



MEDIA RELEASE

Expert Committee warns that nature's decline will damage UK Plc

For immediate release: 11th March 2014

A new report published today by the UK's Natural Capital Committee (NCC) warns of significant consequences for our economy and our well-being unless we take action to restore the environment. The picture is clear: nature is our life support system, but we're losing it fast. Reversing nature's decline is vital for economic prosperity and future well-being.

The report has been welcomed by businesses and environmental campaigners alike. Sir Stuart Rose, former Executive Chairman of M&S (now Chairman of Ocado), a prominent figure in British retail and Ambassador to WWF-UK, said: *"The NCC's report has come at a crucial time. From restoring catchments to mitigate flooding, to rebuilding our fish stocks to safeguard our fishing industries – investing in our natural capital is crucial to long-term economic growth and resilience of UK Plc. It's vital that government gives the NCC its full support, particularly the Treasury, which must create the policy framework to help drive industry innovation and investment."*

Natural capital refers to the elements of nature – such as our forests, rivers, oceans, land, minerals and the atmosphere – that provide goods and services to people. These include food, raw materials, clean air, water, energy, recreation and protection from hazards. Because nature, like other forms of capital, produces value, governments and businesses should be interested in restoring and investing in it. The unfortunate reality is that, although vital to life on earth, nature's services are often economically 'invisible', and consequently ignored in economic, development and investment decisions.

Dr Elaine King, Director of Wildlife and Countryside Link, a coalition of 43 environmental NGOs, said: *"This report highlights the vital importance of bringing our environment to the forefront of decision-making. We welcome the proposed 25-year plan, which will bring a long-term, cross-party approach to restoring and enhancing the natural assets on which we ultimately depend."*

Mike Barry, Director of M&S's internationally acclaimed Plan A, said: *"Like all businesses, M&S depends on nature – from the raw materials such as fish, wood, cotton, leather, soy and coffee used in M&S products, to the water used in our stores. It's in all of our interests to replenish it. M&S has proved that sustainability can be profitable, and continues to work towards helping to restore the ecosystems on which we rely. We encourage all policy makers and business leaders to embed natural capital into their decision-making"*.

Toby Roxburgh, WWF-UK Economics Adviser, said: *"The recent flooding highlighted the urgent need to restore our natural capital – in this case, managing land and rivers better to reduce flood risk. But our fisheries, woodlands and urban green spaces – all are cases where, with the right policy and investment, we can generate economic opportunities and wider benefits for society by restoring nature"*.

Sir Ian Cheshire, Group Chief Executive of Kingfisher Plc., former Chair of the government's business-led Ecosystem Markets Task Force and WWF-UK Ambassador, is another prominent



advocate for positive business action. He said: *“Valuing natural capital enables businesses to understand the resource dependencies in their supply chain. Protecting these assets makes absolute business sense in mitigating risk, as does getting ahead of the curve to seize potential new opportunities. There are many businesses, like Kingfisher, who have already realised their dependence on nature and are working to become restorative – giving back more than they take out”*.

However, businesses can only do so much on their own, and are increasingly calling for stronger government action and support, to help drive wider industry action and investment to restore natural capital.

The NCC’s recommendations point strongly to the need for action across government. The Treasury is at the heart of this debate, given the importance of natural capital to long-term economic security. Restoring nature will require a collaborative effort. This government has the opportunity to give a lead to the world on this agenda. Time will tell if the Chancellor will seize that opportunity.

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This media release is supported by the following seven organisations:

- British Ecological Society
- Friends of the Earth
- Ramblers
- RSPB
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Woodland Trust
- WWF-UK

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Notes to editors

1. The NCC, the world’s first such independent advisory body, advises the government on natural capital and how to prioritise actions to support and improve it. It was established following the UK’s 2011 ‘Natural Environment White Paper’ (NEWP), in which the government committed to be *“the first generation to leave the natural environment in a better state than it inherited”*. Reporting directly to the Economic Affairs Committee, chaired by the Chancellor, the NCC has the opportunity to influence government right the way across economic and planning policy.
2. The NCC’s remit covers England’s natural capital, and does not extend to considering how UK Plc affects natural capital in far corners of the globe, for example through international supply chains and UK greenhouse gas emissions – and how global resource scarcity and climate change in turn present risks to the UK economy.



3. This is the 2nd of the NCC's "State of Natural Capital" reports. The report can be accessed on the NCC's website: <http://www.naturalcapitalcommittee.org/state-of-natural-capital-reports.html>. The NCC published its 1st "State of Natural Capital Report" in April 2013, which stressed the need for a new framework to better measure and account for changes in natural capital, improvement in the valuation of changes to feed into decision-making processes, and the inclusion of natural capital into UK public and corporate accounts.
4. Sir Stuart Rose, one of the most prominent figures in UK retail, was formerly Chairman and Chief Executive of Marks and Spencer and is now Chairman of Ocado. Knighted in 2008 for services to the retail industry, Stuart Rose has been a retail icon for more than two decades. Best known for his roles within Marks and Spencer, where he led the internationally renowned corporate sustainability initiative "Plan A", Rose has also worked with businesses as diverse as Burton Group, Argos and Booker Plc. He is an active ambassador to WWF-UK.
5. Wildlife and Countryside Link is an umbrella body, whose purpose is to bring together voluntary organisations in the UK to protect and enhance wildlife, landscape and the marine environment. It currently has 43 members who have the support of over 8 million people in the UK, collectively employ over 11,000 full-time staff, and have the help of 174,000 volunteers.
6. Sir Ian Cheshire is currently Chief Executive of Kingfisher plc, a British multinational retailing company, the largest home improvement retailer in Europe and the third-largest in the world. He is was formerly chair of the business-led Ecosystem Markets Task Force, set up to advise government on the opportunities for UK business from expanding green goods, services, products, investment vehicles and markets which value and protect ecosystem services. He is an active ambassador to WWF-UK. He is the Senior Independent Director of Whitbread plc, lead Non-Executive Member on the Department for Work and Pensions Board, member of the Corporate Leaders Group on Climate Change, and a Member of the Employers' Forum on Disability President's Group.
7. Mike Barry is head of sustainable business at Marks & Spencer. He is part of the team that oversees Plan A, the eco and ethical programme with the ambition to make the company the world's most sustainable major retailer by 2015. He is also Chair of the World Environment Centre, following six years on the WWF programme committee.