

## **The Climate and Nature Bill**

### **A motion from Sonning and Witney Deanery Synods, November 2024.**

#### Context

Between July 2023 and June 2024, the world breached the 1.5 degrees centigrade threshold for global warming.<sup>1</sup> This limit was introduced as part of the Paris Agreement, a landmark international treaty that was adopted at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris on December 2015, and came into effect the following November. Its primary goal is to 'limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with efforts to limit the increase to 1.5°C', a limit which is crucial to prevent the worst impacts of climate change, including extreme weather, rising sea levels, and disruptions to ecosystems and human livelihoods. This limit is now moving out of reach.

In the latest World Wildlife Fund 'Living Planet' report<sup>2</sup> from October 2024, they report a 73% decline in nature in just 50 years. The report warns that parts of our planet are approaching dangerous tipping points driven by the combination of nature loss and climate change which pose grave threats to humanity. Habitat loss and degradation and overharvesting, driven primarily by our global food system are the dominant threats to wildlife populations around the world, followed by invasive species, disease and climate change.

Significant political leadership locally and globally is needed if we are to tackle these enormous challenges. God's world needs collective and decisive action within the next decade, if we are to give God's creation a chance – and if we are to give our grandchildren a future.

The science is irrefutable, and so is the Bible. The Old Testament is rich with the language of the beauty, awe, and wonder of all creation, and of humanity's relationship with the land in a way that honours God. The New Testament tells us of a God who so loved creation, Jesus chose to walk among it, to spend time in it, and to die on a cross to save it. 'For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.' (Col 1:19-20).

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<sup>1</sup> [World's first year-long breach of key 1.5C warming limit - BBC News](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Catastrophic 73% decline in the average size of global wildlife populations in just 50 years reveals a 'system in peril' | Press Releases | WWF \(worldwildlife.org\)](#)

Often the church can feel uncomfortable stepping into the political sphere. But Proverbs 1:20 talks about wisdom shouting in the streets and crying out in the public square. Jesus himself was not afraid to address deeply political issues of the time, including taxation, the law, and speaking out against injustices. It is no accident that our Bishops have a place in the House of Lords, to speak into the needs of society, and offer bold leadership.

It is in this context that Sonning and Witney Deanery Synods support the aims of Zero Hour's campaign for the Climate and Nature Bill, which is an opportunity for the UK government to take the urgent, decisive action that is needed to respond to the twin challenges of the climate and ecological emergencies. Supporting the Bill is about demonstrating that all parts of society care deeply about the world, and that we, as followers of Christ, the Creator of the world, have a unique witness to offer and an important message to share about the goodness and value of all creation.

### About the Bill

The Climate and Nature Bill (CAN Bill) is a proposed piece of UK legislation aimed at addressing both climate change and the biodiversity crisis in an integrated and science-based manner. It was first introduced in Parliament by Caroline Lucas MP in 2020, and has since gained substantial cross-party support from parliamentarians, scientists, and environmental campaigners. The bill is unique in that it seeks to create a comprehensive legal framework to tackle both climate and ecological breakdown together, rather than addressing them as separate issues.

### Key Objectives of the Bill:

**1. Climate Action:** The bill proposes measures to limit global warming to 1.5°C. It emphasizes immediate reductions in greenhouse gas emissions rather than relying on long-term goals like the 2050 net-zero target. The bill introduces the idea of a "carbon budget," which highlights the importance of cumulative emissions in global heating. This approach would hold the UK accountable for its full carbon footprint, including emissions from international imports and aviation.

**2. Biodiversity:** The bill seeks to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. While existing laws like the Environment Act (2021) aim to stop the decline in species abundance, the Climate and Nature Bill goes further by pushing for nature to be on a visible recovery path by 2030. This holistic approach includes protecting ecosystems that act as carbon sinks, such as peatlands and wetlands, which are critical for climate regulation. It also aligns with a previous government target, set in 2023, to protect and conserve a minimum of 30% of land and sea for biodiversity, by 2030.

**3. Citizen Involvement:** To ensure broad support for the required changes, the bill proposes the formation of a Climate and Nature Assembly. This body would consist of citizens and stakeholders tasked with advising the government on strategies to address the climate and nature crises.

#### Current Legislative Status

The Bill was dropped following the announcement of the General Election, but MP Roz Savage has recently confirmed that she will revive the Bill as a Private Members Bill. In order for the Bill to pass at the second reading in January 2024, it needs 100 MPs to support it.

#### Why the church?

Why is the church needed to support bills such as this one, when many other campaign organisations can do this effectively?

Our deanery synods feel that:

- a) No institution or individual is safe from the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss. Our churches, schools and those in our communities whom we serve will be on a frontline of this crisis, if not now then in the future, and we have a responsibility to advocate for action.
- b) The Church of England is connected to hundreds of thousands of worshippers across the country. It is vital to show positive leadership, and emphasise the role that advocacy can play in bringing about change for good.
- c) The climate and nature emergencies can and should be a reason for unity and collaboration across faiths, politics, and cultural and societal differences. Now is the time to demonstrate that unity, and offer our voice as one among many calling for action.

Therefore, Sonning and Witney deanery synods propose the following motion:

‘That this Synod, aware of the important aims of the Climate and Nature Bill, the only proposed legislation before the UK parliament which ensures a comprehensive and joined-up approach to the climate and nature emergency, whose aims are broadly:

- To make sure that the UK cuts its emissions fairly and fully to stand the best chance of keeping 1.5 degrees alive
- To make sure that the UK takes significant steps to reverse the destruction of nature by 2030
- To involve citizens in deciding the fairest way forward

endorses the 'Zero Hour' campaign to promote the Climate and Nature Bill, and calls on the General Synod also to do so.’