, we have committed to a number of actions listed in our declaration. Our [Action 2030 report for 2019-20](#) sets out everything we achieved last year and our ambitions for 2021. It is vital, as never before, that the work of CIEEM, its members and our profession continue to be at the forefront of targeted action.

## Biodiversity Crisis

Recent reports – including [State of Nature](#), [The European Environment: State and Outlook 2020](#), the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) [Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#), WWF's [Global Futures](#), and the Environmental Audit Committee's [Biodiversity in the UK: Boom or Bust?](#) – provide the evidence for an ongoing local and global decline of nature. We are living through a sixth mass extinction event, and [it is likely accelerating](#).

The [Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#) states that the key drivers of biodiversity decline are: changes in land and sea use, direct exploitation of organisms, climate change, pollution, and invasive alien species. The combined effects of these human activities have put an estimated one million species at risk of extinction, threatening the stability of ecosystems and the services we receive from them.

Biodiversity must be restored and enhanced both for its intrinsic value and for the tangible benefits that it has for society and the economy. Biodiversity and ecosystem services (provisioning, regulating, cultural and supporting) contribute to clean air, fresh water, crop pollination and food production, soil

## Climate Emergency

Human activities which result in the release of greenhouse gases are [estimated to have already caused 1°C of global heating](#) above pre-industrial levels. As a result, there have already been sea level rises, increased extreme weather events, and melting of sea ice and permafrost. This has direct and devastating impacts on society, including land loss, increased severity and occurrence of flooding, wildfires, drought, and difficulties producing food. Richer countries will be able to adapt to these impacts better, so must support developing nations to do so as well.

Carbon emissions in the [UK](#) and [Ireland](#) continue to fall, yet globally they [continue to rise](#), and the total atmospheric concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> continues to increase. As mainly service-based economies, the UK and Ireland 'export' most of their

regeneration, fuel and fibre production, physical and mental health and well-being, and many more goods and services. Intact ecosystems (i.e. that have a complete assemblage of species) are more resilient to change and are therefore better at providing ecosystem services upon which human life and livelihoods depend. [The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review](#) shows clearly that biodiversity underpins all of our economic activities.

The [Aichi Biodiversity Targets](#), set by international governments in Japan in 2010 to halt the loss of biodiversity, have failed – and though it is nearly three decades since the original Rio Earth Summit in 1992, biodiversity loss continues within the UK and Ireland, and internationally.

There needs to be a fundamental and urgent change in the way that we value and manage the natural environment. The [draft Global Biodiversity Framework](#) (the “zero draft”) sets out a “theory of change” that shows how we have to change our approach.

Biodiversity COP15 is an opportunity for global leaders to set each of their own countries, and the world collectively, on a new path to restoring the natural world for all our benefits.

emissions to other countries. The UK and Ireland must therefore support the countries from which they import goods (with embedded carbon) to reduce their own carbon emissions and to protect and restore their natural environments.

We must be wary of carbon offsetting that allows business-as-usual, or waiting for unproven and unrealized technology to solve the climate emergency. We do not have time to wait, they may not come about in time, and new technologies often come with unintended and unforeseen impacts and consequences. Along with drastically reducing our carbon emissions, we must also implement a solution that is viable now – [Nature-based Solutions](#). Implementing Nature-based Solutions allows us to tackle the interlinked biodiversity and climate crises.

# Recommendations

## 1. The Biodiversity COP15 and Climate COP26 discussions and agreements must be integrated.

- a. The climate emergency and biodiversity crisis are intrinsically linked. We cannot solve one without solving the other. Nature-based Solutions make this link and must be integrated into the preparations for both meetings.
- b. We must ensure that actions to address the climate emergency enhance biodiversity rather than impact upon it. For example, intensive tree plantations may sequester carbon but could have little benefit for biodiversity, water resources or communities, and could replace habitats of existing value.
- c. There must be a systems-based approach to solving both crises together.

## 2. There must be a focus on global cooperation.

- a. Nature and carbon do not recognise political boundaries. Countries must agree to cooperate on action across borders, including the creation of national and international legislation that recognizes the reliance of people on nature and that its destruction impacts standards of living and quality of life.
- b. Developed nations, having produced most historic carbon emissions and driven global biodiversity loss, must support developing nations to reduce their emissions and protect and restore biodiversity in a socially just and equitable way.
- c. New international funding mechanisms are needed to address the twin crises together.

## 3. Nature-based Solutions must be central to addressing the climate emergency.

- a. [Nature-based Solutions](#) – in combination with radically reducing carbon emissions through halting fossil fuel usage – offer the only proven ways to achieve climate and biodiversity goals simultaneously, in the timeframes needed to avert climate and biodiversity catastrophe.
- b. [Evidence of effectiveness](#) to support the use of Nature-based Solutions can be found worldwide. Examples of Nature-based Solutions include restoring native habitats such as peatlands, woodlands and seagrass meadows to absorb and store carbon dioxide. Creating and restoring wetlands and salt marsh also works to protect against riverine and coastal flooding; and creating and integrating green and blue spaces in urban areas can combat urban heating, reduce localized flooding and enhance human health and wellbeing. Restorative forestry and agroforestry ensures timber and carbon can be managed sustainably without destroying biodiversity. We need to see sufficient resources in place to collect and collate the evidence underpinning this.
- c. Governments must commit to significant investment – and create incentives for private investment – in Nature-based Solutions. The UN's recent [State of Finance for Nature](#) report says that global annual investment in nature needs to be quadrupled if we are to maintain (let alone restore) the services that nature provides.

## 4. Governments must regulate and implement legally-binding targets.

- a. Governments must provide the regulatory frameworks that give businesses the confidence to change on a level playing field and that provide incentives to innovate new solutions.
- b. Regulation must incentivize reducing both carbon emissions and biodiversity impacts, and thereby encourage businesses to move to zero/low emission activities by decarbonizing their processes and to evaluate and improve their product lifecycles and supply chains for biodiversity impacts.
- c. Governments must implement legally-binding targets – to reduce carbon emissions and restore biodiversity – and provide the governance structures that create genuine accountability across all of government.

## 5. Governments must support economic change.

- a. We will not address the climate and biodiversity crises if economies continue with 'business as usual'. [The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review](#) has highlighted again how our societies and economies rely on the natural environment, how we are undermining its 'stocks' and 'flows', and how we must seek a new economic approach not based on endless growth. Green recovery plans offer an opportunity to all governments to shift emphasis and investments. Governments must implement systems thinking so that *all* policy- and decision-making, investments, strategies and plans demonstrate:
  - i. How they have factored in the 10 years to bend the curve of climate change and biodiversity loss.
  - ii. How they are getting us into the safe space on the economics 'doughnut'.
  - iii. How they are implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a package (rather than individually).
  - iv. How they are moving to a circular economy – with whole life impact assessments.
  - v. How they are addressing intergenerational equity and social justice.
  - vi. How they are working with natural solutions and regenerative practices.
  - vii. How they are accounting for the 'offshoring' of any environmental impacts.
- b. Governments must remove taxes, subsidies, incentives and other support mechanisms that encourage higher carbon emissions and environmentally damaging activities. For example, by:
  - i. Removing financial support and regulatory approval of all fossil fuel extraction.
  - ii. Removing trade rules that encourage environmental exploitation and destruction with no accounting of impacts or costs.
- c. Governments must create taxes, subsidies, incentives and other support mechanisms that support activities that reduce carbon emissions and biodiversity protection and restoration. For example, by supporting:
  - i. Nature restoration projects, in the UK, Ireland and internationally.
  - ii. Procurement standards that require environmental protection and sustainability.
  - iii. Mechanisms that reward the management of land and nature for public benefits. For example, woodlands are managed for biodiversity, recreation and water resource management, agricultural practice is regenerative, and peat extraction is banned. The absence of these mechanisms mean that the benefits are compromised in favour of generating income from destructive activities.

## 6. Relevant expertise and evidence must be at the centre of decision-making and delivery.

- a. Governments must have simple and transparent processes for involving independent biodiversity and climate experts in policy- and decision-making.
- b. Experts should be drawn from across academia, policy, and 'on the ground' practice. They hold the expertise and understanding of the species, habitats and ecosystems for the British and Irish islands – they are our indigenous knowledge.
- c. Governments must recognize that not having experts involved can lead to perverse and unexpected outcomes that undermine addressing the climate and biodiversity crises. For example, tree-planting in the Flow Country in Scotland created a net emission of carbon and destroyed peatland habitats.

## 7. Biodiversity professionals must be supported.

- a. Recognition must be given to the important role of biodiversity professionals in addressing the twin crises. Through elevating their standing, biodiversity professionals will have more influence in projects and planning, more green jobs will be created, and it will improve the diversity of the profession.
- b. Governments must support investment in biodiversity skills and training, which will raise standards, create green jobs, and improve outcomes for communities and the environment.
- c. Governments must provide resources – financial and expertise – to its agencies and local governments in order for them to deliver, support and enforce action.

## 8. The public must be engaged.

- a. Governments must act to ensure that the public understands the value of the natural environment. Functioning ecosystems and a stable climate are existential necessities rather than optional luxuries. Governments must engage in public education initiatives.
- b. Governments must support and encourage local communities to be proactive – through altering behaviours and lifestyles – in reducing carbon emissions and restoring biodiversity. For example, this can include supporting active transport infrastructure, 20-minute cities and local nature reserves and greenspace.
- c. Engagement with and enjoyment of the natural environment is not equally available and accessible to all. Governments must ensure that engaging with and enjoying the natural environment is equitable, diverse and inclusive. Unless we are all engaged, we will not address the twin crises.

## 9. Support must be provided to future generations.

- a. Most countries, including the UK, have [little reference to the climate and biodiversity crises in their education syllabuses](#). Yet there is a [groundswell of frustration](#) from the younger generation. School curricula need to include the impacts of the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis, and the solutions, in all areas of learning. The proposed [GCSE in Natural History](#) in England will be an important step in this direction.
- b. Supporting the younger generation now ensures sufficient future biodiversity professionals are attracted into a fulfilling and valued career that continues to deliver biodiversity restoration. Governments must support relevant degree programmes and vocational training such as apprenticeships.
- c. Governments must recognize that not addressing the climate and biodiversity crises now imperils the standard of living and quality of life of future generations across the world. Government decision-making must factor in impacts on future generations, as has been done in Wales with the [Wellbeing of Future Generations Act](#).

## Working Together, Now!

We must all work together, and we must act now. NGOs and their volunteers must be allowed the space to operate, to complement the work of governments and biodiversity professionals. Local communities must be empowered to take action. We can solve the twin climate and biodiversity crises in a socially just way, but only if we act now and if we do so together – locally and internationally, across sectors, across politics and across countries.