

Wildlife & Countryside Link

Summary of 30x30 progress report

September 2023

The Government has pledged to protect at least 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 – the ‘30x30’ target.

This is an important commitment, with the potential to secure a better future for nature and people by establishing an effectively managed, ecologically representative, well-connected and thriving network of the most important areas for biodiversity and ecosystem services to counter the inter-connected climate and ecological crises and allowing nature to begin to recover. It is also integral to meeting the legally-binding target to halt and reverse the decline of species abundance in England and demonstrating the UK’s leadership on the global stage.

However, three years on from the Government’s 30x30 pledge and with 2030 only 6 years away, this third annual report finds that progress has been alarmingly slow.

- **Only 3.11% of England’s land is effectively protected for nature** (protected sites in favourable condition).
- **At a maximum, 8% of England’s sea is effectively protected for nature** (Marine Protected Areas with management measures in place).

This lack of progress comes despite clear opportunities to make a difference, for example, through strengthening protected landscapes through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill and by designating further Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs).

Urgent action is needed to meet its 30x30 commitment and legally-binding environmental targets – this must be a priority for this Government and the next. The Government must undertake a 30x30 rapid delivery project to protect more important sites for nature and secure effective management of these and existing sites for nature so they are contributing to nature recovery and the 30% target.

Other key land figures:

- Less than half of England’s SSSIs are delivering good outcomes for nature, with only 36.82% of sites in good condition. This figure is slightly decreased from 2022 (39%), primarily due to more up-to-date and accurate condition assessments being in place. (Source: [NE data](#))
- The area of SSSIs in ‘Unfavourable - recovering’ condition has also declined, from 51% last year to 49% in 2023, with more SSSIs reported as ‘Unfavourable - no change or declining.’ (Source: [NE data](#))

- Less than a fifth (19%) of SSSI rivers are in ‘favourable’ or in ‘mostly favourable’ (more than 50% favourable) condition. (Source: [Unchecked UK data](#))
- The condition of 0.36% of SSSIs (by area) has not been recorded at all. (Source: [NE data](#))
- Nature within protected landscapes is typically in no in better condition, and is often in worse condition than nature outside protected landscapes: a lower percentage of SSSIs are in favourable condition (25.3%) within protected landscapes than the national average (38.5%). (Source: [CNP](#))

We recommend the Government take action to:

- Consult on and publish robust criteria for 30x30 in line with international standards, publish an assessment process to report on progress towards 30x30 and publish an action plan to deliver 30x30.
- Improve and significantly expand the protected sites network by introducing a legally-binding target for the condition of protected sites and designating further protected sites to cover at least 16% of the land.
- Strengthen protected landscapes with updated purposes and Management Plans for nature’s recovery, duties on public bodies to further those purposes, and sufficient resources, to support these landscapes to make significant contributions to 30x30.
- Set byelaws through the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) programme to halt damaging fishing activity across the Marine Protected Area (MPA) network by 2024. MPAs must be protected across the whole site rather than simply the designated features.
- Designate at least 10% of English seas in Highly Protected Marine Areas, where all damaging activities are restricted.

For questions or further information please contact:

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Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is the largest nature coalition in England, bringing together 78 organisations to use their joint voice for the protection of the natural world.