



SDG 14 and 15: Progress, gaps and recommendations for the UK

Compiled by:
the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.



Natural resources and systems are fundamental to human life; underpinning our wellbeing and our economies. But these systems are under increasing pressure from humans and our impacts. Species have declined a staggering 60% since 1970, the main cause of which is habitat loss and degradation.¹ Failing to address this looming crisis could push our planetary boundaries over dangerous tipping points.²

The UK ODA budget is important because the UK is one of the few countries to deliver the commitment to spend 0.7% of our GNI on overseas aid. However, environmental considerations are far from wholly integrated into the government's approach to development. ODA often catalyses private sector investment. Where it invests in initiatives that do harm, such as fossil fuels or some large scale infrastructure projects, the negative environmental outcomes from inappropriate economic development can damage future economic prospects and the wellbeing of local communities, costing more to clean up later (see **Goal 7**, **Goal 9** and **Goal 13**).

A key issue affecting our ability to deliver **Goal 14** (life under water) and **15** (life on land) is that the UK's international responsibility is not just about funding and financing projects to tackle biodiversity loss (while this is important), but about integrating biodiversity issues as a proactive consideration into broader development and investment planning.

Our international actions to achieve **Goal 14** and **Goal 15** are vital because, as the world's sixth largest economy, the UK and its citizens have a large and growing global footprint on the environment of other countries. Significantly more needs to be done to tackle consumption and the impact our demand for key commodities has on globally important areas for

biodiversity, if we are to succeed in our commitments to the SDGs (see also **Goal 12**).

Goal 14: Life below water

Target 14.1:

By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution.

Over the last 18 months, the UK has been significantly vocal on efforts to tackle plastic pollution. The Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance was launched during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in London in April 2018. It represents an agreement between the UK, Ghana, Sri Lanka, New Zealand and Vanuatu to jointly tackle marine plastic by banning microbeads, cutting down on single use plastic bags, and other steps to eliminate plastic waste.³ As part of this initiative, the UK prime minister announced a £61.4m funding package to boost global research and help countries across the Commonwealth stop plastic waste from entering the oceans in the first place. The Alliance has now expanded to include Australia, Fiji, Kenya and St Lucia.

The UK has put in place many ambitious plans to end the sale of various types of single use plastic and should use its experience to be a global voice for change. A large amount of UK plastic waste now ends up in nations with detrimental records on marine pollution, such as Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and Poland, source countries for much of the world's

1. <https://www.wwf.org.uk/updates/living-planet-report-2018>
2. <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries/planetary-boundaries/about-the-research/the-nine-planetary-boundaries.html>

3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/commonwealth-countries-unite-to-tackle-ocean-plastic-pollution>



marine debris.⁴ The UK should ensure it is not just offsetting the problem of marine pollution but tackling it at its source; through broad scale programmes to reduce the amount of waste plastic entering the environment, the introduction of a nation-wide deposit return scheme for drinks containers of all materials and sizes, a ban on problem plastics, and by making corporate producers of waste pay for disposal costs and commit to eliminating single-use packaging in the 2020s.⁵

While action on plastic is important as it accounts for 50% of ocean litter, the other half consists of other types of damaging pollution for our marine ecosystem. Chemicals are a significant issue and 80% of this type of pollution is because of activities on land.⁶ There are now over 200 “dead zones” globally, where nothing can survive because of the extent of the ecosystem damage, and the number of these zones doubles every decade. In 2013, the UK played the lead role in the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) reclassifying dangerous (to seabird and other marine life) forms of polyisobutylene in order to ban their discharge at sea. Similarly, the UK should press for curbs on discharging polluting palm oil and paraffin waxes. The UK must also complete its ratification of the IMO’s Ballast Water Management Convention and encourage others to do likewise.

Target 14.2:

By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans.

The UK already leads the world in protecting its own waters, with 23% fully protected and over 90% of this area in the UK’s Overseas Territories – vital areas for biodiversity.⁷ The Blue Belt Programme is part of this protected area commitment and supports the UK’s delivery and research through £20m of funding from 2016 to 2020.⁸

The UK government has recently supported a call to treble marine protection globally from a 10% by 2020 target to a 30% target by 2030.⁹ While it has been a voice for ambitious protection, it also needs to lead by example and champion better management and enforcement of these protected areas – their quality as well as their quantity. In this regard,

4. <https://oceanconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/full-report-stemming-the.pdf>; and <https://unearthed.greenpeace.org/2018/06/14/china-plastics-ban-malaysia-vietnam-poland/>
5. <https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/what-we-do/oceans/plastics/>
6. <https://www.worldoceannetwork.org/won-part-6/carem-wod-2014-4/thematic-resources-pollution/facts-figures-pollution/>
7. <http://www.mpatlas.org/protection-dashboard/country-ranks/>
8. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-blue-belt-programme>
9. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/gove-calls-for-30-per-cent-of-worlds-oceans-to-be-protected-by-2030>

the Target that will replace 14.2 after the current one expires in 2020 should be broken down into:

1. Percentage of seas designated.
2. Percentage of designated seas well-managed for nature - with the need for an increased proportion of seas designated, and greater ambition and delivery on their management.

Marine systems are dynamic and transboundary and so are the human systems and pressures placed upon them. The UK imports about twice as much seafood as it produces and exports, and while UK fish stock management is improving, unsustainable fisheries are still a major global problem.¹⁰

With the UK’s impending departure from the EU, there is an opportunity to be a world leader in sustainable fisheries management. To merit this gold standard, the UK must commit to rebuilding and maintaining commercial fish stocks above levels capable of producing the maximum sustainable yield (MSY), aim to eliminate the by-catch of non-target species, and require all vessels over 10 metres to fit remote electronic monitoring such that their catches can be fully documented.

Target 14.4:

By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce MSY as determined by their biological characteristics.

Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) significantly adversely impacts legitimate commercial fishers, undermines small scale fisheries, as well as harming fish populations. It is estimated that IUU costs the global economy up to \$23bn annually, which represents around 20% of global seafood catch.¹¹

This is also a significant problem in the high seas (an area of international waters that covers about 45% of the planet’s surface), where no legal instrument currently exists to protect biodiversity. Recent satellite technologies have transformed surveillance abilities and help detect and stop IUU fishing. The UK has started to lead the way in piloting and using them for its own marine protection in the UK Overseas Territories. If formalised, this surveillance of high seas activity would extend improved management to an additional 3.9 million km

10. <https://www.ukssd.co.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=cdd573d3-ad46-447f-b034-88b865fc7fab>; and <https://www.mcsuk.org/news/what-will-happen-to-the-fish-market-after-brexit>
11. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2013/02/25/illegal-unreported-and-unregulated-fishing-frequently-asked-questions>



of ocean, almost double the existing Blue Belt. While these are not marine sanctuaries, the UK would be single-handedly bringing monitoring and surveillance to vast tracts of ocean and could invite other countries to follow its lead and tame malpractice on the high seas.

Goal 15: Life on land

Target 15.a:

Mobilise and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems.

The UK is a significant funder of projects and programmes that contribute to **Goal 15** globally. Analysis of Target 15.a has therefore been integrated across the response to focal targets of forests, biodiversity, and illegal wildlife trade (IWT) below.

Target 15.2 and 15.b:

Target 15.2: By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally; and Target 15.b: Mobilise significant resources from all sources and at all levels to finance sustainable forest management and provide adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management, including for conservation and reforestation.

The UK government is a significant donor for forests, providing an estimated £1.1bn in ODA to forest-related activities between 2010 and 2018, principally through the ICF (see Goal 13). DFID has accounted for 51% of this forest spending, the Department of Energy and Climate Change/ the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy for 35% and Defra for 14%. This financing has contributed to the funding of many forest related programmes and bilateral projects, such as DFID's Forest Governance, Markets, and Climate programme. Nearly half of the funding has gone to the three main global forest ecosystems in Brazil, the Congo Basin, and Indonesia.

According to analysis undertaken by the NGO Coalition on Forests, and based on government figures, in the first tranche of the ICF from 2011-12 to 2015-16, forest spending was £700m (18% of the total ICF budget), which was slightly under the 20% target.¹² Over the first two years of the current ICF

tranche in 2016-17 and 2017-18, expenditure on forests averaged £146m per year, representing 12.6% of ICF total spending. The 50% increase in ICF spending over the period 2016-21 gives reason to think that UK forest funding will continue to increase over the next few years. Forests are central to tackling the climate crisis, sustaining biodiversity and meeting the SDGs. It is therefore important that the ICF forest funding targets are met. These funds also need to be part of a coherent strategy for forests, focused on improving forest governance, securing tenure and other rights for indigenous peoples and local communities, and supporting community livelihoods. They must also follow relevant principles and safeguards.¹³

There is a limited ability to judge the effectiveness and impact of these funding streams. The government has rigorous control over its bilateral funding programmes and, while these may be more resource intensive to manage than multilateral funds, they can have a more direct impact tailored to national priorities and situations.¹⁴

However, over the past eight years, 64% of UK aid spending on forests has gone to multilateral agencies – of which 44% (about £450m) has been channelled through four international trust funds. The sharp rise in funding envisaged for 2020-21 will lead, almost inevitably, to an increase in UK contributions to the GCF, and indeed the bulk of the total forest-related UK funding is channelled through multilateral funds. It is vital that the government has a strategy for its work with multilaterals and, in particular, for the different strands of its work on forests. As suggested by the 2015 ICAI review of multilaterals, the government needs to hold multilateral agencies to account for what they achieve, and this applies equally for work on the natural environment.¹⁵

The UK's ability to meet its international objectives on forests also depends highly on tackling its deforestation footprint. Commercial agriculture accounts for almost three quarters of the destruction of tropical rainforests and this is largely driven by industries such as soy, palm oil, timber, pulp and paper, beef and leather, rubber, and cocoa. The UK, as the world's sixth largest economy, is a major importer and consumer of these commodities and the nature of UK trade in them will have significant impacts on our commitments to the SDGs, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UNFCCC. A recent report estimates the total land footprint associated with UK imports to be 33.5 million acres, 44% of this in high or very high-risk areas for deforestation.¹⁶

This footprint issue has been acknowledged in Defra's 25-year Environment Plan, but there is a need to measure the UK footprint and its impacts better, especially for key commodities, as part of our contribution to the SDGs and

Committee Inquiry on UK Aid for Combating Climate Change (not yet published).

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICAI-Report-How-DFID-works-with-multilateral-agencies-to-achieve-impact.pdf>

16. <https://www.wwf.org.uk/riskybusiness>

12. UK NGO Forest Coalition evidence to the International Development



other processes.¹⁷ The December 2018 Defra Indicators Framework consultation is, however, very light on this subject stating: "There are no specific goals in the 25 Year Environment Plan for this indicator, however the Plan commits us to leaving a lighter footprint on the global environment by enhancing sustainability and supporting zero deforestation supply chains."¹⁸ Another core consideration is the need to ask UK business for better transparency of their total supply chains and procurement to ensure they are deforestation free.



Target 15.5:

Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species.

The Darwin Initiative is an existing UK government grants scheme that helps to protect biodiversity and the natural environment through locally based projects worldwide. Darwin projects integrate many of the SDG principles and aim to finance innovative work that cuts across nature and sustainable development issues.

Over the last 25 years, 1,123 Darwin projects have been financed in over 159 countries with a total of £153m awarded by the UK government. It has, however, a very small annual budget – awarding an average of £5.6m per annum since 1992 – with a typical project lasting for up to three years and costing approximately £250,000–£350,000 for the duration.¹⁹ The UK can continue to build on the success of the Darwin Initiative by increasing the amount available for projects per year and to offer funding for longer periods, as a lot of the issues the projects aim to tackle need long-term solutions.

Core funds are also needed outside of ODA for species recovery and to properly manage protected areas, marine sanctuaries, and the high seas, which fall outside the ODA definition. There is a compelling need for UK government leadership to catalyse and mobilise complementary private and philanthropic investments, in addition to committed funding through mechanisms outside of ODA, such as replacements for EU-LIFE and BEST after the UK leaves the EU.

As with the forest Target above, the global footprint of the UK and its investments are having major impacts on nature

17. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan>

18. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/766207/indicator-framework-consult-document.pdf

19. <http://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/assets/uploads/2014/05/The-Evolution-of-the-Darwin-Initiative-from-biodiversity-research-to-global-conservation-impact.pdf>; <http://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/project/year-awarded/2018/>

worldwide. These impacts are especially driven through infrastructure development and increasing land conversion for agriculture and the production of other commodities (see also **Goal 2**). The UK is a large contributor to the World Bank, which regularly invests in these multi-million pound development projects. However, often these projects have devastating social and environmental costs despite there being some standards and safeguards in place. More needs to be done to address transparency and to ensure that development projects do not undermine environmental objectives. UK companies deliver a lot of this footprint impact and, as with deforestation free supply chains, there is a need to develop better transparency and accountability mechanisms. Examples could include mandatory reporting by the corporate sector of environmental impacts or the application of a minimum of UK legislative standards when working outside of the EU to safeguard other countries' environments.

2020 will be a vital moment internationally for the environment. The UK can continue to demonstrate international leadership and commitment through promoting an ambitious post 2020 architecture for the CBD that drives real action to reverse biodiversity declines. This should also be integrated across all conventions, including the UNFCCC, UN Convention to Combat Desertification and the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), and address the urgency of the climate, environment and biodiversity extinction crisis.



Target 15.7 and 15.c:

Target 15.7: Take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species of flora and fauna and address both demand and supply of illegal wildlife products; and Target 15.c: Enhance global support for efforts to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) is estimated to be worth between \$7 and \$23bn a year and is a significant driver of many species' decline globally.²⁰ The UK is a strong global advocate for tackling the IWT and recently hosted the IWT conference in London in October 2018.

The conference called upon the international community to act together to support and build urgent collective action to tackle the illegal wildlife trade as a serious crime carried out by organised criminals and to close markets for illegally traded wildlife. It also recognised the importance of working with local communities, recognising the essential

20. <https://www.zsl.org/conservation/how-we-work/illegal-wildlife-trade-crisis/illegal-wildlife-trade-impacts>



engagement role and rights of local communities and indigenous people to ensure a sustainable solution to addressing IWT.

The UK has taken specific measures as part of its contribution to tackling IWT. Recognising that the UK has been the largest exporter of “legal” ivory items in recent years, the government has now pledged to ban the commercial trade in elephant ivory within, to and from the UK, and this Ivory Bill is now in its final stages of approval.²¹

The IWT Challenge Fund mobilises financial support to practical projects globally to tackle root cause issues of IWT and to benefit people directly affected by the trade. Through the Challenge Fund, approximately £18.5m has been allocated to 61 projects. Recently, it was also announced that DFID is providing an additional £6m to support the development of cross-border Green Corridors for wildlife, by supporting actions that will bring economic and security benefits for communities.²²

This chapter is part of Bond’s report, **The UK’s global contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals**.

Access the rest of the report at bond.org.uk/UK-global-contribution-SDGs

Bond is the UK network for organisations working in international development. [Bond.org.uk](https://bond.org.uk)

21. <https://www.bornfree.org.uk/news/uk-ivory-bill>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-confirms-uk-ban-on-ivory-sales>

22. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-aid-tackles-wildlife-crime-with-innovative-solutions>

To achieve Goals 14 and 15, the UK government should:

- Measure the UK’s global footprint, especially for key goods and commodities. Ensure better transparency and accountability mechanisms for the private sector on the sourcing and sustainability of these commodities.
- Collaborate across government and with the private sector to develop programming on the UK’s global footprint. Ensure domestic policies are consistent with recognising this problem. Lead global initiatives for other high consuming countries to do the same.
- Revisit DFID’s EDS to build in a greater focus on environmental sustainability (see **Goal 8** and **Goal 13**). Ensure financial flows, trade policies and taxation policies are also coherent with these goals of environmental sustainability.
- Lead on catalysing and mobilising private and philanthropic investments to complement ODA spending. Ensure funds are available to recover species and properly manage protected areas, marine sanctuaries, and the high seas.
- Enhance the UK’s current leadership on marine sustainability through:
 - a) A more concentrated effort to tackle marine pollution at its source, especially plastics and chemicals through bans and deposit schemes.
 - b) An increased proportion of marine protected areas with emphasis on those areas being well-managed for nature.
 - c) Commitment to rebuilding and maintaining commercial fish stocks above levels capable of producing the MSY, and eliminating the by-catch of non-target species within the fisheries system.
- Promote an ambitious post 2020 CBD architecture that drives real action to reverse biodiversity declines. Integrate this across all conventions, including the UNFCCC, and the UN Convention on Combating Desertification and the AEWA. Back this up with the necessary financial mobilisation that recognises the urgency of the climate, environmental and biodiversity extinction crisis.