

Tackling the climate and biodiversity crises

IEMA's key recommendations for UK policymakers – 2024



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Background

Prior to the political party conference season in 2023, IEMA published a series of key asks for policymakers that we subsequently socialised at the Labour Party and Conservative Party conferences respectively. Following the announcement of the general election on 4 July, these asks have been updated to reflect changes in the policy landscape and the evolving insights of our members.

IEMA's key recommendations for UK policymakers

The future prosperity of communities up and down the UK, and globally, is inherently bound to the condition of the natural environment. Our ability to live healthy and fulfilling lives is dependent on the ecosystem services that make this possible and the extent to which our own actions enable the life-preserving qualities of nature to be sustained. That means economic growth and development that respect environmental boundaries.

Importantly, however, it does not mean that growth and development are no longer economic and policy objectives that can be strived for over the long-term. Growth and the protection of the natural environment are not mutually exclusive. For example, research by the government's independent climate change advisers sets out that from 1990 GDP grew by approximately 40%, whereas during the same period GHG emissions fell by 47%¹.

“Environmental policy can only deliver effective outcomes if it is well implemented”

The goal of the UK's environmental and climate policy should be to enable businesses to thrive while enhancing nature for future generations. What's more, the public care about this agenda too, with a recent YouGov survey finding that more than two-thirds of them (67%) are worried about climate change and its effects².

Through our key policy groups IEMA has developed a series of recommendations for policymakers that we believe can help make the realisation of this goal a reality. Importantly these recommendations should not be considered in a siloed way. Each of these areas relate to one another in a practical sense and so should be considered as a package of joined-up interventions.

This document puts forwards recommendations in the following areas:

- **Green skills and jobs**
- **Environmental governance**
- **Biodiversity and natural capital**
- **Circular economy**
- **Climate change and energy**
- **Impact assessment**

Environmental and climate policy can only deliver effective outcomes if it is well implemented. Developing the right skills and jobs that can make this happen is therefore also a necessity. To this end, this document starts with putting forward a range of policy recommendations targeted towards ensuring that the UK has the green skills and jobs in place to deliver a cleaner and stronger economy.

The subsequent section then sets out a range of important governance considerations that build on the proposals in IEMA Core Principles for Environmental Policymaking³.

¹ Committee on Climate Change (2022) Progress in reducing emissions

² YouGov (2022) Most people are worried about climate change – but what are they willing to do about it?

³ IEMA (2022) IEMA Core Principles for Environmental Policymaking

Green skills and jobs

There is a legal requirement for the UK to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050⁴. Across the UK there are also wider environmental targets that each devolved administration must deliver. In England this includes halting the decline in species populations by 2030, and increasing tree and woodland cover to 16.5% of total land area by 2050⁵.

Meeting our climate and environmental targets is an economy-wide challenge. Not one for sustainability professionals and organisations alone. It is increasingly a necessity that all job roles can help contribute to delivering greener outcomes.

With YouGov polling data highlighting that 65% of British adults believe they do not have access to green skills training through

their employer⁶, there is clearly a need to act speedily on policy interventions to create a greener workforce. The same poll also found that 56% of British adults have never heard of the term 'green job', while 64% also demonstrated a similar lack of awareness of the term 'green skills'.

"A YouGov poll found that 56% of British adults have never heard of the term 'green job'"

HEMA recommends that policymakers, with support from business, should:

- 1 Ensure the delivery of a green jobs plan that sets out how investment in green jobs and skills will be channelled across different economic sectors so that we have a workforce that can deliver the green economy of the future.
- 2 Build on the work of the Green Jobs Delivery Group and establish a permanent cross-government body that takes a strategic approach to delivering green skills and jobs growth in the economy that is tied to our long-term climate and environmental goals.
- 3 Support the development and utilisation of IEMA's Green Careers Hub to help all workers understand where they fit into the green economy of the future.



⁴ House of Commons Library (2019) Net zero in the UK

⁵ Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (2022) New legally binding environment targets set out

⁶ IEMA and Deloitte (2022) A blueprint for green workforce transformation

Environmental governance

The report published by the Office for Environmental Protection at the start of 2023 on the progress being made in the delivery of the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) revealed that on seven out of its 10 goals progress was “largely off track”⁷.

A key challenge that we have identified is that there is not enough information and guidance for businesses to understand their role in helping to deliver the key goals set down in the plan, which is frustrating given that the appetite seems to be there.

A further area of concern is that there doesn't seem to be a joined-up approach between the EIP and the environmental impact assessment reform that is being delivered through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act – specifically in terms of the interactions between the EIP goals and the move towards Environmental Outcomes Reports as part of the new environmental assessment regime for England.

Equally, the practice of translating the EIP goals from national to local level isn't clear for many of our members that are working on local nature recovery and enhancement.

“The practice of translating the EIP goals from national to local level isn't clear for many of our members”

Looking at this more widely, the single biggest challenge is around long-term governance. The relationship between the EIP, the long-term environmental targets framework and the Environmental Principles Policy Statement that is now being implemented across government is not clear enough.

The principles statement, for example, makes little to no reference of the other policy and legislative instruments, so its therefore difficult to see how ministers across Whitehall could have these at the forefront when making decisions on public policy that will have an impact on the natural environment.

IEMA recommends that policymakers, with support from business, should:

1 Ensure that policy instruments aimed at restoring and enhancing the condition of the natural environment are more effectively integrated with one another, including the EIP, the long-term environmental targets framework and the Environmental Principles Policy Statement.

2 Develop and deliver a comprehensive strategy for translating the EIP goals from national to local level, so that those working on local nature recovery and enhancement can better understand how their work should feed into the wider picture.

3 Raise the profile and understanding of sustainability across Whitehall to ensure the most effective implementation of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' Environmental Principles Policy Statement.

⁷ Office for Environmental Protection (2024) Progress in improving the natural environment in England 2022/2023

Biodiversity and natural capital

There is a biodiversity crisis as well as a climate crisis. Recent research has shown that **the abundance of 753 terrestrial and freshwater species has on average fallen by 19% across the UK since 1970**. In addition, the distributions of 54% of flowering plant species have decreased (across Great Britain) during the same time and the abundance of 13 species of seabird has fallen by an average of 24% since 1986⁸.

Policy action on reducing impacts on biodiversity and restoring nature is something that has begun to gather pace. However, there are key actions that are required to make current government policies and requirements more likely to be effective.

Developing and implementing policy that puts the UK on a long-term pathway to becoming nature positive is critical, as is an approach across all decision-making on public policy that there should be no precedence over nature.

IEMA recommends that policymakers, with support from business, should:

- 1** Urgently design and implement a robust plan to protect 30% of the land and of the sea for nature's recovery by 2030 (30by30).
- 2** Take steps to ensure that new requirements for biodiversity net gain in the planning system are effectively delivered, managed and monitored (and suitably resourced), and that lessons learned are acted on to guarantee good outcomes.
- 3** Establish a land use framework that enables the effective interaction of different spatial policies including biodiversity net gain, environmental land management schemes and planning reform.



⁸ State of Nature Partnership (2023) State of Nature Report 2023

Circular economy

The way we use and dispose of materials and products is not sustainable, and is a root cause of environmental degradation, climate change and biodiversity decline. The 'throughput economy' (take, make, use, dispose) is no longer viable – instead we need to implement circular practices to achieve greater resource efficiency with the highest sustainable outcomes.

Economic growth is intrinsically linked to greater resource use and GHG emissions. The way we currently use and dispose of materials and products is not sustainable. By adopting circular strategies that create more value from materials and products throughout their life cycle, such as repair, refurbishment, renting and sharing, we can enable more resource-secure, resilient and sustainable outcomes.

The need to act urgently is also clear, with research suggesting that **over 90% of the UK's material use comes from virgin sources and only 7.5% of materials are circled back into the UK economy after use⁹.**

IEMA recommends that policymakers, with support from business, should:

- 1** Focus efforts on achieving absolute decoupling of resource use from GDP incorporating consumption-based measures, not those that are solely production based.
- 2** Establish a resource productivity target that is underpinned by the principles of green growth to enable the transition to a low-carbon circular economy, the availability of sustainable materials, and increasing resource efficiency and the wellbeing of the population.
- 3** Develop a national circular strategy to ensure materials and products needed for our transition to a net-zero economy are reused, remanufactured and recycled.

“By adopting circular strategies, we can enable more resilient and sustainable outcomes”



⁹ Circle Economy Foundation (2024) The circularity gap report (for the United Kingdom)

Climate change and energy

When the UK parliament signed the 2050 net-zero target into law in 2019 it was widely considered as world leading. Indeed, the UK was the first major economy to establish such a target. However, since then there has been slow progress on delivery, with the government's policy strategy having been subject to legal challenge and revision.

Following the independent review that The Rt Hon Chris Skidmore was asked to undertake, plans to deliver net zero were updated, but there remain significant gaps.

Through its nationally determined contribution **the UK is required to reduce emissions by 68% by 2030 relative to 1990 levels**. The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) has recently reported that its confidence in this target being met "remains low"¹⁰. CCC research indicates that, outside of the electricity sector, emissions reduction must increase four-fold to meet the target and that there appears a lack of urgency in policy delivery to achieve this.

IEMA recommends that policymakers, with support from business, should:

- 1** Rapidly improve on the design of the Future Homes Standard as consulted on in early 2024, including the consideration of embodied carbon, so that new homes are built in way that dramatically reduces their carbon impact.
- 2** Develop a clear investment and deployment roadmap for onshore wind as recommended by the Skidmore Review and establish a speedier regime for good projects to connect to the grid.
- 3** Accelerate the rollout of the infrastructure that is required to support the transition to low-emission vehicles, including that which is required for electric vehicles.



¹⁰ Committee on Climate Change (2023) Progress towards reaching Net Zero in the UK

Impact assessment

The discipline of impact assessment, including the well-known environmental impact assessment (EIA) and strategic environmental assessments (SEA) have been a cornerstone of the planning system in the UK for decades, enabling local authorities, regulators, statutory bodies and the public to understand the likely significant effects of projects, plans and programmes on people and the natural environment, and therefore helping to bring about effective decision-making.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (discussed also in the environmental governance section of this short paper) includes powers to revoke the EIA and SEA legislation and replace them with as-yet-undefined Environmental Outcome Reports (EOR) in England, which could change the scope of impact assessments dramatically.

The legislation sets out a shift away from the current EIA and SEA regime to what is described as an outcomes-based approach. New EORs have been subject to high-level consultation, but the results have not been published. Further consultation on the detail

of implementing secondary legislation on EORs is not expected before 2025.

IEMA is concerned that the new EOR legislation could lead to a watering down of the rigour that has been applied through conventional EIA and SEA approaches, and that it will not necessarily lead to better outcomes for people or the natural environment overall.

There are also other issues that should be picked up through reforms to the IA regimes.

IEMA recommends that policymakers, with support from business, should:

- 1 Create a national environmental assessment unit to enhance EIA and SEA delivery, and to support the shift to EORs.
- 2 Do more to promote evidence-based practice and to mandate the use of competent experts.
- 3 Create more meaningful opportunities to improve public participation in the planning system and with the EIA, SEA and EOR process.



Background to IEMA's key recommendations for UK policymakers

The recommendations set out in this document have been derived from the research and work undertaken by IEMA's policy and practice steering groups. Insights from the Institute's wider membership have also been captured through roundtable sessions and workshops that have contributed to the development of specific policy reports and representations to relevant government consultations.

Additional insights have been gathered through IEMA's public affairs roundtable series. At these roundtables IEMA members have been able to exchange their views on key areas of environmental policy with members of parliament from across the House of Commons and House of Lords.

Highlights in the series have included:

- Green skills and jobs with Dr Alan Whitehead MP (Shadow Minister for Climate Change and Net Zero)
- Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill with Alex Norris MP (former Shadow Minister for Levelling Up, Housing, Communities and Local Government)
- COP15 with The Rt Hon Lord Benyon (former Minister for Biosecurity, Marine and Rural Affairs)
- Environmental Improvement Plan with Baroness Young of Old Scone (former Member of the Environment and Climate Change Committee)
- UK net zero review with The Rt Hon Chris Skidmore (former MP and Chair of the Net Zero Review)
- UK net zero delivery with Kerry McCarthy MP (Shadow Minister for Climate Change and Net Zero)
- Circular economy and biodiversity, with Alex Sobel MP (former Shadow Minister for Nature Recovery and the Domestic Environment)
- Climate and energy with Wera Hobhouse MP (Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Energy and Climate Change)

* The status and positions of the above were correct prior to the general election being announced.



Further reading

IEMA policy reports and government consultation representations are available at www.iema.net/policy-and-practice/policy-reports

Further information

For more information from IEMA's policy team, please contact:
Ben Goodwin, Director of Policy and Public Affairs, IEMA – policy@iema.net

About IEMA

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The Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA) is the global professional body for over 21,000 individuals and 300 organisations working, studying or interested in the environment and sustainability.

We are the professional organisation at the centre of the sustainability agenda, connecting business and individuals across industries, sectors and borders.

We also help and support public and private sector organisations, governments and regulators to do the right thing when it comes to environment and sustainability related initiatives, challenges and opportunities. We work to influence public policy on environment and sustainability matters. We do this by drawing on the insights and experience of our members to ensure that what happens in practice influences the development of government policy, legislation, regulations and standards.