

News story

Nature recovery to be accelerated as the government delivers on measures to protect land and sea

One year on since the publication of the Environmental Improvement Plan, the government launches new measures to halt and reverse nature's decline

From: **Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs**

(/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs) and **The Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP** **(/government/people/stephen-barclay)**

Published 31 January 2024

This was published under the 2022 to 2024 Sunak Conservative government



Puffins, porpoises, and pine martens are just some of the species set to benefit from new measures set out by the Government today (31 January) to boost nature recovery on land and at sea.

The new plans - announced one year on from the launch of the Environmental Improvement Plan – will see a permanent closure of the sandeel fisheries in English waters of the North Sea from April, further targeted restrictions on damaging bottom trawling and a new framework for national parks and protected areas to help them better deliver for nature.

Sandeels are a vital food source for some of our most vulnerable seabirds and marine mammals, such as the iconic puffin and harbour porpoise, and commercially important fish species such as haddock and whiting. This closure will bolster the resilience of these species and make space for nature to recover across our marine habitats.

Important pink sea fans, fragile sponges, anemones will also be further boosted with a targeted ban announced on bottom trawling in an additional 13 Marine Protected Areas.

To bring us closer to achieving the global goal to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030, a new framework for National Parks and National Landscapes to help them better deliver for nature and access will also be published. This builds on the commitments the government set out at COP28, including a map which demonstrates which areas of land could contribute to the 30by30 target in England.

The framework will support our cherished Protected Landscapes and landowners to deliver our

Environmental Improvement Plan targets including tree planting and peatland restoration which are essential for sequestering and storing carbon to mitigate the impacts of climate change while supporting biodiversity.

Environment Secretary Steve Barclay said:

- “ We’ve made a lot of progress since we launched the Environmental Improvement Plan – we’ve planted nearly 5 million trees, improved public access to our beautiful countryside and accelerated the adoption of our world-leading farming schemes.
- “ We are building on this progress with a new package to safeguard our marine ecosystems and bring us one step closer to achieving our 30by30 target, both on land and sea.
- “ Protecting the environment is fundamental to the prosperity of our country and our new commitments will drive forward our mission to create a cleaner and greener country for all.” ”

Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, said:

- “ Restoring thriving ecosystems is a vital process, not only for meeting our national Nature recovery goals, but also for our food and water security, wellbeing and economic prosperity.
- “ The measures set out by the government today will take us closer to meeting our ambitious 2030 targets, both on land and at sea. Natural England has played a key role over the last year delivering the commitments set out in the Environmental Improvement Plan and we look forward to continuing to work in close partnership with government to accelerate delivery on the ground.”

Beccy Speight chief executive of the RSPB said:

- “ Answering the RSPB’s call to end industrial Sandeel fishing, today’s announcement is a vital lifeline from our Government for our seabirds when they need it most. The UK is

home to globally important seabird colonies, but these populations are at the forefront of the nature and climate emergency and are in significant decline, with their resilience being pushed to the limit.

“ To support the recovery of our seabirds, the RSPB has long recommended an end to industrial Sandeel fishing in UK waters to secure vital food sources for these amazing birds. A call that has been passionately backed by tens of thousands of our members and supporters when Defra launched a public consultation on the issue. Halting wildlife decline and putting nature on the path to recovery must be supported by a programme of Government actions and today’s announcement represents one of those jigsaw pieces, along with demonstrating that overwhelmingly the public supports these actions that enable nature’s recovery.”

The government has also announced the recipients of £7 million of awards to improve lowland peat soils.

Peatlands are our largest terrestrial carbon store, however, as a result of centuries of drainage for agriculture, just 1% of England’s lowland peatlands remain in a near-natural state, and these drained peatlands account for 88% of all greenhouse gas emissions from England’s peat.

The 34 projects, spread across England’s lowland peat regions such as the Cambridgeshire Fens and Somerset Levels, will use government funding to improve the management of water on lowland peat and enhance understanding of climate change impacts and flood risk. They include projects that will use innovative technologies, such as telemetry, to precisely control water retention levels across the landscape.

Since the launch of the Environmental Improvement Plan a year ago, the government has delivered more than 50 commitments set out in the plan and the Environment Act. This includes:

- Implementing a ban on single-use plastics

- Planting nearly 5 million trees
- Accelerating the Sustainable Farming Incentive and launching further 34 new Landscape Recovery projects – putting us on track to have 70% of land in Environmental Land Management schemes by 2028
- Launching a new species survival fund
- Beginning the process of creating a new national park and forest for the nation
- Significantly improving air quality with PM2.5 emissions down by 10%
- Improving access to the countryside by opening up a further 245 miles of the King Charles III England Coast Path

Delivering on these commitments will ensure that our most important places, at the core of nature's recovery, deliver for people and the planet. In doing so, we will create a natural world that is rich in diverse plants and wildlife and restored for future generations to enjoy.

It is due to UK leadership that the global target to protect 30% of land and sea by 2030, known as 30by30 was adopted and these announcements today will further support that target and the historic agreement for nature reached by the UK and nearly 200 countries at the 2022 UN Biodiversity summit.

Notes to editors:

Sandeels:

- A spatial closure of English waters of the North Sea to fishing for sandeel will be introduced before the start of this year's sandeel fishing season on 1 April.
- UK vessels are not permitted to fish for sandeel because the UK's share of the Total Allowable Catch for North Sea sandeel is not allocated. The spatial closure will extend that prohibition to all vessels operating in English waters of the North Sea.
- In March 2023 Defra undertook a public consultation proposing options for future sandeel management in English waters of the North Sea.

Over 95% of respondents support some form of prohibition on fishing for sandeel, with a majority favouring the closure of all English waters.

Marine Protected Area protections:

- The UK is at the forefront of marine protection with 377 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) protecting 38% of UK waters. In English waters there are 181 sites protecting 40% of our seas. We have built a comprehensive network of MPAs and are now focusing on measures to enhance their protection.
- Now that we are an independent coastal state, free from the Common Fisheries Policy, the Fisheries Act 2020 introduced new powers enabling the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) to implement fisheries management measures in MPAs in English offshore waters. The first 4 offshore MPA byelaws were implemented in 2022.
- MMO consulted last year on proposals to restrict bottom-towed fishing gear over rock and reef habitat in a further 13 MPAs and we are announcing today that a byelaw will be implemented to bring those proposals into effect.

###Improving lowland agricultural peat:

- Projects funded under the Lowland Agricultural Peat Water Discovery Pilot and the Lowland Agricultural Peat Small Infrastructure Pilot will help to deliver our mosaic approach, which includes more sustainable farming practices and restoring peat where possible, helping to deliver on our Net Zero goals and providing further environmental co-benefits.
- Our new lowland agricultural peat pilots are designed to provide much-needed evidence, which will help to deliver on the recommendations of the Lowland Agricultural Peat Task Force report – known as the [Caudwell report](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fassets.publishing.service.gov.uk%2Fmedia%2F649d6fe1bb13dc0012b2e349%2Flowla)
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- Under the Lowland Agricultural Peat Water Discovery Pilot, delivered by the Environment Agency: 13 projects (totalling £3.1 million) will receive funding, which is enabling local collaborations to develop costed water management plans that support our mosaic approach to reducing carbon emissions from lowland peat soils, including both sustainable farming on higher water tables and peat restoration where possible.
- Under the Lowland Agricultural Peat Small Infrastructure Pilot: 21 projects (totalling £3.8 million) will receive funding, which is supporting Internal Drainage Boards to update and install water management infrastructure to enable better water management for peat and the environment.

Protected Landscapes Outcomes Framework:

- The Protected Landscape targets are non-statutory and create a shared ambition for all 44 of England's Protected Landscapes (National Parks and National Landscapes). National Landscapes is the new name for designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs).
- The targets are for the Protected Landscapes as places (the geographic area covered by the designation).
- Whilst action will be coordinated by Protected Landscape bodies it will be the responsibility of all stakeholders, partners and land managers in the area to support their delivery.
- The targets are based on an analysis of the environmental potential of the Protected Landscapes to deliver on current national targets. Each individual Protected Landscape body will

set their own individual contribution to these national targets for Protected Landscapes.

- At COP28 the government published a map indicating which areas could count towards the target to protect 30% of our land for nature by 2030. More information can be found here:
[Delivering 30by30 on land in England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-30by30-on-land-in-england)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-30by30-on-land-in-england>

Projects for Nature platform:

- At COP28, the government announced a new initiative to align financial flows to nature recovery. The Projects for Nature scheme will match corporate donations to nature restoration projects selected by Defra, Natural England and the Environment Agency in an effort to link up forward thinking businesses, such as Lloyd's Banking Group and Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, with projects to help us reach our environmental targets.
- To learn more about the Projects for Nature initiative and view the platform, visit:
[www.projectsfnature.com](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.projectsfnature.com%2F&data=05%7C02%7CEllie.Clark%40defra.gov.uk%7Cc2fd18070f314bd8f7c708dc2196b397%7C770a245002274c6290c74e38537f1102%7C0%7C0%7C638422178351994649%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTil6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCi6Mn0%3D%7C0%7C%7C%7C&sdata=Af69cK%2FtTNoo98SnUOCgSOQNgv5iaXFJ9t6QENsCCeo%3D&reserved=0)
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