



Office for Environmental Protection

Call for Evidence

Office for Environmental Protection assessment of Improving Nature delivery - halting England's decline in species abundance by 2030 and further restoring it

The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) is inviting interested parties to submit evidence as part of our scrutiny of government's plans and environmental targets for improving nature.

The 2023 Environment Improvement Plan for England (EIP23) identifies "Improving Nature" and specifically, halting and reversing declines in species abundance, as key objectives of environmental improvement in England. The EIP goal area of Thriving Plants and Wildlife, and the associated targets relating to species abundance, are acknowledged as the apex areas of environmental improvement.

We are currently gathering information from central government to understand their analysis of the pathways to achieving the environmental targets, and the barriers and enablers to their successful delivery. With this call, we are seeking further evidence held by other parties that could support our assessment of progress and opportunities for improvement. To best inform our assessments, we would appreciate that evidence is submitted by **Monday 7 August 2023**.

Background

The OEP's latest monitoring report (ref 1) for England highlights challenges with achieving environmental improvements framed in terms of "species abundance". The indicator 'abundance of priority species' showed a long-term decline of 82% between 1970 and 2018, incorporating a period of sharp decline immediately prior to publication of the 25 Year Environment Plan (25 YEP). This chronic and ongoing loss of priority species, suggests that progress towards meeting the Environment Act 2021 target of halting the decline in species abundance by 2030 remains a major challenge for the UK Government.

The purpose of our analysis is to independently assess the actions needed to achieve the vision of the EIP to improve nature and more specifically to achieve the Environment Act targets, in particular both species abundance targets:

- Halt the decline in species abundance by 2030.
- Ensure that species abundance in 2042 is greater than in 2022, and at least 10% greater than 2030.

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We aim primarily to establish whether government's plans and delivery pathways will achieve the species abundance targets, and secondly whether they detail and address the major barriers, enablers, synergies, and trade-offs within and across policy domains. The EIP23 (page 39) identifies 8 areas of action for the next decade including nature protection, restoration and enhancement. Mobilising public and private finance is seen as a key enabler.

To inform our assessment, we are calling for evidence relating to the type, scale, and pace of interventions required. The review covers terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments, but does not extend to the UK Overseas Territories.

Evidence can include your views and / or relevant existing written material (for example, reports and academic literature). When your views are provided, please reference the evidence that informs them.

We are interested, in particular, in the following questions:

1. Considering the government's species abundance targets, to what degree do you consider these achievable in England's terrestrial, freshwater, and marine environments? What assumptions affect your consideration of feasibility?
2. Considering the 8 areas of action set out in EIP23 and other actions, what are the main interventions, or types of interventions, required to achieve the species abundance targets in England's terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments. Regarding these interventions, what scale and pace of deployment is required to achieve success?
3. What are the enablers and barriers to improving species abundance in the terrestrial, freshwater, and marine environment, and achieving the species abundance targets?
4. What are the synergies and trade-offs in improving species abundance in the terrestrial, freshwater, and marine environments, and achieving the species abundance targets?
5. What are the key uncertainties and knowledge gaps in assessing the achievability of the targets?

In addition to the above, you are welcome to provide any other information that you consider is relevant to this review. When considering improving species abundance, we appreciate that there is limited monitoring of species in some environments, in particular the marine environment. We would therefore also like to understand the limitations this may pose when considering the questions and we welcome your consideration of species abundance in a broader sense beyond what is set out in the targets where the target species list is severely restrictive in understanding overall improvement.

Please send any evidence to eip.monitoring@theoep.org.uk by **Monday 7 August 2023**.

How we will use your information

Evidence received will be treated with the utmost care and attention to inform our review. On occasion, it may be beneficial that our review and publication attributes information to individuals or organisations. If you do not wish this to occur please let us know.

In any case, we may publish or disclose the information you provide, including personal data, in accordance with the access to information regimes. These are primarily the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIRs), the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). We have obligations, mainly under the EIRs, FOIA and DPA, to disclose information to particular recipients or to the public in certain circumstances.

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that as the OEP is bound by the FOIA and the EIRs we may be obliged to disclose all or some of the information you provide. In view of this, it would be helpful if you could explain why you regard the information you have provided to be confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information, we will take full account of your explanation. However, we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances.

We will hold and process any personal data you provide in accordance with the privacy notice on [our website](#).

Public authorities

Information that we receive from public authorities under their duty of cooperation with the OEP (section 27 Environment Act 2021) will be treated as confidential unless an exemption under section 43 applies. For this reason, if you are responding on behalf of a public authority, please confirm that consent is given for the OEP to disclose your information in our report.

Reference material

1. [Progress in improving the natural environment in England, 2021/2022 | Office for Environmental Protection \(theoep.org.uk\)](#)
2. [Environmental Improvement Plan 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
3. [The Environmental Targets \(Biodiversity\) \(England\) Regulations 2023 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)
4. [The Environmental Targets \(Woodland and Trees Outside Woodland\) \(England\) Regulations 2023 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)
5. [The Environmental Targets \(Water\) \(England\) Regulations 2023 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)
6. [The Environmental Targets \(Marine Protected Areas\) Regulations 2023 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)
7. [The Environmental Targets \(Woodland and Trees Outside Woodland\) \(England\) Regulations 2023 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)
8. [OEP response to consultation on environmental targets | Office for Environmental Protection \(theoep.org.uk\)](#)
9. [Consultation on environmental targets - Defra - Citizen Space](#)