



Great British Energy Bill: Briefing for Lords Second Reading

This briefing is on behalf of environmental coalition [Wildlife and Countryside Link](#) ahead of Second Reading of the GB Energy Bill in the House of Lords on 18 November 2024.

8 November 2024

What's missing from the Bill: A duty for nature alongside climate

Increasing the scale and pace at which renewable energy is delivered in the UK is essential to meeting the Government's commitments to decarbonise the electricity system by 2030 and achieve net zero by 2050. Great British Energy is a new publicly-owned company which will develop renewable energy projects and co-invest in projects with the private sector. GB Energy is a central part of the Government's plans to achieve these climate mitigation targets and the legislation to establish this company is welcome. **In its current form, however, the Bill will not ensure that GB Energy delivers for nature alongside climate.**

The Government was elected on a manifesto which recognised the close links between climate and nature, acknowledging that 'the climate and nature crisis is the greatest long-term global challenge that we face' and that 'the climate crisis has accelerated the nature crisis.' Clean power and net zero is one of the key five missions of the Government.¹

Nature has a pivotal role to play in achieving this mission: restoring natural habitats to be effective carbon sinks has the potential to provide a third of the climate mitigation effort needed to reach net zero.² However, habitats in poor condition are currently releasing carbon rather than capturing and storing it. Only 7% of woodlands and only 25% of peatlands are in good condition.³ It is essential to put more habitats into good condition and increase the capacity of nature to contribute to climate mitigation to meet net zero targets and nature recovery targets under the Environment Act.

The GB Energy Bill is currently a missed opportunity to ensure that GB Energy delivers for nature alongside climate, straying from the joint nature and climate approach set out in the manifesto the Government was elected on.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/energy-secretary-ed-miliband-sets-out-his-priorities-for-the-department>

² <https://www.iied.org/cba14-closing-uk-minister-urges-countries-allocate-more-finance-nature-based-solutions-help-tackle>

³ [State of Nature 2023 - report on the UK's current biodiversity](#)



We are calling for GB Energy to be given a nature recovery duty, alongside its other objectives for clean energy, energy efficiency and energy security, in line with the approach set out in the manifesto the Government was elected on. A nature recovery duty would give GB Energy a requirement to factor the UK's critical natural infrastructure into its planning, projects, and investment decisions, alongside the necessary clean energy infrastructure.

These points were raised by MPs from across parties at Commons Second Reading of the GB Energy Bill on 5 September 2024⁴ and at Committee Stage of the Bill on 8 October 2024.⁵ At Report Stage on 29 October 2024, Green MP Siân Berry made a strong case for a nature recovery amendment tabled by Adrian Ramsay MP, Pippa Heylings MP, and others, setting out how a statutory duty for nature is necessary to ensure nature considerations are embedded in GB Energy.⁶

Why is a nature recovery duty needed for an energy company?

Currently, public bodies in the UK, including public sector companies, often fail to consider environmental costs and benefits. For example, despite some good practice, outdated legislation means that Forestry Commission continues in many places to prioritise commercial considerations over growing and maintaining biodiverse woodland habitats on the Public Forest Estate.⁷

During Committee Stage of the GB Energy Bill, in response to a question from Liberal Democrat MP Pippa Heylings about the absence of an environmental requirement in the GB Energy Bill, expert witness Shaun Spiers of Green Alliance raised the failure of water companies to prioritise nature as another reason for ensuring that nature is central to how GB Energy will behave.⁸

The evidence is clear that public bodies and the existing planning and development system are not always prioritising nature considerations and delivering positive environmental outcomes. It is important the GB Energy does not repeat these mistakes. As well as wider action from the Government on nature recovery, GB Energy, as a key delivery mechanism of the infrastructure needed to meet the clean power mission, must go beyond minimum relevant environmental legislation in delivering more for the public good.

This could be achieved, and the mistakes seen in the water sector and in parts of the planning system avoided, by adding a nature duty to the GB Energy Bill, as proposed during Commons stages. This would help ensure that new renewable energy projects work in harmony with legal protection for carbon-rich

⁴ [Hansard transcript](#) of GB Energy Bill Second Reading debate on 5 September 2024

⁵ [Hansard transcript](#) of GB Energy Bill Committee Stage first sitting debate on 8 October 2024

⁶ [Hansard transcript](#) of GB Energy Bill Report Stage debate on 29 October 2024]See also amendment text (NC2): https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/59-01/0005/amend/gb_energy_day_rep_1029.pdf

⁷ See, for example the decisions made around the [replanting of Wareham Forest in Dorset in 2021](#) and [proposals for coniferous planting](#) on an important bird breeding site within Northumberland National Park.

⁸ [Hansard transcript](#) of GB Energy Bill Committee Stage first sitting debate on 8 October 2024



habitats and deliver more nature-based solutions on land and at sea, from providing space for fish species around offshore wind turbines⁹ to wildflower planting around solar farms.¹⁰

A nature duty for GB Energy would also build on recent momentum achieved in the Lords towards requirements on public bodies to help achieve climate and nature targets. On 5th November, the Crown Estate Bill was successfully amended at Lords report stage to require Crown Estate Commissioners to “keep under review the impact of their activities on the achievement of sustainable development.” The Minister confirmed at the despatch box that “this regard includes, where relevant, consideration of relevant legislation, such as Part 1 of the Climate Change Act 2008, which deals with the targets for 2050, Section 56 of the Climate Change Act 2008, and Sections 1 to 3 of the Environment Act 2021.”¹¹ GB Energy, envisioned as a partner body for the Crown Estate in the delivery of new renewable energy should be given requirements in this area also, ideally through a clear duty to actively contribute to nature targets.

A nature recovery duty would give GB Energy statutory direction to invest in clean energy projects that meet the highest environmental standards, embed wildlife-friendly design into renewable energy project design, and create more space for nature on development sites.

We would be grateful if peers could raise these points at Second Reading of the GB Energy Bill on 18th November.

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) is the largest nature coalition in England, bringing together 83 organisations to use their joint voice for the protection of the natural world and animals.

We are also calling for a nature and climate duty to be applied to the Crown Estate¹² and to all public bodies, including Network Rail, Ofwat and Ofgem. A Private Members Bill from crossbench peer Lords Krebs, proposing an environmental duty, was debated in the Lords on 18 October.¹³

For questions or further information please contact:
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⁹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0964569124000085?via%3Dihub>

¹⁰ <https://www.lancaster.ac.uk/news/new-evidence-shows-uk-solar-parks-can-provide-for-bees-and-butterflies>

¹¹ Hansard of Crown Estate Bill Lords report stage: [https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-11-05/debates/87F39AF7-D17F-46DE-8E47-660D28D00AF9/CrownEstateBill\(HL\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/lords/2024-11-05/debates/87F39AF7-D17F-46DE-8E47-660D28D00AF9/CrownEstateBill(HL))

¹² https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Crown_Estate_Bill_Report_Stage_Link_Briefing%20.pdf

¹³ https://www.wcl.org.uk/docs/Briefing_The_Environmental_Targets_Bill_October_24.pdf