Department
for Environment,
Food & Rural Affairs

International environmental protection report (April 2022 to March 2024)

April 2025

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

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1. Introduction

This international environmental protection report is the first of its kind. It covers significant international developments in environmental protection and climate mitigation and adaptation during the reporting period (April 2022 to March 2024). This encompasses multilateral, regional, national and subnational initiatives that are ambitious, pioneering, unique, far-reaching or otherwise significant.

We are committed to the 13 legally binding environmental targets set under the Environment Act 2021 (the Environment Act), which include targets for air, water, biodiversity, marine protection, resource efficiency and tree and woodland cover. The Environment Act requires that the Secretary of State prepare an Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) for significantly improving the natural environment. EIPs must have a minimum duration of 15 years. The Government has concluded a rapid review of the existing Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP23). We published a statement of the rapid review's key findings on 30 January 2025, to be followed by publication of a revised EIP later this year. Our new, statutory plan will include delivery information to help meet each of our ambitious Environment Act targets It will focus on cleaning up our waterways, reducing waste across the economy, planting millions more trees, improving air quality and halting the decline in species by 2030.

The 4 nations of the UK, the Overseas Territories and the Crown Dependencies, have also worked together to submit our National Targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity's Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), in August 2024. We outlined a range of policies and strategies that align fully with all 23 of the GBF targets at home.

Many countries have made similar, national commitments both in terms of reaching net zero, protecting nature, improving environmental quality and tackling climate change. Given the UK's ambition on environmental protection, we want to ensure that we continue to innovate and draw from the best available practice internationally. It is hoped that this report will act as a useful resource that will enable us to track the changing trends and focus of international action to protect and enhance the natural world. We will also restore the UK's international credibility and leadership, playing a leading role in driving forward action to address the triple planetary crises of climate change, nature loss and pollution.

Compilation of the report

This report covers developments that have taken place during the reporting period (April 2022 to March 2024). The government will report to Parliament every 2 years going forward.

For this first report we've focused primarily on counterparts across the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, key trading partners and other countries piloting innovative approaches in addressing environmental and climate issues. The report

draws on a wide range of developments at multilateral, regional, national and sub-national levels.

One of the key aims of this report is to identify global best practice that could in turn inform potential approaches in the UK. With this in mind, we have structured the report's findings around the key headings of the Environmental Improvement Plan 2023.

Headline findings

There have been significant multilateral developments during the reporting period. In 2022, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies partially concluded with the aim of tackling certain forms of harmful fishing subsidies that support unsustainable fishing activity. This was the first ever WTO agreement with an environmental focus. Later that year, the agreement of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) demonstrated the commitment by the international community to combat the degradation of natural habitats. This was followed by a landmark global agreement on the conservation of marine life within international waters: The Implementing Agreement under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement). At the UN Climate Change Conference COP28, countries committed to increasing the speed of their efforts in a whole host of areas. These include reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening resilience to climate change, as well as sending more financial and technological support to more vulnerable nations.

We have identified significant legislative developments at national and sub-national levels across all key aspects of environmental and climate protection. Most notable are developments on mitigating and adapting to climate change, biodiversity and nature restoration and the transition to the circular economy.

Many countries and trading blocs centred their economic recovery from the global COVID-19 pandemic around initiatives supporting the green transition such as the US Inflation Reduction Act and the EU's Green Deal Industrial Plan.

Green finance initiatives have been adopted in several countries, acting to stimulate greater public and private sector investment into nature recovery. Examples include Australia's Nature Repair Market and Canada's National Adaptation Plan. This demonstrates an increasing global understanding of the links between environmental protection and economic worth, with sustainability an increasingly important factor in the attractiveness of development projects to investors.

2. Biodiversity

The health of our planet is reflected in the vitality of its plant and animal species. Many of these species are currently under threat due to the growing degradation of their natural habitats. Nations across the world have responded to this issue through the creation of a host of multilateral agreements, as well as national legislation to tackle their own specific environmental challenges. The economic stakes are high. According to reporting from PwC, over half of the world's GDP ($58 trillion) directly or indirectly dependent on nature. Evidence from the 2022 meeting of the World Economic Forum found that global food production, as well as land and ocean use, generate around $10 trillion annually (12% of global GDP), in addition to an estimated 40% of employment.

Multilateral developments

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

COP15 of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (December 2022) agreed the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) to bring all governments, businesses and civil society together to address the loss of nature. The GBF sets a global commitment to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 to be delivered via 4 goals and 23 targets, including:

- protecting 30% of the Earth's land (including terrestrial and inland water areas) and 30% of the Earth's ocean (including marine and coastal areas)
- closing the $700 billion per year biodiversity fund gap which includes eliminating up to $500 billion in harmful subsidies and mobilising $200 billion from all sources
- cutting food waste in half by 2030

All parties are required to take domestic action to implement the framework fully and effectively, whilst supporting other parties to contribute to the delivery of global targets and goals. This includes an agreement to strengthen planning, monitoring, reporting and review mechanisms to better hold themselves to their commitments. Parties are obliged to revise and update their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) to align with the GBF and publish national targets and actions reflecting all the applicable goals and targets of the GBF.

The Implementing Agreement under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement)

Whilst the GBF encompasses the management of a host of environmental issues, the global community has taken steps to ensure that marine habitats outside of national

jurisdiction are protected. One of these steps is the adoption of the BBNJ. This agreement aims to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. These areas make up over 60% of the surface of the global ocean and nearly 95% of its volume. The BBNJ Agreement aims to ensure their protection for the present and long term through:

- effective implementation of the relevant provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- further international cooperation and coordination

The agreement includes:

- new obligations to share the benefits of research into and utilisation of marine genetic resources (MGRs)
- a mechanism to establish area-based management tools (ABMTs), including Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)
- provisions building upon provisions in UNCLOS on environmental impact assessments (EIAs) for new activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction
- provisions strengthening capacity-building for developing states parties, along with broader marine technology transfer

The BBNJ Agreement opened for signature at the UN on 20 September 2023. There are now over 100 signatories, including the UK.

OSPAR – a regional seas perspective

The UK is a contracting party to the Oslo and Paris Convention for the Protection of the North East Atlantic (OSPAR). The OSPAR maritime area stretches from Mid-Atlantic Ridge in the west to the North Sea in the east, and from the North Pole southward to the Azores. 40% of its area is beyond national jurisdiction. Its vision is of a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic Ocean that is productive, used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification.

In 2023, OSPAR contracting parties produced their latest decadal Quality Status Report (QSR). The QSR highlighted that whilst there have been improvements in some areas (overall reduction in pollution, for example) there are still high levels of cumulative pressures on the marine environment from human activities.

OSPAR Marine Protected Area (MPA) developments include:

- North East Atlantic Fisheries Committee (NEAFC) and OSPAR's collaboration to develop a common understanding and shared approach to ensure OSPAR's MPA activity and NEAFC other effective conservation measures better complement each other
- OSPAR extending the designation of the North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea basin (the largest in the North Atlantic, roughly the size of France) – it now protects both the

water column and seafloor, as well as additional species and habitats, such as coral gardens and deep-sea sharks
- the roadmap being developed by OSPAR Arctic Outcomes Working Group to increase environmental protection in arctic waters (potentially through an MPA)

Other OSPAR developments include:

- in 2023, the beginning of discussions on possible amendments to the OSPAR Convention to address new and growing pressures – such pressures may include offshore renewables, aquaculture and space vehicle debris
- the Regional Action Plan for the recovery of marine birds (RAP-Bird), which was adopted by the OSPAR Commission in 2024 – the RAP-Bird presents 11collective actions, targeting the main causes of decline in all species of marine bird in the OSPAR maritime area
- excellent progress in implementing the second OSPAR Regional Action Plan on marine litter, including 2 new recommendations on waste management handling of fish boxes and updated sustainability guidance for fishers.
- OSPAR signing a memorandum of understanding with the Sargasso Sea Commission, which aims to facilitate voluntary collaboration for the conservation of the Sargasso Sea.

Regional and national terrestrial developments

EU Nature Restoration Law

This law requires EU member states to create national habitat restoration plans and prevent significant deterioration. The main overarching targets require that member states must:

- put in place effective and area-based restoration measures with the aim to jointly cover throughout the areas and ecosystems within the EU, at least 20% of land areas and at least 20% of sea areas by 2030, and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050
- put in place the restoration measures that are necessary to improve to good condition areas of habitat types listed in Annex I and Annex II[1] which are not in good condition. These measures shall be in place:

[1] Regulation - EU - 2024/1991 - EN - EUR-Lex

(a) By 2030 on at least 30% of the total area of all habitat types listed in Annex I and groups 1 to 6 of the habitat types listed in Annex II that is not in good condition, as quantified in the national restoration plans.

(b) By 2040 on at least 60% and by 2050, on at least 90% of the area of each group of habitats types listed in Annex I of the groups 1 to 6 of the habitat types listed in Annex II that are not in good condition, as quantified in the national restoration plan.

Different restoration targets apply to different ecosystems and Member States will decide the specific measures they will put in place on their territories. For this purpose, each Member State will develop a national restoration plan, setting out restoration needs and measures to fulfil the obligations and achieve the targets of the law adapted to the national context, and taking into account the diversity of different regions.

Additional targets include reversing the decline of pollinator populations by 2030 and achieving no net loss of green urban space and tree cover by 2030. National Restoration Plans must be submitted to the European Commission by mid-2026, showing how they will deliver on the targets. The European Environment Agency will draw up regular technical reports on progress towards the targets.

Other innovative legislation

Many nations have already implemented innovative legislation to tackle the unique challenges they face. China has recently brought their Qinghai-Tibet Plateau Ecological Protection Legislation into force (an area larger than Western Europe). This prohibits production and construction activities, including mining, that fail to meet conservation requirements or risk soil erosion in areas classed as environmentally fragile. It also imposes strict rules against the construction of new hydropower stations on the plateau.

The Philippines have strengthened laws underpinning the protection of local biodiversity when mining. This is significant as, according to the Philippine Mines and Geosciences Bureau, the country is ranked in the global top 5 for mineral reserves and is the second largest producer of nickel.

The Australian government plans to invest A$7.7 million into the creation of a nature repair market, designed to make it easier for carbon producing businesses to invest in projects that will also benefit nature. They hope that this will encourage an estimated A$18 billion of private sector investment into defending natural habitats.

Australia has also introduced the Agriculture Biodiversity Stewardship Package. This includes the carbon and biodiversity pilot and the enhancing remnant vegetation pilot. It is trialling market-based approaches for landholders to improve biodiversity and inform the development of a national nature repair market. A national stewardship trading platform was established, allowing landholders to plan and evaluate carbon and biodiversity projects, connect farmers with potential buyers of biodiversity and carbon services, and

apply for government-funded biodiversity stewardship pilot programmes. The government is exploring options to implement the Australian Farm Biodiversity Certification Scheme to certify farms and farm businesses for their biodiversity management. It is consulting on legislation to support a voluntary biodiversity stewardship market, supporting new income streams for farmers who improve biodiversity outcomes on their land.

In Canada, the Jane Goodall Act provides an unprecedented level of protection to captive animals. This includes the banning of over 800 wild species for use as attractions at roadside zoos or as pets in private residences. The act also contains provisions to ban the captivity of elephants entirely.

National marine protection developments

Marine protection laws have also been enhanced on a national level. One notable development is the creation of the world's first sperm whale reserve in the Dominican Republic, which should act to boost tourism.

Ireland has established a Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) to assess maritime area consent applications that developers are required to possess before they are allowed to perform any activities there. Other duties include granting marine licences, investigating reported compliance issues, prosecuting serious regulatory breaches and encouraging co-operation between all regulators of Ireland's maritime area.

3. Air quality

Air pollution is one of the most severe environmental threats to public health, accounting for approximately 7 million early deaths every year globally, according to a report from the World Health Organisation . Efforts are being made worldwide to improve air quality at local, national and international levels, aiming to increase average life expectancy and improve our shared environment. Air pollution does not respect national borders, so co-operation to tackle transboundary emissions is vital in ensuring safe limits are reached within individual countries.

Multilateral developments

In December 2023, the parties of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution (Air Convention) including the UK, agreed to work to revise the Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-Level Ozone (Gothenburg Protocol). These revisions are expected to further strengthen efforts to reduce transboundary air pollution across North America, Europe, the Caucuses, and Central Asia. The amended Gothenburg Protocol, in force since 2019, is the only binding region treaty anywhere in the world that limits and

binds countries to act to reduce 5 major air pollutant emissions and report on progress towards those reductions.

At a global level, the UK co-sponsored a US led resolution through the Sixth United Nations Environment Assembly in 2024, ‘Promoting regional cooperation on air pollution, to improve air quality globally’. This resolution calls on the United Nations Environment Programme to set up a global network for air pollution, with:

- inter-regional cooperation between countries
- regional multilateral environment agreements
- relevant non-governmental organisations

The network will facilitate sharing of relevant science, technical, and policy information to help all countries to find ways to reduce air pollution nationally and cooperate where appropriate on shared air pollution issues. This will be supported by an online repository of relevant scientific information and policy guidance from member states and multilateral environment agreements on air pollution topics. This has since been created by the Climate and Clean Air Coalition, which since 2025 is co-chaired by the UK and Brazil.

Regional developments

The European Union has agreed an update to the Ambient Air Quality Directive in 2024. The Ambient Air Quality Directive regulates to improve air quality across EU member states with the primary objective of protecting health and the environment. It sets air quality standards for various pollutants including particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5), nitrogen dioxide (NO2), sulphur dioxide (SO2), benzene, carbon monoxide, lead, arsenic, cadmium, nickel, benzo(a)pyrene and ozone. The new directive sets lower limits for some of these pollutants alongside new provisions regarding access to compensation where member states fail to follow some of the new specific air quality rules.

Emissions from industrial and agricultural sources also contribute to harmful levels of air pollution. Many countries and regions, including the UK, regulate these sectors to reduce emission sources. Most notably, the EU recently revised the Industrial Emissions Directive (IED) as its main instrument to reduce pollution from large industrial installations including steelworks, large combustion plants mining and intensive pig and poultry farms. The revision introduces the concept of environmental performance limit values and require member states to establish an electronic permit system by 2035.

4. Water

Regional and national developments

Clean water is essential for both human wellbeing and the health of the environment. Across the world, infrastructure that supplies and treats water is under greater pressure than ever before. Many of the world's largest rivers are being used for significant abstraction as well as a way to dispose of pollution and waste. Farming was particularly impacted during the drought in 2022 and the economy relies on plentiful water to enable businesses to function and grow. Global action is being undertaken to combat this crisis to ensure a clean and accessible supply of water for all.

Examples of this action are varied and have been tailored to best address local and regional requirements. For example, in China, following on from the successful implementation of the 2021 Yangtze River protection law, the government have introduced the Yellow River protection law in October 2022. The law seeks to guarantee the safety of the Yellow River, promote the conservation and sustainable usage of its water resources, drive high-quality development, as well as to protect, and promote the heritage of the Yellow River through cultural events and exhibitions.

In South Korea, amendments to water management legislation provide protection and support for residents acts along the Nakdong and Geum rivers. The aim of these laws is to improve local water quality, manage water resources and pollution. This has been done through granting the national government powers that enable it to maintain local rivers, which had been damaged due to heavy rainfall. The act also aims to achieve this by designating areas close to water sources as protected areas. This means that building within these areas is restricted, except for the development of specific facilities such as sewage treatment areas and natural villages. The regulations also mandate the creation of pollution management plans. The punishments for breaking these rules will form a significant deterrent, ranging from financial penalties to imprisonment.

In Central America, Costa Rica has amended their 2011 Tax Exemption for Wastewater Treatment Systems law (October 2023). The law removes many different taxes for public sector bodies and non-profit organisations who possess wastewater cleaning facilities. The aim is to reduce the costs of running these essential pieces of infrastructure saving money that can then be invested into other water facilities.

In Europe, Spain has recently established a law recognising the legal personality of the nation's largest coastal lagoon known as the Mar Menor lagoon and its basin. Located within the south east of the country, the lagoon has faced serious environmental issues caused by the dumping of fertilisers. It is hoped that the protection this law provides will discourage the dumping of waste into the lagoon as doing so now will now result in legal repercussions for those responsible.

5. Chemicals, pesticides and hazardous substances

Multilateral developments

The Global Framework on Chemicals for a Planet Free of Harm from Chemicals and Waste

Chemicals are an integral part of everyday life, and the global chemicals market is projected to double between 2017 and 2030 to over $10 trillion according to a report from the United Nations. As a result, global chemical pollution and related adverse health and environmental impacts will only increase if gaps in international chemicals management are not addressed.

Progress has been made under several global agreements, including the Global Framework on Chemicals' (GFC) predecessor, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management. Pollution from chemicals continues to contribute to millions of deaths, illnesses and disabilities each year, and it remains closely interrelated with the crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.

Adopted at the fifth session of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5) in September 2023, the GFC is unique in the way it attempts to comprehensively address all aspects of chemicals and waste issues through a multi-stakeholder approach.

The newly adopted framework calls for the prevention of the illegal trade and trafficking of chemicals and waste, increased global action on highly hazardous pesticides, and the implementation of national legal frameworks. It also calls for the transition to safer and more sustainable chemical alternatives, the responsible management of chemicals in various sectors – including industry, agriculture, and healthcare – and the enhancement of transparency and access to information regarding chemicals and their associated risks.

Stockholm Convention work to protect human health and the environment against persistent organic pollutants (POPs)

Multilateral progress has also been made with respect to persistent organic pollutants (POPs) through the UN Stockholm Convention on POPs. POPs resist degradation, are toxic to humans and wildlife, accumulate in living organisms, and can be widely distributed far from their place of release, including across international borders, such that global action is needed to protect human health and the environment. Long term exposure to POPs has been linked to increased health risks such as cancer, reproductive issues and birth defects. Important convention-level work in this reporting period includes the 10th and 11th Conference of the Parties (COP) in 2022 and 2023, in which 4 new substances were

adopted for global elimination (PFHxS, dechlorane plus, UV-328, and methoxychlor), to be implemented domestically by parties to the convention.

There have been several meetings of the convention's POPs Review Committee (POPRC) to evaluate substances that have been nominated for potential adoption under the convention, making ultimate recommendations to the COP on whether these should be adopted for global prohibition. Substances that have been recommended, to the next 12th COP in 2025, for listing for global elimination include 'Chlorinated paraffins with carbon chain lengths in the range C14-17 and chlorination levels at or exceeding 45% chlorine by weight', also known as medium chain chlorinated paraffins (or 'MCCPs'), a substance nominated by UK, as well as long-chain perfluoro carboxylic acids (LC-PFCAs), a member of the per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) family of chemicals. Also under evaluation is chlorpyrifos, a pesticide.

Minamata Convention on Mercury

The UK is a party to the Minamata Convention, a multilateral environment agreement (MEA) to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of mercury. Mercury is listed as one of the World Health Organization's (WHO) 10 chemicals of major public health concern. Amongst other obligations, the Minamata Convention requires parties to phase-out or phase-down mercury use in certain products and processes.

In March 2022, the fourth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-4) agreed to phase out the manufacture import and export of a number of mercury-added products including certain batteries, lamps and photographic film and paper by 1 January 2026. The COP also agreed on 2 new measures to advance the phase-down of dental amalgam. The amendments entered into force in September 2023.

In November 2023, the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-5) agreed to phase-out of the manufacture, import and export of 9further mercury-added products including certain batteries, fluorescent lamps and cosmetics and to phase-out the production of polyurethane using mercury catalysts. Separately, the COP agreed on a new requirement to advance the phase-down of dental amalgam. These amendments enter into force in April 2025, with the earliest phase-out dates from 1 January 2026.

Regional and national developments

The EU commission has adopted a new voluntary framework to help guide the innovation process for different chemicals and their related materials in a safe manner. It is hoped that this framework will minimise the impact caused by the production and usage of end-of-life chemicals on overall public health and the environment. The commission also recommended that this framework be tested by member states, as well as private businesses and academia with each stakeholder group providing feedback on different

aspects of the framework. The results from the feedback are due to be discussed in December 2024.

The EU are taking forward a range of actions to address the risks from per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) have published and consulted on a restriction proposal for PFAS as a group across a large number of applications. This restriction proposal is currently undergoing analysis by ECHA's expert committees.

In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency has undertaken a multitude of actions to address certain persistent chemicals, specifically polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). These include but are not limited to the following:

- granted states the ability to apply for $1 billion in grants to tackle drinking water contamination caused by PFAS
- removed PFAS inventory reporting exemptions
- introduced a rule requiring all manufacturers of PFAS to report to the EPA on PFAS uses, production volumes and other metrics since 2011
- implemented rules preventing anyone from resuming the manufacturing and usage of over 300 PFAS that have not been produced in recent years without a risk assessment

6. Circular economy

Multilateral developments

The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal

The UK is party to the Basel Convention, which is a multilateral environment agreement (MEA) to protect human health and the environment against the adverse effects resulting from the generation, transboundary movements and management of hazardous wastes and other wastes. An important part of the convention is the prior informed consent (PIC) procedure. The PIC procedure requires that an importing party must give consent before another party can export hazardous wastes and certain other wastes to them.

In June 2022, the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Basel Convention (COP-15) agreed to amend the annexes of the convention in order to provide additional controls over the transboundary movement of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE). Under the amendment, all WEEE will be subject to the PIC procedure, whereas previously only WEEE considered hazardous was subject to the PIC procedure.

The purpose of the amendment is to give importing countries greater control over the waste they are importing, and to reduce the human health and environmental hazards stemming from undocumented and poorly managed WEEE, particularly when it is exported abroad. It is also intended to provide greater transparency on the global transboundary movement of WEEE including how it is recycled or disposed of. This should increase resource recovery and support the circular economy. These amendments came into force on 1 January 2025.

Regional and national developments

The planet's resources are limited. Much waste that could be used productively is dumped into large landfill sites that have finite capacity. Dumping waste into landfills also contributes to global warming through the production of greenhouse gas emissions. Awareness of these issues has been rising, as seen with the recent UN Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee negotiations on plastic pollution. This has led to many national initiatives that minimise waste and promote the circular economy.

The EU has recently instituted the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) to ensure that the design of products is environmentally friendly and produces as little wastage as possible. A new 'digital product passport' will be produced to provide consumers with information about the environmental sustainability of a wide range of products (a few exceptions include food, and medicinal products). The regulation also introduces a direct ban on the destruction of unsold textiles and footwear.

Laws that encourage the transition to a circular economy continue to become more commonplace globally. Ireland has passed the Circular Economy Act, providing a framework for the government to incentivise the use of recyclable alternatives, enforce charges for commercial waste and improve regulatory processes. They have also redesigned their existing Environment Fund into a Circular Economy Fund, which will remain ring-fenced to provide support for environmental initiatives and additional funding for future projects designed to stimulate the circular economy. Other examples of efforts to tackle plastic waste include:

- Spain's law on waste and contaminated soils for a circular economy
- Japan's 2022 Act on Promotion of Resource Circulation for Plastics
- the Philippines' new Extended Producer Responsibility law
- Colombia's 2022 single use plastics law that replaces 14 different plastics with sustainable alternatives

7. Sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries

Multilateral developments

WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies

A sustainable supply of fish is integral to global food security. According to research carried out by the International Institute for Sustainable Development, approximately 17% of global protein consumption comes from fish, this figure can rise as high as 80% in some coastal regions around the world, making it a vital food source, especially in less developed countries.

The WTO's Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies is the culmination of more than 20 years of negotiations and represents a first, significant step to ensuring the health of the oceans through globally sustainable fisheries activity. It partially delivers UN Sustainable Development Goal 14.6 and is the first WTO agreement with an environmental sustainability focus.

The agreement works by prohibiting harmful fisheries subsidies that support illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Addressing these activities is vital as overfishing leaves fishing stocks depleted to an unsustainable degree, preventing them from replenishing as a result.

The UK continues to play an active role at the WTO to deliver the second part of UN Sustainable Development Goal 14.6 to tackle subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing. Elsewhere, the UK is at the forefront of international efforts to deliver sustainably managed fisheries, including through the Blue Planet Fund and chapters in Free Trade Agreements to which the UK is a signatory, which are designed to curb subsidies that negatively impact the sustainability of global fish stocks.

Regional and national developments

EU Deforestation Regulation

The EU's Deforestation Regulation addresses both legal and illegal deforestation with the aim of ensuring that the products EU citizens consume do not contribute to deforestation or forest degradation worldwide. There are strict rules to ensure compliance, including fines for those who do not comply, and checks by competent authorities. There will be a benchmarking system to determine the level of checks a country must undergo to prove compliance, which is also unique.

Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Deforestation in the Legal Amazon

Another resource that is vital for sustaining life is our forests. An article by the UN Environment Programme showed that forests are home to an estimated 60,000 different tree species, 80% of amphibian species, 75% of bird species and 68% of the world's mammal species. As the second largest storehouse of carbon (after the oceans), forests already absorb and store approximately 30% of current levels of carbon emissions from fossil fuels according to a separate study by the UN.

The Brazilian Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Deforestation in the Legal Amazon (PPCDAm) was reinstated in January 2023. The plan sets out actions for achieving net zero deforestation in the Amazon by 2030 through 4 pillars: sustainable productive activities, environmental monitoring and control, territorial and land planning, as well as normative and economic instruments. The PPCDAm was responsible for the historic 83% decrease in deforestation in the region during its first 3 phases before being cancelled in 2019 by the former President Bolsonaro.

Brazil has also recently proposed the Tropical Forests Forever Fund, which aims to conserve tropical rainforests by raising $250 billion from both governments and business. The funds would be independently managed and can be drawn upon by tropical countries that meet the set thresholds for limiting deforestation. Countries would see a reduction in the availability of funding if their deforestation rates increased.

Many other countries have also implemented deforestation legislation. Costa Rica has reformed regulations for the harvesting and extraction of wood from fallen trees in private forests. Ireland’s forest strategy and forestry programme contains a detailed forest action plan, including afforestation and native tree area schemes. Romania is targeting efforts to improve their wood traceability system by setting up 350 cameras at key locations to monitor wood transport vehicles and so tackle illegal harvesting. Bangladesh’s 2023 Forest Bill and Forest Conservation Law provides forest officials with the power to conserve forests and local biodiversity for the first time.

Another major sustainable resource development is China’s law on the protection of black soil. The law focuses on managing soil erosion as intensive cultivation and the effects of wind and water erosion have resulted in decreasing thickness and organic matter of the black soil. This is important as black soil is a non-renewable resource that produces an estimated quarter of the country’s grain.

Mexico’s Mining Bill includes amendments that limit concessions to 30 years, requires 2 minerals worth extracting for a concession to be granted, and prohibits concessions in areas of water availability as well as protected natural habitats.

8. Mitigating and adapting to climate change

During the period relevant to this report (April 2022 to March 2024), the UK handed over the Conference of the Parties (COP) presidency to Egypt, who hosted the 27th COP under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in November 2022.The 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) was hosted by the United Arab Emirates in Dubai in December 2023. It marked an important step in global efforts to tackle climate change. In the first Global Stocktake under the Paris Agreement, the global community agreed to transition away from fossil fuels, triple renewables and double energy efficiency globally by 2030, and operationalise the new fund for loss and damage. These and other priority negotiated outcomes were packaged by the COP presidency into the 'UAE consensus'. Flowing from these global agreements, there have been legislative moves by countries around the world on climate.

EU Green Deal Industrial Plan (GDIP)

Announced in March 2023, the EU's GDIP comprises of regulatory and spending instruments aimed at promoting investment in green sectors and accelerating the EU's transition to net zero.

EU Fit for 55 package

In July 2021, the European Commission unveiled a 'Fit for 55' package of energy and climate legislation, as part of its Green Deal roadmap. The package covers 12 new or amended legislative files (including the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism) to meet the EU's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) – a commitment to reduce emissions by 55% by 2030, based on 1990 levels.

EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

The EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) is described by the EU Commission as: 'the EU's tool to put a fair price on the carbon emitted during the production of carbon intensive goods that are entering the EU, and to encourage cleaner industrial production in non-EU countries. By confirming that a price has been paid for the embedded carbon emissions generated in the production of certain goods imported into the EU, the CBAM will ensure the carbon price of imports is equivalent to the carbon price of domestic production, and that the EU's climate objectives are not undermined. The CBAM is designed to be compatible with WTO-rules.'

The EU CBAM will initially apply to products from the iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertiliser, electricity and hydrogen sectors.

From October 2023 to December 2025, the EU CBAM is in a transitional phase and applies as a reporting obligation only. This is to allow the EU to collect data and refine its CBAM methodology in advance of its full introduction in January 2026. CBAM charging will be phased in gradually, in parallel to a phasing out of emission trading system (ETS) free allowances for the CBAM sectors concerned.

UK-NZ and EU-NZ Free Trade Agreements

The UK-NZ Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which came into force in May 2023, includes a comprehensive environment chapter that reinforces our commitments to the Paris Agreement and efforts to meet net zero. It also encourages trade and investment in low carbon goods, services and technologies, with the most comprehensive list of environmental goods and liberalised tariffs in a trade deal to date. This includes removing tariffs on products such as electric vehicles and wind turbine parts. Liberalising trade lowers the cost of green goods, services and technologies and speeds their uptake around the world.

In July 2023, the EU also signed an FTA with New Zealand which includes a high number of novel, innovative and enforceable provisions in areas such as sustainability, labour rights and gender equality. The EU-NZ FTA is also the first to include the EU's greener ambitions on trade, adopted in June 2022.

Canada: Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership and Emissions Reduction Plan

The Sustainable Canadian Agriculture Partnership 2023-28, agreed at federal, provincial and territorial level, came into effect on 1 April 2023. This new framework (which represents a 25% funding increase over the previous framework) has a strong focus on climate change and environment, including a political commitment to contribute to reducing greenhouse-gas (GHG) emissions in agriculture.

The 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan launched in March 2022 announced additional funding of 1 billion Canadian dollars over 6 years to support sustainable agriculture and encourage the sector to significantly reduce GHG emissions. Almost half of the additional budget is dedicated to on-farm programmes that help farmers adopt climate change mitigation practices, including nitrogen management, cover cropping, and rotational grazing, by providing a combination of training, technical support, and financial incentives. Another 30% will be devoted to supporting the development and adoption of clean technologies in the fields of green energy and energy efficiency, precision agriculture, and the bioeconomy.

Responsibility for agriculture is shared between federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions resulting in a pattern of different tier-level schemes as well as joint schemes.

Climate adaptation funding

Many nations have also allocated a substantial amount of funding towards climate adaptation initiatives to reduce the damage climate change is causing amongst their communities. Notable examples include Canada, which has committed a substantial amount of investment, ($2 billion since autumn 2022) into its own National Adaptation Plan. A lot of this investment has been focused on pivotal issues such as the creation of a disaster mitigation fund and wildlife resilience.

Nepal's National Adaptation Plan, which was introduced in November 2023, has allocated over $47 billion of funding split between international climate financing and contributions from the Nepalese government, to handle a wide array of adaptation outcomes including disaster risk reduction, agriculture and water.

Chile passed its Climate Change Framework law in June 2022. For the first time, the nation's climate mitigation and adaptation plans must be combined and updated by June 2025. Carbon budgets have been linked to Chile's climate adaptation and biodiversity commitments. Sectors (such as energy and agriculture) can be held accountable through sanctions on their budgets if they do not meet their targets in line with these commitments.

Climate litigation

There is an increase globally in climate-related litigation in domestic, regional and international courts. For example, the International Court of Justice is considering countries' climate commitments for the first time. And in April 2024, the European Court of Human Rights found that Switzerland failed to comply with its positive obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights concerning climate change.

In 2023, the United Nations Environment Programme published a status review of global climate litigation. This serves as a resource to help show the current state of global climate litigation and trends. It includes descriptions of the key issues that courts have faced in climate change cases.

9. Environmental hazards and risk

As global warming continues to cause rising sea levels and extreme weather patterns, environmental hazards such as floods and droughts are occurring more frequently, and with greater severity than we can manage. This has led to calls for urgent action to reduce the immense social, economic and environmental damage caused by these natural disasters.

Regional and national developments

Across Europe, much of the focus has been on the implementation of plans to mitigate the impacts of these hazards. One notable example has been Germany's national water strategy. This strategy highlights the need to prevent water scarcity and conflicts of use and adapt national water infrastructure to withstand climate change. Moreover, legislation requiring environmental impact assessments to evaluate any project for climate related vulnerabilities has been brought into law through the 2022 immediate programme on climate adaption. It is hoped that these assessments will enable hazard prevention measures to be implemented in all new projects. Spain has also focused on reducing the impacts of environmental hazard by creating their own flood management plans. This consists of €2 billion of public investment being pledged to fund measures that will improve resilience to extreme flooding. This includes more advanced early warning systems and public flood awareness campaigns.

Similarly in North America, Canada has introduced legislation known as the National Strategy on Flood and Drought Forecasting Act. This act aims to provide better access to state-of-the-art predictive modelling technologies to assist in preparing for floods, droughts and other events. This is significant as the act is a clear response to the record-breaking heat waves in the region of British Colombia in 2021 alongside heavy flooding.

In Asia, China has bolstered its regulations on administering compensation for ecological and environmental damage to discourage man-made environmental damage.

In South America, Colombia has become one of the first nations in the region to have introduced legislation designed to put responsibility for environmental remediation on the polluter. Known as the environmental liabilities law, this new legislation has led to the creation of the National Committee for the Management of Environmental Liabilities. This new committee are responsible for Implementing management plans for environmental liabilities, as well as finding financial mechanisms to implement management plans. The bill designates the generator of the environmental liability as the responsible party. In cases where the competent environmental authority has determined that multiple parties contributed to the environmental damage, joint liability is established. The law also mandated the establishment of an Environmental Liabilities Information System to keep track of the status and progress of all environmental liabilities.

10. Enhancing biosecurity

Biosecurity refers to a set of precautions and preventive strategies aiming to prevent or minimise the introduction and spread of harmful species and diseases. These typically enter a country through trade in live plant and tree products, such as potted plants, trees and seeds, wood packaging materials like shipping crates, imports of live animals and products of animal origin, as well as being naturally carried over wind and water or through

human activity. Pests and pathogens represent a growing threat to not only health, welfare and food security, but also to the world's native plants and animal species. Biosecurity and biodiversity are inextricably linked, where our resilience to new threats is protected by having good biosecurity and high levels of biodiversity.

Regional and national developments

Canada: Bill C-275, amendment to the Health of Animals Act

The Canadian government have made a strong commitment to tackling the issue of biosecurity through an amendment to the Health of Animals Act. This amendment means that it is now an offence to enter, without lawful authority or excuse, a place in which animals are kept if doing so could reasonably be expected to result in the exposure of the animals to a disease or toxic substance that is capable of affecting or contaminating them. It is hoped that this act will limit the spread of disease to animals, protecting them as a result.

USA: vaccination against avian influenza of Californian condors

In the USA, 20% of the Californian condor population were reported dead due to the highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1. The US Department of Agriculture and the Fish and Wildlife Service recognised that this posed a high risk to US populations of condors. As a result, they authorised the emergency use of a vaccine in May 2023, following a successful trial in black vultures. This continued to be rolled out over the coming months to vulnerable populations, as of June 2024, 94 birds have been successfully vaccinated. The Californian condor is an important symbol of a successful wildlife recovery programme, and the avian influenza global epizootic was putting it at risk. With this new programme, species recovery is back on track.

11. Natural heritage and access

The ability to spend time in nature is essential for physical health and mental wellbeing. Natural landscapes also help make countries unique, can help form part of the national identity and draw in both residents and foreign visitors who want to experience such national treasures. This makes preserving nature a vital task, as mismanagement of rural areas contributes to their inaccessibility. Nations across the world are becoming more aware of the importance of improving access to nature for all with a particular focus on disadvantaged communities.

Regional and national developments

In South Korea, the government has implemented the Restructuring and Regeneration Support of Rural Spaces Act. The aim of this act is to help local authorities prioritise rural infrastructure projects in line with the government's long-term vision. This is in an effort to deal with rural difficulties and local extinction crises caused by a lack of clear spatial planning. The act orders the organising of rural areas into specific districts, with the central government pledging to create long term development plans every 10 years and review them every 5 years.

Australia, in response to an academic review of their Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999, has enacted the Nature Positive Plan to reform their environmental conservation legislation. This includes the establishment of an independent Environment Protection Agency, similar in some ways to the UK's own recently established Office for Environmental Protection. The focus of this agency will be to improve partnerships with First Nations, increase the pace of decision making and ensure public trust.

In Colombia, the government has made a new regulation aiming to encourage sustainable agritourism. This is through the creation of tourism quality certificates, and local businesses that apply for them will have access advice from the central government. This includes assistance training staff, inclusion in official guides and advertisements to promote their activities to tourists. The certificate also provides access to financial support for any agritourism activities. It is hoped that this will further bolster Colombia's lucrative tourism industry which draws in millions of visitors each year.

Slovakia has introduced a reform that covers all national parks in the country. This is an ambitious reform as it reorganises them, assigning protected zones for the more efficient management of certain native species with the aim of balancing conservation and commercial development.

Annex A – glossary of terms

Abstraction: The process of removing something, especially water from a river or other water source.

Afforestation: The process of introducing trees and tree seedlings to an area that has previously not been forested.

Agritourism: Tourism in which tourists stay with local people in rural areas

Biodiversity: The variety of plant and animal life in the world or in a particular habitat, a high level of which is usually considered to be important and desirable.

Biosecurity: The prevention of disease-causing agents entering or leaving any place where they can pose a risk to farm animals, other animals, humans, or the safety and quality of a food product.

Climate resilience: The ability to recover from, or to reduce vulnerability to, climate-related shocks such as floods and droughts.

Deforestation: The action of clearing a wide area of trees, typically so that the land may be used for other purposes.

Environmental liability: Environmental damage and the risk of damage caused by any commercial activities.

Framework: A particular set of rules or guidelines which can be used to deal with specific issues.

Free Trade Agreement (FTA): An agreement that reduces the barriers to imports and exports between countries. Usually by removing all or most tariffs and quotas in place before the agreement was reached.

Habitat: The natural home or environment of an animal, plant, or other organism.

Liberalised: To remove or loosen restrictions on something.

Pathogen: A bacterium, virus or other microorganism that can cause disease.

Persistent organic pollutants (POPs): Poisonous chemical substances that break down slowly and get into food chains as a result.

Quotas: Trade restrictions that limits the number of goods that a country can import or export during a particular period.

Signatory: Those who sign an agreement and so are subject to it.

Soil erosion: A gradual process that occurs when the impact of water or wind detaches and removes soil particles, causing the soil to deteriorate.

Stakeholder: An individual, group or organisation that's impacted by a particular issue.

Subsidies: A benefit given to an individual, business or institution, usually by the government.

Tariffs: A tax imposed by one country on products or services imported from another country.

Annex B – references

Links to named multilateral agreements, treaties and trade agreements within the IEPR

Chemicals:

- UNEP welcomes new Global Framework on Chemicals
- Amendments to the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal
- Amendments to the Minamata Convention on Mercury
- Safe and sustainable by design - European Commission (europa.eu)

Persistent organic pollutants:

- Dangers of POPs: Why do persistent organic pollutants matter? | UNEP - UN Environment Programme

Global Biodiversity Framework:

- UN Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity framework

Marine life:

- UNTC BBNJ Agreement
- UN information on the importance of oceans: The ocean – the world's greatest ally against climate change | United Nations
- Deep Ocean Stewardship Initiative (DOSI) BBNJ group

Nature restoration:

- EU Nature Restoration Law
- EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EC)

Fisheries:

- European Parliament (2022) EU WTO agreement on fisheries subsidies

Links to national environmental legislation

Australia:

- section 1 Nature Repair Market
- section 10 Nature Positive Plan

Brazil:

- section 6 Net-zero deforestation of the Brazilian Amazon by 2030 and Tropical Forests Forever fund

Canada:

- section 1 Jane Goodall Act
- section 7 Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership, National Adaptation Strategy.
- section 8 National Strategy on Flood and Drought Forecasting Act
- section 9 Amendment to the Health of Animals Act

China:

- section 1 Qinghai-Tibet Plateau Ecological Protection Legislation
- section 3 Yellow River Protection Law
- section 6 Black Soil Protection Law
- section 9 compensation for environmental damage regulation

Chile:

- section 7 Climate Change Framework Law

Colombia:

- section 8 Environmental liabilities law
- section 10 Regulation of agritourism activities

Costa Rica:

- section 3 amendment to the 2011 Tax Exemption for Wastewater Treatment Systems law

Dominica:

- section 1 sperm whale reserve

Germany:

- section 8 National Water Strategy

Ireland:

- section 1 Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA)
- section 5 Circular Economy act
- section 6 Forest strategy and forest programme

Japan:

- section 5 Promotion of Resource Circulation for Plastics

Nepal

- section 7 National Adaptation Plan

New Zealand:

- section 7 EU-New Zealand FTA, UK-New Zealand FTA

Philippines:

- section 1 biodiversity mining law
- section 5 Legislation of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Law

Romania:

- section 6 Policy to improve the wood traceability system

Slovakia:

- section 10 National Park Reform

South Korea:

- section 3 water management and support for residents acts for both the Nakdong and Geum rivers
- section 10 Restructuring and Regeneration Support of Rural Spaces Act Statutes of the Republic of Korea (klri.re.kr)

Spain:

- section 3 law recognising the legal personality of the Mar Menor lagoon
- section 5 law on waste and contaminated soils for a circular economy
- section 8 Spain's flood management plans

United States of America:

- section 4 Key EPA Actions to Address PFAS | US EPA
- section 9 vaccination of Avian Condors

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