

Rt Hon Dr Thérèse Coffey
Secretary of State
Seacole Building
2 Marsham Street
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6th December 2022

Dear Secretary of State

The Royal Society of Biology represents a wide range of professional scientists and Member Organisations across the world of biosciences. As mentioned in our previous correspondence regarding the COP26 summit in Glasgow last year, we agree strongly that there is a climate and biodiversity emergency that must now be addressed. These are inextricably linked, and one cannot be addressed without the other. We believe there is a powerful societal mandate for this and an expectation that must not go unmet¹. The Prime Minister's attendance at the COP27 summit in Egypt was welcomed, and helped reflect the level of concern the UK has for meeting its environmental targets. We believe similar representation for the UK at COP15 would appropriately reflect the need to treat biodiversity with the same level of concern, and the UK's leading role in doing so.

The issues of climate change, habitat loss, chemical and waste pollution, and unsustainable consumption of natural resources have all led to a crisis in worldwide biodiversity levels. Whilst efforts are being made to tackle this global challenge, there are fundamental key issues that need addressing in order to prevent catastrophic species loss, and the subsequent serious consequences for human society. As of 2019, around 1 million species are threatened with extinction, largely within the next few decades, unless we take action².

Biodiversity underpins the entire foundations of life on earth, and progress towards preventing and reversing any losses should be an urgent and immediate priority for governments around the world. Failure to address this issue could lead to disastrous health, economic, and environmental implications, both in the UK and abroad. Biodiversity loss can alter patterns of infectious disease, and increase human exposure to new and established zoonotic pathogens^{3,4}. In addition, recent ecosystem losses are estimated to have cost USD 4 trillion–USD 20 trillion per year⁵. Biodiversity is also a key driver of a multitude of ecosystem services, such as soil erosion control, plant nutrient concentration, and invasion resistance⁶. These issues will only continue to increase unless serious and immediate action is taken.

¹ Letter from the Royal Society of Biology to the Prime Minister regarding climate change and the COP26 conference, 2021: https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/Royal_Society_of_Biology_letter_in_advance_of_COP26.pdf

² IPBES, 2019: [The global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services](#)

³ PNAS, 2021: [Impacts of biodiversity and biodiversity loss on zoonotic diseases](#)

⁴ World Health Organisation, 2015: [Biodiversity and Health](#)

⁵ J.P.Morgan, 2022: [The economic importance of biodiversity: Threats and opportunities](#)

⁶ Response from the Royal Society of Biology to Defra's consultation on "Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit", 2018: https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/RSB_response_to_Defra_consultation_on_Health_and_Harmony_submitted.pdf

Part 2 of COP15 and the subsequent adoption of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework is a real opportunity to back biodiversity protection and highlight this issue to the world. The vital importance of instigating these measures should be reflected by their prioritisation in UK policymaking, including high level representation for the UK in Canada.

Recent extreme weather events such as the heatwaves seen in the UK this summer have led to an increase in the British public's demands for action on the environment, with two thirds saying they have become increasingly worried about climate change and its effects. The issues of plastic waste pollution and its effects are also a key concern, with litter and pollution being seen as the greatest threat to the marine environment⁷.

As a leading global power, the UK must lead by example with its environmental policies. The UK has emphasised its aim of halting biodiversity loss in tandem with its Net Zero transition⁸, and has championed the 30by30 initiative. It is important that both of these are not deviated from as a result of national or international pressures. The second part of COP15 provides a real opportunity to put these issues of biodiversity loss at the forefront of the international stage, and to publicly commit to a framework aimed at halting this decline.

With positive action, there is still a real chance of halting the disastrous effects of biodiversity loss on both our world ecosystems and our society which entirely relies on them, before it's too late. Current and emerging technologies, public dialogue and communication, and environmental legislation can all play a part in this. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has stated that "there is no long-term prosperity without action on climate change", but it is equally true that there is no long-term health and prosperity without action on biodiversity loss, to preserve the ecosystems which underpin our food supply, provide sources for new medicines, and regulate our climate. The second part of COP15 presents a real opportunity for high-level representatives from various nations to come together face to face, and finalise a plan that will provide a sustainable future for our planet. It is important that the post-2020 biodiversity framework is equitable, evidence based, and truly delivers protection and support to our vital national and international ecosystems – halting and reversing biodiversity loss. If we do not achieve this, the consequences will be catastrophic.

Yours sincerely,



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⁷ Defra, 2022: [Protecting the marine environment is vital say public](#)

⁸ HM Government, 2021 : [Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener](#)

