

30 x 30: What does it mean for Northern Ireland?

What is 30x30 and where has it come from?

30x30 is the political commitment to protecting 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030.

In 1992, 195 world leaders agreed to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) as a mechanism to conserve and ensure the sustainable use of biodiversity at every level. Every two years, a Convention of the Parties (COP) is held to progress the commitments made, with the fifteenth COP, or COP15, due to be held in Kunming, China, in October this year.

Ahead of COP15, plans for a new post-2020 global biodiversity framework have been drawn up, setting out how countries will progress towards the [2050 Vision of "Living in harmony with nature"](#). The final framework is expected to include an agreement to put global biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030, and a target to protect 30% of the Earth's land and seas for nature by 2030, (30x30).

In September 2020, we heard Boris Jonson commit to protecting 30% of UK land by 2030 (30x30) in a ['boost for biodiversity'](#). In December 2020, the [Scottish Government](#) also committed to extending the land area protected for nature in Scotland to at least 30% by 2030. In Northern Ireland, on 25th May, Edwin Poots, Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Minister, publicly [endorsed](#) the 30x30 target.

Why do we need the 30x30 target?

We need to deliver the 30x30 target because nature is in crisis. The degradation of our lands, ocean and freshwater systems is destroying Earth's ability to support life. Our health, society and economy all depend on nature. Our lives are [embedded in the environment](#) – we do not or cannot live outside it. We need to move to the 'sweet spot' between social and planetary boundaries, where we live in an [environmentally safe and socially just space in which humanity can thrive](#).

We need to deliver 30x30 because we are experiencing a climate crisis.

Climate change is causing ice sheets to melt and sea levels to rise, increasing the vulnerability of our coasts. It is causing the acidification of our oceans, more extreme weather events and threatens our food and water security. Climate change is also one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation. Despite the international agreements and high-level commitments, globally we are [not on track](#) to limit eventual global warming to below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, nor even 2°C.

We need to deliver 30x30 because the nature and climate crises are inextricably linked – and so are the solutions.

Tackling [both crises together](#) offers the best chance of significant positive impacts. Nature can provide us with the solutions to bridge the emissions gap while we address increasing consumption and seek to decarbonise our economy. At sea, [blue carbon](#)

habitats have the potential to make significant contributions to Northern Ireland's climate change targets, as do terrestrial habitats such as peatland, woodland, hedgerows, grassland and freshwater. Peatlands are the most carbon-dense terrestrial systems globally and cover approx. 14% of NI, however only a small proportion is considered to be intact. With more sustainably managed land and seas, 30x30 could create the foundation for the recovery of habitats and species, improve ecosystem climate resilience and support the many benefits we receive from nature, such as carbon storage.

What would 30x30 look like in NI?

[30 x 30: Land for Nature's Recovery in Northern Ireland](#) set out current thinking on how this should be achieved in Northern Ireland.

On land, 30% would be protected for nature in perpetuity, be well managed, in good or recovering condition and be regularly monitored. Crucial protected area designations would be completed. This strictly protected core, in good condition, would provide the backbone of a physically and functionally connected, country wide [Nature Recovery Network](#). Other areas, that meet the criteria, could also contribute to the 30%. Planning system reform, sustainable agriculture and land use, and a transboundary approach, will all be key delivery mechanisms.

At sea, an ecologically coherent network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), well-managed, monitored and enforced, would be completed. No less than 30% of the MPA network would be offered the strictest form of environmental protection, set within all of NI's waters that are in Good Environmental Status (GES). Fisheries management would take an ecosystem-based approach that prioritises sustainability. An effective Marine Spatial Plan would put the marine environment at the core of sustainable policy and decision making.

What next?

Northern Ireland must take the international aspirations of CBD COP 15 and use them to boost domestic ambition, to adopt and fully implement 30x30. Commitment to this must be shown by **legal underpinning of 30x30**, in addition to the commitment to delivery in the subsequent Biodiversity Strategy. The long-term decline of biodiversity in Northern Ireland can be reversed, and, with countries worldwide playing their part, global biodiversity can be put on the path to recovery by 2030.