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James Benford
Director General for Surveys and Economic Statistics Group

Toby Perkins MP
Chair, Environmental Audit Committee
House of Commons
London
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Dear Mr Perkins,

As Director General for Surveys and Economic Statistics at the Office for National Statistics (ONS), I am writing to provide an update to the Committee on our recent and upcoming environment-related work which may be of interest.

Public and business attitudes to the environment, climate and nature

Our Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) and Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS) provide timely public and business attitude data around climate change and related topics, notably with regular questions including:

- Asking adults in Great Britain monthly about the important issues facing the UK today, with "climate change and the environment" as an option, with 62% selecting this when asked from 5 to 30 August 2026, the highest figure for this response since late 2024[1].
- In this same period, 88% of adults had responded as having taken some form of action in the past month to cut back the amount of water they use.
- From July to September, we have also been asking additional questions about environmental issues, including the ways in which they may have been affected by climate change, actions they may have taken to tackle environmental issues and barriers to taking action, and a new question on concern about biodiversity loss. These will be included in our next bulletin on 16 October 2026[2].
- Each quarter, we also ask UK businesses about adaptations to climate change effects and the reasons for not adapting, concern (or otherwise) about climate change affecting their business, whether they assess environmental risks, any actions to reduce emissions and protect nature and biodiversity, and any impacts from severe weather. The latest results, out today (8 October 2026)[3], found that 41% of UK businesses reported as being very or somewhat concerned about the impact climate change may have on their business, noting that the BICS excludes some industries, as detailed in the Quality and Methodology Information[4].

[1] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/publicopinionsandsocialtrendsgreatbritain/august2026
[2] https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/publicopinionsandsocialtrendsgreatbritainseptember2026
[3] https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/businessinsightsandimpactontheukeconomy8october2026
[4] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/economicoutputandproductivity/output/methodologies/businessinsightsandconditionssurveybicsqmi#:~:text=0%20and%20249.-,Coverage,-The%20sectors%20covered

- We have also brought public and business attitudes around environment matters together, most recently in November 2025[5], and before this in 2024[6]. This includes asking GB adults about environmental issues and climate change, such as if they make changes to their lifestyle to tackle climate change and the reasons for, or barriers to, making changes.

Natural Capital Accounts

We are planning to publish the next annual update of the UK's Natural Capital Accounts later this year. From 2027, we will likely be moving to an earlier release following a new timetable for publication of the National Accounts' Blue Book in July.

The current edition of the Accounts[7] estimated the total annual value of ecosystem services in the UK to be £41 billion in 2023, with the total asset value being £1.6 trillion. This release included a range of developments, including expanding urban heat regulation measurement to local authorities in Great Britain, as outlined in a blog post[8].

We are planning further developments in the upcoming edition, including greater use of industry- and product-specific deflators, and updating our approach to estimating the expenditure and health benefits ecosystem services of recreation and tourism.

We have also continued to publish 'deep dives' into different UK habitats, most recently *'Enclosed farmland natural capital accounts, UK: 2026'*[9] in July 2026 and '*Woodland natural capital accounts, UK: 2026'*[10] in February 2026. We are looking at updating some of our other, older habitat accounts in the coming years.

As part of the Surveys and Economic Statistics improvement plan, the ONS is also working towards improving our methods and systems to achieve 'official statistics' status for our annual accounts by 2029.

The annual UK Natural Capital Accounts also contribute to our inclusive income and wealth accounts[11], which look to deliver on a key recommendation from the Dasgupta Review of the Economics of Biodiversity[12].

Natural resources and their depletion in the National Accounts

The updated System of National Accounts 2025 (SNA25) brings natural resources – such as coal, oil, gas, timber and fish – onto the national balance sheet. It also includes a measure of their depletion in the calculation of Net Domestic Product (NDP) – a measure of economic output that accounts for the costs of the running down of physical capital.

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[5] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/bulletins/publicopinionsandsocialtrendsgreatbritain/october2025
[6] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/publicandbusinessattitudestotheenvironmentandclimatechangegreatbritain/2024
[7] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/uknaturalcapitalaccounts/2025
[8] https://blog.ons.gov.uk/2025/12/05/natural-cooling-how-we-are-better-measuring-the-local-value-of-nature-for-urban-cooling/
[9] https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/uknaturalcapitalenclosedfarmland2026
[10] https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/woodlandnaturalcapitalaccountsuk2026
[11] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/economicoutputandproductivity/output/articles/ukinclusiveincome/latest
[12] https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-economics-of-biodiversity-the-dasgupta-review

Once the new SNA25 changes are implemented, UK NDP will account for the depletion of natural resources. We are in the process of developing estimates, with the intention to implement these from 2030, along with other SNA25-related changes to improve quality, coherence, timeliness, and resilience of National Accounts outputs. In particular, the inclusion of natural resource depletion in NDP will enable National Accounts users to better understand the economic sustainability of growth.

This work is part of the ONS Surveys and Economic Statistics Improvement Plan[13].

Key international environmental economic standard under review

The Central Framework of the UN System of Environmental Economic Accounting (SEEA) is currently under review[14]. This covers issues such as interaction and consistency with other key frameworks (including SNA25), the social domain, and policy, as well as considering physical environmental measures, environmental activities and flows, and also assets – including the treatment of water and the atmosphere as assets.

There will be a final initial global consultation this autumn[15], covering issues such as links with SEEA Ecosystem Accounting framework and links with the social domain. Further consultations will follow in 2027, ahead of expected likely adoption of the updated standard by the UN in 2028. More information can be found here[16].

Beyond GDP & well-being

We explore quality of life and progress beyond GDP in the UK in our quarterly article, '*UK Headline Measures of National Well-being*'[17], which presents the latest estimates for seven headline measures. In Quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2026, 21.2% of UK energy consumption came from low-carbon sources, up from 19.6% compared with a year ago, and 18.9% compared with five years ago. This indicates an increase in the share of energy consumption supplied from low-carbon sources.

These quarterly headline measures complement our annual dashboard[18] which brings the full set of 60 well-being measures together. These include 8 environment indicators, including greenhouse gas emissions, household waste recycling and species abundance.

The UN Secretary General's High-Level Expert Group on Beyond GDP[19] report published earlier this year proposed 31 indicators for national dashboards to complement GDP and measure "equitable, inclusive, and sustainable well-being". These indicators included air and water quality, while the report also refers to natural capital and planetary boundaries. This is currently being considered through an intergovernmental process at the UN, with an initial 'elements' report published recently[20] following an international consultation process.

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[13] https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/ourstrategyandplans/onsimprovementplans/onseconomicstatistics/onsplanforeconomicstatisticsprogressupdatedecember2025
[14] https://seea.un.org/content/update-seea-central-framework
[15] https://seea.un.org/sites/seea.un.org/files/documents/CF_update/seea_cf_issues_final_list_march_2025.xlsx
[16] More information at https://seea.un.org/en/content/consultation-update-SEEACF
[17] https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/beyondgdpinsightsukheadlinemeasuresofnationalwellbeingseptember2026
[18] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/ukmeasuresofnationalwellbeing/dashboard
[19] https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/high-level_expert_group_on_beyond_gdp_final_report.pdf
[20] https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/beyond_gdp_elements_paper_final.pdf

In parallel, the UN Expert Group on Well-being Measurement[21], co-chaired by the ONS, and associated task teams – including on the environment, also co-chaired by the ONS – are preparing to engage on this issue at a technical level towards a proposed 'Framework for Inclusive and Sustainable Well-being' that would inform national dashboards.

Climate & Health

June 2026 marked the conclusion of the ONS's Wellcome-funded project on Standards for Official Statistics on Climate-Health Interactions (SOSCHI)[22]. This was a four-year project to develop a transparent and globally usable framework and tools for official statistics on climate and health.

This project resulted in the UN adopting six priority indicators on the effects of climate on health into global climate change indicator sets:

- Incidence of diarrheal disease cases attributable to (a) heat and (b) rainfall
- Incidence of malaria cases attributable to (a) heat and (b) rainfall
- Mortality from all causes attributable to (a) heat and (b) cold
- Mortality from suicide attributable to excess heat (proxy for mental health)
- Mortality attributable to short-term effects of outdoor air quality (PM2.5)
- Mortality attributable to effects of wildfire smoke (PM2.5)

The framework is available on the SOSCHI online platform[23], in the statistical framework report[24] and topic documents on the open-access research repository Zenodo[25].

In August 2026, we also published 'Climate-related mortality in England and Wales'[26], estimating that 40,063 deaths in England and 2,070 deaths in Wales were associated with the hottest days between 1988 and 2025.

Other recent and upcoming releases

- Earlier this year, '*Environment, climate and nature insights*'[27] brought together official statistics and analytical outputs from across the Government Statistical Service (GSS) to provide an overview on the latest trends from economic, environmental and social perspectives. This highlights long-term changes in the UK's climate, with increasing temperatures and rainfall extremes, and the pressures placed on biodiversity;
- We recently published the latest data from the UK Material flow accounts on the UK's domestic extraction: an estimated 377 million metric tonnes in 2024, imports and exports and flow of materials, including biomass, minerals and fossil fuels[28];

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[21] https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/groups/EGWM/
[22] https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/whatwedo/programmesandprojects/standardsforofficialstatisticsonclimatehealthinteractions
[23] https://climate-health.officialstatistics.org
[24] https://zenodo.org/records/20488109
[25] https://zenodo.org/communities/soschi/records?q=&l=list&p=1&s=10&sort=newest
[26] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/climaterelatedmortalityenglandandwales/1988to2025
[27] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/articles/environmentclimateandnatureinsightsuk/2026
[28] https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/materialflowaccounts2026

- Our *'Data centres and the UK National Accounts'*[29] publication explained how data centres that support AI and cloud computing are reflected in the UK's economic and environmental economic statistics;
- Our UK Low Carbon and Renewable Energy Economy (LCREE) Survey[30] estimated £77 billion turnover in 2024, with employment of 304,000 full-time equivalents. In August 2026, we also published new data on companies' research and development spending from the survey[31], alongside a plan and timeline for developing our environmental economy business surveys[32];
- Our Physical Energy Flow Accounts[33], published in September, record the flows of energy from the environment to the economy, within the economy, and from the economy back to the environment, with the total supply of natural inputs, products, and residuals in 2024 estimated to have decreased to 22.9 million terajoules;
- Later this month, we will be publishing our provisional residence-based greenhouse gas emissions estimates for 2025[34]. This measure focuses on emissions generated by UK economic activities; more information on the three official measures of UK GHG emissions, and trends over time, can be found in our regularly-updated explainer article[35], showing that emissions on all three measures have declined since 1990; and
- Created last year with other Government Statistical Service producers, we also plan to update our Environment, Climate and Nature theme workplan[36] – which details official environmental statistics and priorities for these for the year ahead – later this year.

We would be happy to provide further information to the Committee on any aspect of our work, if that would be helpful.

Yours sincerely,



James Benford

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[29] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/uksectoraccounts/methodologies/datacentresandtheuknationalaccounts
[30] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/finalestimates/2024
[31] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/bulletins/lowcarbonandrenewableenergyeconomysurveyresearchanddevelopmentestimatesuk/2020to2024
[32] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/methodologies/environmentaleconomybusinesssurveysdevelopmentplanuk
[33] https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/physicalenergyflowaccountspefa2026
[34] https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/greenhousegasemissionsukprovisionalestimates2025
[35] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/environmentalaccounts/methodologies/measuringukgreenhousegasemissions
[36] https://analysisfunction.civilservice.gov.uk/government-statistical-service-and-statistician-group/user-facing-pages/theme-based-statistics/gss-theme-workplans/gss-theme-workplan-environment-climate-nature/