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Food & Rural Affairs

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Dear Dr Smith,

Thank you for your letter of 17 October about climate change and human health. I am replying as the Minister responsible for nature policy and apologise for the delay in doing so.

On 1 August, the UK published the UK National Targets committing us to achieving each of the 23 targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework at home. These were factored into the global analysis of information considered by COP16. We fully recognise the importance of publishing our National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans and will publish the full document in due course following the review and revision of the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP), which we announced on 30 July.

Through the rapid review of the EIP, we will develop a new, statutory plan to protect and restore our natural environment with delivery information to help meet each of our ambitious Environment Act targets. It will focus on cleaning up our waterways, reducing waste across the economy, planting millions more trees, improving air quality, and halting the decline in species by 2030.

We will honour the UK's existing international commitments to deliver 30by30, and to playing our part in achieving the global 30by30 target adopted at the United Nations (UN) Biodiversity Summit COP15 in December 2022. Our 30by30 commitment, to effectively conserve and manage 30% of our lands and seas by 2030, sits at the very heart of our mission to ensure nature's recovery. Achieving this target is also critical to supporting our wider priorities, including cleaner rivers, lakes, and seas, boosting food security, and protecting communities from the dangers of flooding.

We recently published our 30by30 criteria, confirming that delivering 30by30 on land in England, means ensuring that our most important and wildlife-rich habitats are benefiting from effective, long-term conservation and management. This will require a collaborative approach, and all sectors have a role to play. Marine Protected Areas cover 40% of English seas, exceeding the marine coverage aspect of the 30by30 target. We are now focusing on making sure they are protected effectively.

In England, we are committed to meeting our four legally binding targets for biodiversity: to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030; to reverse declines by at least 10% by 2042; to reduce the risk of national species extinction by 2042; and restore or create more than 500,000 hectares of wildlife-rich habitat, also by 2042.

At the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP16, parties agreed the Global Action Plan on Biodiversity and Health. The UK supported the adoption of this important plan, which builds off Decision 15/29 agreed at CBD COP15. The aim of the action plan is to mainstream biodiversity and health linkages into national policies, strategies, and programmes and accounts, to curb the emergence of zoonotic diseases, prevent non-communicable diseases, and promote sustainable ecosystems. The strategy embraces a holistic 'One Health' approach that recognises the health of ecosystems, animals and humans are interconnected and the need for cooperation with international organisations, including the World Health Organization.

At this year's UN Climate Change Conference (COP29), the UK reaffirmed its commitment to spending £11.6 billion on international climate finance from 2021/22 to 2025/26, for climate change solutions that protect, restore, and sustainably manage nature as well as promoting sustainable livelihoods and prosperity. This includes at least £3 billion being spent on nature. This government will deliver for nature, taking action to meet our Environment Act targets, and working in partnership with civil society, communities and businesses to restore and protect our natural world.

Finally, the government recognises the importance of providing access to the outdoors for people's health and wellbeing and is working to ensure this is safe and appropriate. This is why we have set out our ambitious manifesto commitments to create nine new national river walks and three new national forests in England, expanding access to the great outdoors. We will make further announcements on plans to develop policy on access to nature in due course.

Thank you once again for taking the time to contact me about this important issue.

*Yours sincerely
Mary Creagh*

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