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# WWF briefing – global footprint target and deforestation in the Environment Bill

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March 2021

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## KEY POINTS

- The UK Government should amend the Environment Bill to include a global footprint target to halve the UK's global environmental footprint by 2030.
- This would help ensure the Government meets its ambition to make the UK a world leader on the environment, ahead of the UN biodiversity conference COP15 in Kunming later in 2021 and the UN climate conference COP26 in Glasgow in November.
- WWF will be publishing a report in the summer setting out an appropriate global footprint target for the UK which will align with the bill's passage through Parliament.

## DEFORESTATION CONTEXT

- As a large consumer of imported forest risk commodities and host of COP26, the UK has a vital global leadership role to play in reducing deforestation and land conversion.
- Nature is in freefall and we are losing vital forests and other critical natural ecosystems at an alarming rate. Urgent action is needed to avoid irreversible biodiversity loss and build resilience world-wide.
- Forests like the Amazon are vital to maintaining the Earth's natural carbon and water cycles, so addressing deforestation is essential to addressing the climate emergency and should be a central part of what the UK Government is pushing for at COP26.
- Official Brazilian figures published in November showed a 9.5% increase in year-on-year deforestation in the Amazon. An area of the Brazilian Amazon half the size of Wales has been lost in just one year, the highest deforestation figure since 2008. The number of fires reached a 10-year high in 2020, with 10,000 more fires recorded in the first 8 months of the year than in 2019. WWF's Deforestation Fronts report, released in January 2021, identifies 24 deforestation "fronts" worldwide, and found that in those areas alone an area of forest almost twice the size of the UK was destroyed in the period 2004 to 2017.
- We have now reached a tipping point: thanks to deforestation, forest degradation and climate change, parts of the Amazon forest are emitting more CO<sub>2</sub> than they are sequestering, reducing their capacity to fight climate change.

## WHY A GLOBAL FOOTPRINT TARGET?

- WWF proposes that the UK establishes a legal target in the Environment Bill to halve its global environmental footprint by 2030. This is a critical way to reduce the UK's

role in deforestation worldwide and show vital global leadership at COP15 and COP26.

- The Government recognises the importance of the global footprint. For example, reducing the global footprint is one of the commitments in the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan. However, it must go further by putting a target in law.
- The UK currently imports approximately half of the food and animal feed it consumes. Our footprint reaches far beyond our own shoreline, meaning we cannot focus solely on restoring nature in the UK. We need to take accountability for our destruction of nature overseas and ensure we do not reach our domestic environmental targets by offshoring our impact.
- Overconsumption, unsustainable forest management, land-use change, and unsustainable agricultural practices all contribute to environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, and exacerbate climate change. A UK global footprint target stems from our need to address the key drivers of such destruction.
- The UK can play a critical role by reducing its global footprint. To supply the annual UK demand for just seven commodities a land area of 88% the size of the UK - a total of 21.3 million hectares - is required. About 28% of the UK's overseas land footprint (nearly 6 million hectares) is in countries at high or very high risk of deforestation or land conversion, with weak governance and poor labour standards. It is therefore essential that the UK Government addresses the UK's global footprint in legislation.
- The science tells us that roughly halving the footprint globally by 2030 is what is required for different drivers and pressures on our economy if we are to ensure that future generations have access to the same resources or better as we currently do, and to preserve biodiversity for its own intrinsic value.
- In 2020 WWF commissioned a report from Metabolic, ***Halving the Impact of Production and Consumption***. This described what "footprint" meant in detail and sought to translate the halving of production and consumption into actionable metrics, looking at drivers, pressures and states of environmental systems. The report provides a framework for how the UK can measure its global footprint.
- WWF will be publishing a report in the summer setting out an appropriate global footprint target for the UK and how this can be measured and underpinning reports that demonstrate the risks and how due diligence can work for different sectors including seafood, raw materials and finance.
- While a global footprint target is a good first step, it is not a comprehensive fix - targets focusing on species and ecosystems are also important, and effective implementation is also critical.

#### A GLOBAL FOOTPRINT TARGET AT COP15

- A global footprint target in the Environment Bill would send an important signal for the UK's ambition ahead of COP15.
- Proposals such as retaining and extending the 30x30 target are an important objective for the COP15 summit.
- However, conservation efforts alone will not reverse the loss of nature. Transformative change is urgently needed in our production and consumption patterns, in particular in how we produce and consume our food, and also in other productive sectors, including forestry, fisheries, infrastructure and energy, extractives and manufacturing and the finance sector.
- Therefore, to fully address the key drivers of the destruction of biodiversity the UK should also adopt a global footprint target that addresses the impact on biodiversity of production and consumption abroad.

#### A GLOBAL FOOTPRINT TARGET AT COP26

- At COP26, the UK's role as hosts means that we have an opportunity to catalyse global action on reducing the global footprint of major economies.

- Nature-based solutions- such as afforestation- as essential to meeting the challenge of the climate emergency, as well as protecting global biodiversity and the livelihoods of millions of people worldwide.
- Reducing the global footprint of countries such as the UK is essential to halting deforestation and therefore allowing nature-based solutions to play their full role in addressing the climate emergency.
- Therefore, only by tackling the UK's global footprint can the UK do the most it can to keep warming below 1.5°.
- The UK government also has a critical role to play through the Forest, Agriculture & Commodity Trade (FACT) dialogues, which the UK as COP26 president initiated in July 2020. The FACT dialogues are an initiative to bring together key countries to accelerate the transition towards more sustainable land use practices, in a way that both protects forests and enhances economic development and food security. The aim is to announce an ambitious package of action and commitments at COP26.
- A global footprint target in the Environment Bill would be an important way for the UK to demonstrate global leadership in the FACT dialogues by showing it is committed to reducing international deforestation.

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Support a global footprint target in the Environment Bill and call for the UK to champion this target at both COP15 and COP26.

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