

“25 Year Plan needed for Northern Ireland’s environment” says new environmental campaign coalition

As the UK Government today published its long-awaited 25 Year Plan for the Environment, a coalition of environmental NGOs is calling for a similar long-term strategy to protect the environment in Northern Ireland.

The 25 Year Plan for the Environment was launched today during Theresa May’s first major speech on the environment and sets out how the UK Government will deliver on its manifesto commitment to leave the environment in a better state for future generations. However, the environment is a largely devolved matter and so the plan primarily focusses on measures for England.

Nature Matters NI, a joint campaign of leading environmental NGOs, is calling for a similar long-term plan for the environment in Northern Ireland. As part of a wider NGO coalition covering the UK as a whole, we are also calling on the four nations to work closely together in developing a joint vision for our shared natural heritage.

Emily Hunter from the Nature Matters NI campaign said:

“While there is room for improvement, the UK Government’s 25 Year Plan is an encouraging step forward for the environment, but we now need the same long-term planning for Northern Ireland. We don’t want to be lagging behind the rest of the UK when it comes to protecting the environment and it is vital that we continue to work together as we leave the EU given that nature does not respect borders.

“Northern Ireland has a unique and beautiful environment that is home to over 20,000 different species, including many threatened species such as the red squirrel and the cryptic wood white butterfly. However, we have seen greater loss of biodiversity than any other region of the UK. It’s clear we’re not doing enough to protect this precious wildlife so we need a bold and ambitious plan for Northern Ireland that ensures future generations will be able to continue to enjoy this unique and special environment.

“There’s an economic imperative here too: a healthy environment can help the economy by providing vital services such as flood defence and carbon storage. If we keep exploiting our environment with no long-term strategy, we will just be leaving future generations to pick up the cost.

“We want to see farm payments that reward and incentivise nature-friendly farming practices so the decline in biodiversity can be halted and reversed. We want adequate investment and management of our most important designated wildlife habitats. We want to see a clean air strategy that addresses the 500 deaths we have each year in Northern Ireland due to air pollution. We want a completed network of protected areas in our seas and a sustainable fisheries management system that will help to deliver a healthy marine environment. We also want an ambitious plan, backed up by legislation, to deal with the plastic pollution that is choking our seas.

“With the right political will, we can set out a positive plan for the future of Northern Ireland’s environment and show how we can genuinely have a ‘Green Brexit’.”

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25 Year Plan for the Environment

A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment sets out how the UK Government intends to deliver a 'Green Brexit' and achieve its manifesto commitment of leaving the environment in a better condition than when we inherited it.

The plan includes some measures relating to international commitments that apply UK-wide, but the majority of the plan relates to devolved areas and will apply only to England.

Headline measures proposed in the plan include:

- Development of a sustainable fisheries policy
- Development of a new Northern Forest
- Eliminating avoidable plastic waste by 2042 by extending the 5p carrier bag charge and encouraging supermarkets to introduce plastic-free aisles.
- Developing a Strategy for Nature setting out how we will meet our international biodiversity commitments
- Designing and delivering a new environmental land management system
- Helping more children engage with nature through a Nature Friendly Schools Programme

Nature Matters NI (@NatureMattersNI)

Nature Matters NI is a public-facing campaign of the NIEL Brexit Coalition, a wide range of organisations and individuals dedicated to securing the best future for our environment post-Brexit. Nature Matters NI comprises organisations such as the National Trust, NIEL, RSPB NI and Ulster Wildlife representing approximately 100,000 members in Northern Ireland.

Created in response to the threats posed to environmental legislation and protections by leaving the EU, the campaign is advocating along three major strands: Nature and Environmental Protection; Agriculture and Land-Use Policies; and Marine and Fisheries Policies.

The following organisations are currently involved in the Nature Matters *Nature and Environmental Protection* campaign working group:

- Buglife
- Butterfly Conservation
- Climate NI
- Friends of the Earth
- NI Bat Group
- Northern Ireland Environment Link
- Northern Ireland Marine Task Force
- RSPB NI
- The National Trust
- The Woodland Trust
- Ulster Angling Federation
- Ulster Wildlife