

Wildlife and  
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## ENVIRONMENT LINKS UK CONFERENCE 2018

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### How is the UK delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals?

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Dear ELUK member,

I would like to thank you for joining us and contributing to the Environment Links UK (ELUK) Conference, hosted by Wildlife and Countryside Link (WCL) at Senate House, London on 3 October 2018. I hope you found it to be an informative, interesting and inspiring event.

#### Overview

This year's conference gave ELUK members the opportunity to explore how we can work effectively together, and with our Governments, to facilitate effective delivery of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – particularly in the context of the UK's exit from the European Union and the Voluntary National Review of progress to which UK Government is committed in 2019.

We were grateful to hear perspectives on SDG delivery in three of the four UK countries from:

- Katriona Carmichael – Deputy Director, Environment and Land Use Strategy, Scottish Government
- Marie Navarro – Director of Policy, Legislation and Innovation from the Office of the Future Generations Commissioner, Wales
- Emma Williams - Deputy Director, International Environment Strategy and Official Development Assistance, Defra

We were also given an expert overview of five SDGs highly relevant to ELUK's work from the UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UK SSD), following their landmark report '[Measuring Up](#)'.

The experts we heard from were:

- Overview: Dominic White, WWF-UK, UK SSD Co-Chair
- SDG 2: Vicki Hird, Food and Farming Campaign Coordinator, Sustain
- SDG 12: Nicholas Schoon, Policy and Communications Manager, Bioregional
- SDG 13: Toos van Noordwijk, Director of Engagement and Science, Earthwatch
- SDG 14: Alec Taylor, Marine Governance Programme Manager, WWF-UK
- SDG 15: Simon Marsh, Head of Sustainable Development, RSPB

The key themes that emerged from the discussions were:

**Communication:** The language we use must be informative and appropriate for the audience we are addressing. Complex messages and 'insider' terminology such as SDGs may be appropriate for speaking to Governments, but it will not engage the public.

**Education:** Children must be engaged through more than just science lessons at school. This can be achieved through outdoor learning and a holistic approach that integrates sustainability into the curriculum. Children must feel connected to nature if they are to be empowered to make change themselves.

**Partnerships:** We must expand our work to make linkages with other SDGs - such as poverty, economic growth and develop partnerships, particularly with the private sector. Building consensus with business will demonstrate wide support to Governments, and has the added benefit of opening up funding opportunities.

**Domestic vs. international:** An overriding theme of the presentations from Government representatives was that the SDGs are an exercise in international development – with developing countries taking a lead from the UK and a handful of OECD nations. We need to make it loud and clear that the UK cannot hope to be a global leader with its native wildlife in such a drastic state of decline. The SDGs apply as much on home turf as they do abroad.

**Role of NGOs:** Although the SDGs are the most important long-term driver of sustainability in the UK, they often lack visibility in our respective Governments and thus are not integrated into departmental planning and policy development. NGOs can assist by articulating the importance of the SDGs, and how they relate to our work, whenever we engage with Government.

What next?

**Voluntary National Review of Progress:** The Department for International Development (DFID) has developed an [online tool](#) for organisations and individuals to engage with the UK Government's Voluntary National Review of Progress towards the SDGs.

**Get involved with UK SSD:** UK SSD is always open to new stakeholders joining their network, which currently consists of over 70 organisations. Your organisation can [become a partner](#) of the network, or individuals can [become a friend](#) for more informal engagement. If you would like more information, please contact the network's Co-Chair Emily Auckland [emily@ukssd.co.uk](mailto:emily@ukssd.co.uk).

Appended to this letter are write-ups from the five workshops at the conference. These sessions were a great opportunity to drill down into the more specific issues that ELUK members work on in the context of the SDGs. You can also revisit the online debate from the day at [#ELUK2018](#).

We very much enjoyed hosting the conference this year, and we look forward to seeing you at the next conference in 2020!

Yours sincerely,



Dr Elaine King,

Director, Wildlife and Countryside Link

## **SDG 2 workshop – Sustainable agriculture**

This session focused specifically on SDG 2.4, sustainable agriculture. With each country designing its own domestic agriculture policy after 40 years of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, attendees explored the different legislative and policy contexts across the UK, and where common challenges and opportunities exist for collaboration to secure a bright future for farming and the environment.

You can download the slides from the workshop, which provide the political and policy context for each UK country, [here](#).

### Key outcomes of the discussion were:

Despite positive rhetoric, we are far from establishing the radical change in agriculture policy we need in any of the four countries. Delegates recognised that the level of commitment to change is still variable across the UK, from the ambitious (but not yet safe) Agriculture Bill in England, to the lack of Government in Northern Ireland preventing meaningful consultation.

The term 'public goods' is now commonplace in discussions about agriculture policy, but lack of an agreed definition across the UK makes it ambiguous and vulnerable to misinterpretation.

Delegates agreed that, in an ideal world, the four countries would agree to a set of common standards, principles or objectives for agriculture with flexibility to design unique policies. It was acknowledged that, ideally, these would have been agreed before each country began consulting on its own policies, but a lack of effective cross-border governance made this an impossibility. Such common standards will be essential to maintain the integrity of the UK internal market and fair management of common resources.

With debate still polarised around the environment and productivity, we are in danger of boxing ourselves into another two-pillar approach like the CAP. We must find ways to talk about productivity, environmental delivery and high welfare standards as parts of one coherent approach to agriculture.

Farmers will only be incentivised to adopt new practices if they can see the business case for doing so. This means communicating the positive impacts that sustainable practices will have on their farm businesses in terms of productivity, output, profit and efficiency.

Good advice will be absolutely integral to successful delivery of a sustainable agriculture policy. Farmers need advice that is specific to their individual needs and resources. This advice needs to be provided in a way that farmers can access and understand, e.g. through agronomists, as many farmers have little appetite to engage with written or online advice.

## **SDG 15 – Biodiversity**

SDG 15 'Life on land' includes a whole range of targets on the protection and restoration of terrestrial ecosystems and biodiversity. It is also the target that the UK is failing to deliver most, according to UK SSD's Measuring Up report. But, in this workshop, we took a step back from the doom and gloom and asked ourselves: *What does success look like for UK biodiversity in 2030?*

### Key outcomes of the discussion:

Success would be species that are currently in decline having stabilised or began recovering, and no further extinctions of UK species; and species that were lost in the UK, such as beavers, having been successfully restored. Success should be the same across the UK, but how we get there will be different.

The UK must restore its own natural environment if it is to match the 'global leadership' rhetoric coming from Government. It must also keep to its word of retaining EU protections, despite Brexit leading to fractured and piecemeal approaches to environmental legislation across the UK.

Targets are essential to achieve the massive turnaround nature needs. They must have milestones and an appropriate mechanism of accountability i.e. environmental watchdog(s). Look to the UK Marine Strategy for examples of stepped targets that make delivery more manageable, and ensure that terrestrial and marine targets are integrated. Any UK target should not be aggregated with one country subsidising delivery for another. Success must be based on hard evidence and accurate data, with no 'shifting baselines'.

Our vision should be translated to the public through imagery, promotion of key milestones, and celebration of "quick wins" that are tangible. Governments must recognise that biodiversity is at the heart of society and the economy and central to the wellbeing and prosperity of the UK.

Financial investment is needed to make progress. Investing in the environment should be viewed as a larger, longer-term investment that encompasses both social and economic objectives. There are examples elsewhere in the world of private investors funding conservation projects to deliver government objectives and, if the objectives are delivered, Government refunds the investment. Other departmental budgets, such as health and education, should contribute to environmental restoration.

The intrinsic value of the environment must also be recognised, and not lost through 'natural capital' approaches. Demonstrating environmental degradation in terms of financial loss to the economy could be a powerful tool.

## **SDG 13 – Climate Action**

The '*climate action*' workshop aimed to build a better understanding of how SDG 13 aligns with existing initiatives within ELUK and member organisations. To tackle climate change we need collaboration, so together we identified methods for including these targets in future work. Attendees left the session with tangible recommendations to progress, or potentially start in some cases, their '*climate action*' work.

### Key outcomes of the discussion:

To set an example when campaigning and advocating for environmental awareness, NGOs should look to reduce their own organisational footprint. Ideas that organisations were already using or considering using included car sharing, flexible working, and increasing energy efficiency in buildings. Some organisations have gone as far as incorporating these into a wider environmental framework committing a reduction of emissions in-line with the Climate Change Act.

However, there was acknowledgement that challenges can exist when implementing such measures. Budget limitations, rented accommodation and wider infrastructure - such as public transport or cycling provision - can all hamper our well-meaning efforts.

Due to the extreme nature of climate change, we need to ensure our work is as resilient as possible. What we're putting in place, in terms of specific projects and policy, needs to be resilient against future climatic changes. For example, the oceans are at the forefront of the climate battle, so the Marine Protected Area network should be a flexible system. It needs to be able to move according to climatic changes and the resulting move in species and habitats. Only then can it provide effective protection.

Innovative thinking, like mobile Marine Protected Areas, is required but to achieve that we need ambitious long-term thinking. For example, the current planning system is not fit for addressing climate issues due to its short sighted vision. We need an ambitious planning system that allows space for renewable energy, public infrastructure and nature. However, our current political system, and priorities, do not best match with this need.

To shift our system to a long-term vision of thinking and planning, we need to collaborate, across land and sea, NGOs and Governments, and from country to country. Climate change will affect all aspects of our work and lives at a global scale, so to build a sense of urgency we need to utilise the linkages where possible. The SDGs provide a perfect framework for doing this and offer an opportunity for cross-sector collaboration. We could be working with housing associations to highlight the benefits of energy efficiency in tackling fuel poverty and climate change. We could be working with farmers to highlight the impacts of climate change on food production. We could be working with fishermen to highlight the changing fish stocks that result from climate change.

## **SDG 12 – Circular Economy**

The Circular Economy workshop focused on SDG 12, To ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. We explored what needed to change and learned from each other about what is currently being done in our respective countries. Many organisations' work was not currently focused on this SDG, but attendees went away with some interesting ideas on how we can incorporate this into our work, in addition to now having insights into current policies and schemes which are successful. We concluded with the agreed action to keep in touch through email on individual Links' work streams in relation to circular economy.

### Key outcomes of the discussion:

SDG 12 requires joined up and wide-ranging changes from a range of key players. Action needs to be taken from consumers, retailers, producers and governments.

Producers must take more responsibility and must have procedures in place that ensure the materials they are bringing into the world will gain a second life and, ideally, third, fourth and fifth... For example, Finland taxes large plastic producers for virgin plastic. This has been hugely successful, with 90% of plastic now recycled, creating a demand for recycled plastic within the country.

We face the choice of whether to tackle the problem by creating a new business model for businesses to follow (green economic growth) or, on the other side of this coin, tackling over-consumption and the system as a whole. The creation of new business models would require financial incentives to ensure that it is beneficial to reuse materials rather than use virgin materials.

In our respective countries, there is much focus around recycling and deposit-return schemes. These are steps are in the right direction. However, the problem is bigger, and relates to behavioural and systematic change. We need to tackle the default position of 'excess consumption'. It must be made easier for consumers to choose less waste. Taxation must be totally redesigned, with taxes applied to wasteful practices. China and other countries' s bans on importing other countries' waste , was discussed, as well as the UK reducing taxes for companies that don't export waste. Waste must be seen as a 'pollution issue' rather than just a 'litter issue', with charges being applied.

On a smaller, business-level scale, Lush was used as a good example of a circular business model. They use recycled materials for all their packaging and incentivise consumers to reuse their packaging by asking them to return them to a store in return for free products. This makes 'circular economy' a good idea for businesses and incentivise their customers to be loyal.

The knowledge of producers about how their products were made is important in terms of how to reuse or recycle them. There is a knowledge gap with consumers. Recycling is increasingly confusing, especially considering what can be recycled varies considerably across different locations and/or councils. Recycling schemes should be made simpler and labelling on products should be mandatory.

Certification schemes, such as FSC, are important in allowing consumers to make their own choices. However, we must be aware of 'greenwashing' in advertising of materials – for example, the differences between biodegradables and compostables are not clear to members of the public.

Furthermore, the production of items which are still designed for single-use purposes, although 'plastic-free', are doing little to contribute to the culture change needed: reuse becoming the norm. Additionally, more must be done to encourage repair. For example in the Netherlands, disadvantaged members of the community are taught how to repair items, providing them with a skill, which brings both environmental and social benefits.

## **SDG 14 – Marine**

The UK Marine Strategy is the main delivery tool for SDG 14 target, '*Life below water*'. Therefore, this workshop was used as an opportunity to consider more detailed targets to monitor progress on SDG 14 through the upcoming consultation on the UK Marine Strategy. The session included a brief presentation setting the context, then focused on developing ideas around targets 14.2 and 14.5. This session kicked off preparations for an ELUK response to the UK Marine Strategy consultation, expected in late 2018.

### Key outcomes of the discussion:

Using the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) as an existing vehicle for driving forward SDG 14 is incredibly useful, especially as MSFD is a more ambitious legislative tool for securing a sustainable future for our seas. Both SDG 14 and the MSFD only run until 2020 so, once completed, there is a clear opportunity to address gaps.

The indicator for 14.2 is too narrow and should be extended outside the national exclusive economic zones to be more effective.

A potential new descriptor could be the percentage of the marine area that has an ecosystem based marine spatial plan implemented (implemented being the key word). However, we should be careful to not get too focussed on percentages and number of areas as this could lead to 'box ticking'. Implementation should be the main focus.

Given the sector's support for the Ecosystem Based Approach, we need to explore how this is interpreted across Governments.

A challenge in developing new targets, and measuring progress on existing ones, is the lack of data available. For example, sustainability for fisheries is unclear due to the lack of stock assessments and monitoring carried out.

It would be useful to review past approaches, such as those for Integrated Coastal Zone Management. These will no doubt be valuable in identifying management processes for which there is a clear gap in the Marine Strategy.

The MSFD itself is lacking governance and social aspects. This could include aspects such as stakeholder engagement & political will, which would be qualitative and therefore harder to include. Nevertheless, it is important that these are incorporated.

To make the MSFD more ambitious, we would need to begin collecting more data to ensure a true understanding of the environment. However, given budget constraints within Governments how can we include new data successfully?

A useful indicator to include would be the rise in ecosystem services provided, as this could help feed into restoration. This would help reframe the narrative to be more future focused and help us establish what monitoring may be useful to establish and monitor this aim. This would allude to the Natural Capital Approach but does this need to be developed further before being used as the basis for setting indicators.

Though included in the SDGs, there are no specific targets in the MSFD for Marine Protected Areas. Seafloor integrity, mobile species and habitats could all relate to a specific target for Marine Protected Areas. Through the MSFD consultation we should push for a specific metric on the delivery

and management of the ecologically coherent network. If achieved, this could secure the development of management plans, monitoring and funding.

A strong position on what '*well managed*' Marine Protected Areas look like would be a good tool for advocating further management and perhaps encourage cultural by-in from coastal communities.

An independent watchdog would hold Governments to account to ensure they are delivering the UK Marine Strategy and MSFD and therefore are delivering on SDG 14.