

27th February 2020

Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
1 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0ET

Dear Secretary of State Alok Sharma MP,

Food, climate change and the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) for COP26

We are writing to you in your capacity as both Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and COP26 President. Congratulations on your appointment to both of these important roles.

The UK has an opportunity to demonstrate global leadership as it hosts the COP26 this year. As you know, the food system is the single biggest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, and is the single biggest cause of biodiversity loss and ecosystem decline in the UK and globally, and has become an increasing focus of discussion.

Food was not a major element in the first round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). However, the greater ambition now required to maintain global warming to 1.5 degrees must now encompass action to constrain emissions from food and agriculture. Nature-based solutions, the focus for COP26, are *especially* important in food, farming, fisheries and land use.

We would like to draw your attention to two specific areas where the UK is already ahead of the curve and where including measures within the UK's NDC and hence the COP26 agenda could be used to encourage positive and verifiable actions by other nations.

First, on food waste. The UK's Courtauld Commitment is a world-leading voluntary industry agreement which in turn is linked to the global 12.3 initiative to reduce food waste and loss, and WRAP has helped households and businesses reduce food waste – almost half a million tonnes less food was wasted in the UK in 2018 than in 2015. Some major UK food businesses are now publishing their food waste figures and some are going further by asking suppliers also to report on food waste. However, many are still not taking action; or are not taking sufficient action. Introducing mandatory food waste reporting throughout the supply chain and back to the primary producers (both in the UK and internationally) would provide a fuller picture of food waste, and stimulate action to reduce it. Mandatory food waste reporting (which could be required under the data reporting powers in the new UK Agriculture Bill) could be widely replicated and provide a valuable lever for reducing food waste globally.

Second, on environmental impact more broadly. The UK Government could be taking a global leadership position to address and exclude deforestation risk in agri-commodity supply chains, such as by means of Due Diligence Obligations. Meanwhile in the UK food industry, as you know, Tesco has already made a public commitment to halving the environmental footprint of its customers' shopping basket; and Sainsbury's has committed to net zero by 2040. These are all hugely ambitious but feasible undertakings, and need to be taken up globally if we are to achieve net zero emissions globally and at the same time tackle the biodiversity crisis. Including such a target and mandatory reporting into the UK's NDC for COP26 would not only demonstrate leadership but also leverage similar commitments from other developed economies. Many of the measures required to achieve this (smarter use of nitrogen and water, zero deforestation, reduced waste, crop diversity and rotations, better animal health and genetics, agroforestry, soil carbon sequestration, farm machinery electrification) have major co-benefits and tend to raise farmer incomes.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and discuss the inclusion of food in the UK's NDC for COP26, and look forward to discussing this with you. Yours sincerely,



Professor Tim Benton,
Energy, Environment & Resources
programme at Chatham House



Shaun Spiers
Executive Director
of the Green Alliance



David Edwards
Director of Food Strategy
WWF

With the support of Pete Ritchie, CEO of Nourish Scotland and Kath Dalmeny, CEO of Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming. For correspondence: Nourish Scotland, 1 Summerhall Place, Edinburgh EH9 1PL; pete@nourishscotland.org.uk; 0131 226 1497. cc. Secretary of State for Defra, George Eustice MP