



WWF-UK

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WWF Parliamentary Briefing – The Land Charter: for nature, net zero and the economy

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BACKGROUND

2021 is a crucial year for global renewal and environmental protection and decision made in the coming months will define our future. The post-Covid recovery and international agenda provides a series of critical moments for the government to leverage its influential position on the world stage and demonstrate international leadership in responding to the environmental crisis. **The world is on the brink of irreversible harm – this could be the last chance to step up and deliver. The decisions and promises made in the coming months will define our future and never be forgotten.**

The UK government has promised that they will ensure nature is central to actions to tackle the climate crisis – and put nature at the heart of the UN climate summit. From more trees to healthy oceans, wetlands and peatlands, nature-based solutions for climate mitigation could provide around a third of the world's mitigation needed through 2030 to limit global temperature rise to well below 2°C.

Agriculture and land use change are key drivers of the decline of nature in the UK, as well as contributing extensively to greenhouse gas emissions. In the UK, agriculture, land-use and peatlands were responsible for 12% of emissions in 2017, and these emissions have been static for more than a decade. **For the Government to honour its promise and make net zero a reality, it must ensure that land is a net carbon sink by 2040 at the latest, with direct emissions from agriculture significantly reduced by 2030, as recommended by the Climate Change Committee.**

THE LAND CHARTER

WWF is calling on the Government to commit to a clear pathway for agriculture and the wider land use sector to reach net zero by 2040 at the latest by launching our **Land Charter: for nature, net-zero and the economy**. The Land Charter calls on the Government to:

- Commit to a clear pathway to **reduce emissions from agriculture** and for land use to become a net carbon sink by 2040 at the latest, without offshoring these impacts.
- Halt and being to **reverse the decline of nature** by 2030, protecting and restoring habitats across the country from peatlands to hedgerows.
- Take advantage of the opportunities provided by a transition to climate and nature-positive farming to **create a more productive and sustainable sector** that provides new, secure, green and sustainable jobs, supporting the levelling up of rural areas.

- **Position the UK as a global leader** in delivering climate emissions reductions from agriculture, including through taking advantage of new opportunities provided by Brexit.
- **Put farmers, land managers and local communities at the heart of future decision making for land use**, equipping them with the skills and resources to make the best decisions for their businesses, climate, nature and people.

THE BENEFITS OF DECARBONISING THE LAND USE SECTOR

Agriculture and the economy

Reducing direct emissions through a nature-positive, regenerative agriculture pathway to net zero can deliver stable, sustainable careers in agriculture and support the levelling up of rural areas.

Short term gains for farmers, landowners and rural communities enacting these changes using regenerative agriculture techniques are likely to include lower costs, lower economic risks and a higher return of deployed capital. When combined with innovation and investment in technological advances for land use, longer term gains could include the creation of new, highly skilled, digitalised jobs and the development of local economy opportunities. This should go alongside public and private investment in public goods to restore nature increase soil carbon sequestration, improve access to nature and enhance water quality.

Committing to delivering net zero land-use would help secure a more stable economic future for farmers and rural communities, reducing the risks of unpredictable weather patterns which negatively impact production.

Restoring nature

The UK is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. The UK State of Nature Report 2019 shows continuing declines in the abundance of species across our islands and seas, with a range of causes including land use change, urbanisations, pollution, climate change and overfishing. This forms part of a global pattern of wildlife losses that risks the collapse of ecosystems, irreversible losses for our natural world, and significant consequences for people and economies.

The UK is a nation of animal lovers, and the abundance of nature and access to it provides public good in and of itself. Nature also provides numerous economic benefits, as outlined by the **Dasgupta Review** commissioned by HM Treasury, and so government decisions should demonstrate that they provide for nature positive outcomes.

Nature is our greatest ally in the fight against climate change, and land use, agriculture and nature-based solutions should be at the forefront of plans to address greenhouse gas emissions at home and abroad. **The pathway to net zero should be based on systemic nature-based solutions to climate change that will lead to increased tree cover, restoration of peat bogs and salt marshes, as well as locking up carbon within our farmed landscape.**

Demonstrating the UK's global leadership

As of yet, no country has a comprehensive plan to reduce emissions from agriculture and land use compatible with limiting global warming to 1.5°C. This presents the opportunity to position the UK as a global leader in this space, strengthened by our G7 and COP26 presidency. **UK farmers can and should be trailblazers in this transition**, developing an agricultural system that delivers the sustainable production of food, restores nature and supports secure employment opportunities.

The opportunities of new agricultural payment systems

Leaving the EU allows us to realign the way the UK interacts with nature through setting new rules and requirements for farming and nature recovery. These powers can and should be harnessed to reduce emissions from agriculture, halt the loss of nature and begin to restore our landscapes by 2030.

Involving local communities

Farmers, land managers and local communities must be at the centre of decision making in the transition to a more sustainable agriculture and land use system. Strategies must deliver individualised, bottom-up actions supported by long-term financial investments, ensuring both nature and local people benefit and thrive through proposed changes.

The Government must aim to design and maintain a safe, sustainable, healthy food system which guarantees to keep our nation fed, alongside the development of an innovative and resilient agricultural sector which both works to deliver the required produce and employment opportunities and provides ongoing protection and regeneration of the natural environment.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you are a Parliamentarian:

- Sign the Land Charter by visiting <https://www.wwf.org.uk/landcharter>
- Encourage the Government to keep its promise and commit to a clear pathway for decarbonising the land use sector by tabling Parliamentary Questions and contributing to relevant Parliamentary debates (contact wwf@atlas-partners.co.uk for more information)
- Write about your support for the Land Charter on your website, in your MP newsletter and/or in any local newspaper column you have

If you are not a Parliamentarian:

- Write to your MP to encourage them to support the Land Charter and help hold the Government to account for delivering its promises on climate change (find more information here: <https://www.wwf.org.uk/landcharter-share>)