

The UK's Environmental Leadership

In the time that Boris Johnson has been PM, the UK has gone from being too often a tick-box country on the international environment, to *the* country that is in many ways leading the charge.

That is why the UK today is often the only non-local country to be invited to address summits of regional leaders, for example Latin American Leader summits on the Amazon.

At the recent G7, it was UK negotiators who were widely credited by other G7 members for securing ambition on environmental matters. It was the UK for instance that insisted on a historic commitment that all G7 Aid money should be aligned with nature and become 'nature-positive'; something we have committed to, but which we had been told would never be accepted by other G7 members. The agreement has been widely celebrated by nature-rich countries around the world.

It was the UK that took the lead in producing the 'Leader's Pledge for Nature', signed by nearly 100 world leaders and led by the PM. It is unprecedented; by far the most radical, ambitious declaration of its sort, and it has formed the benchmark of international cooperation on the environment since.

It was the UK who created the Global Ocean Alliance of countries calling for protection of 30% of the world's ocean by 2030, and co-led a coalition calling for the same for our land. There is every chance these targets will be agreed before the end of the year, putting the world on course for renewal. Our position is strengthened by commitments we ourselves have made to extend England's protected sites by 400,000 Hectares, the equivalent of the Lake District and South Downs parks combined; to restore our peatlands and plant trees on an unprecedented scale; and to put into law a commitment to reverse nature loss here in the UK this decade.

The UK is currently building an alliance of countries committed to switching land subsidies to favour the environment. The top 50 food producing countries alone spend \$700 billion each year subsidising destructive land use, so if we succeed, this will represent the single biggest step towards turning the tide for nature globally. Without the UK, which stands almost alone in leading by example on this issue domestically, there would be little chance of success.

COP26

COP 26 was the biggest unplanned test of the UK post-Brexit and the largest international summit ever hosted in this country. We brought together 120 world leaders and more than 38,000 representatives from Governments, civil society, business and youth.

We needed COP26 be a landmark moment in our efforts to combat climate change and it was. And although a gap remains between where we are and where we need to be, we narrowed that gap considerably and kept alive the possibility of keeping global warming within 1.5 degrees.

With all the additional country commitments that we secured, 90% of the global economy is now covered by net-zero commitments, up from 30% when the UK took on the presidency in 2019.

65 countries committed to coal phase out, including 4 of world's top 20 coal-power generating countries. The UK will have completely phased out coal power by 2024.

In addition, all major coal-financing countries committed to following the UK's lead and ending international coal finance by the end of 2021. The Executive Director of Greenpeace declared that "a signal has been sent that the era of coal is ending. And that matters."

Almost 40 countries are following the UK's lead in ending overseas public financing for all unabated fossil fuels. This will free more than \$24 billion a year. And around one-third of the global car market is now covered by manufacturer commitments to phase out polluting vehicles, up from close to zero in 2021. The UK is on course to be the fastest G7 country to decarbonise cars and vans.

And because the challenge cannot be met by governments alone, we helped persuade over 450 private financial institutions, responsible for over \$130 trillion in assets, to commit to net zero by 2050. This will be accelerated by our commitment to make climate-related disclosures mandatory across the economy by 2025.

Nature at COP26

But the most important success at COP26 was that we brought nature from the very margins of the debate on climate to its heart. There is no solution to climate change, or so many other challenges we face, without massive efforts to protect and restore nature.

We delivered an unprecedented package of commitments on forests and nature. The WWF global lead on climate and energy declared that "Nature truly arrived at COP26". The Tropical Forest Alliance said that the commitments signify "the biggest moment we've had in forests and nature, probably ever. I think we'll look back and realise that this was the day when we finally turned the tide on deforestation." Forbes described the commitments as a "'Paris moment' for forests".

More than 140 countries, accounting for over 90% of the world's forests, committed to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation by 2030. Donor countries, combined with philanthropy, committed \$20 billion of climate finance to help the do that.

In addition, \$1.5 billion was secured to protect the forests of the Congo, which regulate rainfall across much of Africa, and whose loss would cause an unprecedented humanitarian disaster.

\$2 billion was secured for indigenous people, who have been protecting forest biodiversity for generations with virtually no support. The head of the Global Alliance of Territorial Communities, said: "After attending these climate events for years, this one is different."

And because we know that public money alone will never be enough, we pressed for broader commitments. We persuaded all the main Multilaterals, including the World Bank, to agree to align their portfolios not only with Paris climate goals, but with nature too. We secured commitments from financial institutions with nearly \$9 trillion in assets to do similarly.

Most importantly, we pressured the world's biggest buyers of agricultural commodities, including the Chinese-owned COFCO, to align their buying policies with 1.5 degrees and our overall deforestation goals. It is hard to exaggerate the effect of that signal on some of the more reluctant forest countries. Agricultural commodities are responsible for some 80% of deforestation. We were the first country to introduce laws banning the import of those commodities grown on illegally deforested land. Others are now following.

Finally, the PM and President Biden launched a new public/private fund for forests a year ago. The fund now has more than \$1.5 billion, and is growing fast.

Our Overseas Conservation Work

To persuade nature rich but economically poor countries to agree ambitious policies and targets, we know we need finance. So having doubled our International Climate Finance to £11.6 billion, we committed to spending nearly a third of it on nature based solutions, like forests and mangroves.

We have set up a new £100m landscapes fund to create wildlife corridors between countries, providing safe passage for wildlife and jobs for people living in and around the corridors. We are developing a range of ambitious programmes to protect ecosystems in a number of key, threatened regions like the Congo Basin and the Amazon. And in all of these, we are coordinating and mobilising other major donor countries.

Our world-renowned Darwin Initiative which has been funding wonderful conservation for years has been expanded and 'Darwin Extra' has been added to provide larger and longer term funding for some of the world's most exciting nature restoration projects.

Global Ocean

The Blue Belt is one of the greatest conservation stories in my lifetime. We have now fully protected an area of ocean the size of India around our beautiful Overseas Territories. And it continues to grow; most recently we worked with the islanders of Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic to create a new protected area roughly three times the size of the UK. We are launching a new programme called the Blue Shield to protect other islands from a wide range of threats.

The UK was the first country to back a visionary proposal by Costa Rica, Colombia, Ecuador and Panama to protect half a million square KMs of ocean. The PM's early backing of the project is credited with having unleashed a wave of finance since.

Our new £500m Blue Planet fund is supporting everything from marine protection to coral and mangrove restoration, tackling everything from plastic pollution to illegal fishing.

At the recent UN Environment Assembly, the UK helped persuade the world to agree a new global treaty on plastic pollution. We will now be pressing for maximum ambition in the Treaty itself.

The UK has joined with France and the EU in a new High Ambition Coalition to secure global agreement for new legal mechanisms for protection of areas of ocean beyond national jurisdiction.