

COP15 and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework – Part 2: what happened in Montreal?



07 February, 2023

In December 2022, at the second part of the Fifteenth Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) (“COP15”), the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) (“the KMGBF”) was adopted.

While the KMGBF has been heralded as a “[landmark](#)” agreement and described as nature’s “[Paris moment](#)”, both it and COP15 have received comparatively little attention in the domestic media, by contrast with, for example COP27 (discussed in an earlier [post](#) on this blog) and the Paris Agreement itself.

This is the second of two posts that on this important development in international law that considers COP15, the KMGBF and its implications for the UK.

The Road to Montreal

The aim of COP15 was to establish a strategic plan for the implementation of the Convention until 2030, to follow the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 which had set a number of targets for the previous decade which had since expired (“the Aichi Targets”). [None of the Aichi Targets had been achieved at a global level](#) by 2020, with limited progress at the national level too.

COP15 was originally scheduled to be held in China in 2020, but was postponed due to the covid-19 pandemic. Ultimately it was held in two parts: Part 1 took place virtually, hosted from Kunming, China in October 2021, and Part 2 in Montreal, Canada from 7–19 December 2022, under the presidency of China. The headline outcome was the adoption of the KMGBF at the end of COP15 Part 2. This has been widely praised as setting, for the first time, concrete targets for the protection and restoration of biodiversity, in a similar way to the 1.5 degree goal in the Paris Agreement. It is hoped that setting clearer and more quantifiable goals might make them more achievable.

The KMGBF

The KMGBF recognises that despite ongoing efforts “*biodiversity is deteriorating worldwide at rates unprecedented in human history*”. It sets 23 targets to be initiated immediately and achieved by 2030 and four long-term goals for 2050, with the overall aim that “*by 2050, biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.*”

The four goals for 2050 are:

A: to maintain, enhance or restore ecosystems’ integrity, connectivity and resilience and substantially increase the area of natural ecosystems; to halt human-induced extinction of known threatened species, reducing extinction rate and risk tenfold and to maintain genetic diversity of species

B: the sustainable use and management of biodiversity

C: the fair sharing of monetary and non-monetary benefits of the utilisation of genetic resources

D: securing adequate means of implementation of the Convention (for example, financial and technological) for all parties to it

The 23 targets for 2030 include:

Target 1: use spatial planning/land management to bring the loss of areas of high biodiversity importance close to zero

Targets 2 and 3 – the “30x30”: effectively conserve at least 30% of the world’s lands, inland waters, coastal areas and oceans, and to restore 30% of already degraded ecosystems

Target 6: reduce rates of introduction of invasive alien species by at least 50%

Target 7: reduce pollution risks and effects to prevent harmful impacts on biodiversity

Target 8: minimise the impact of climate change and ocean acidification on biodiversity

Target 10: ensure sustainable management of areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries and forestry

Target 12: significantly increase area and quality of and access to green and blue spaces in urban areas

Targets 14 and 15: integrate biodiversity into decision-making across government and business

Target 16: reduce global consumption

Target 18: reduce incentives/subsidies harmful for biodiversity by at least 500 billion USD per year

Target 19: increase level of financial resources for implementing the Convention to at least 200 billion USD per year

Reception and Analysis

As explained above, one of the main positives of the KMGBF is the far greater number of measurable outcomes against which progress can be assessed much more easily than the previous Aichi Targets. This will ensure from the outset that achieving the new targets has a better chance of success than previously. However, some of the targets are still somewhat vague and not all of them are ‘SMART’ – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound – for example, the bland aims to “reduce global consumption” and “minimise the impact of climate change”. Only part of one of the 2050 goals has a quantifiable element, namely Goal A: to reduce extinction rate and risk tenfold by 2050.

Another positive feature is the recognition – in Targets 8 and 11 – of the role that nature-based solutions can have in solving the biodiversity crisis. Nature-based solutions encompass the concept of using nature to address social, economic and environmental challenges including climate change and biodiversity. They were a focus of COP27, thus providing some alignment between the response to the climate crisis and that to loss of biodiversity.

Furthermore, the emphasis on human rights and protection of indigenous cultures in Section C of the KMGBF has reassured some who were concerned that indigenous cultures and local communities might be undermined or land grabbing measures justified on the grounds of conserving or enhancing biodiversity.

However, there are also a number of ways in which the KMGBF fell short of what it could have achieved. While the “30x30” in Targets 2 and 3 has been described as the “[centrepiece](#)” of the Framework, it fails to specify which 30% of the world’s lands or degraded ecosystems must be protected or restored. It may therefore fail to cover those areas which are most important for biodiversity or most in need of protection, which is problematic as the same areas may also be most valuable economically.

The lack of dedicated fund for implementing the KMGBF also dogged discussions in Montreal, culminating in a late objection submitted by the Democratic Republic of Congo. There is a concern among developing countries – some of the most biodiverse – that they are being asked to comply with obligations without the funding to do so, and that recourse to the Global Environment Facility will not be sufficient to enable them to implement those obligations.

Finally, while the KMGBF does make some mention of climate change and land-use change (for example through agriculture), there is limited discussion of these factors or centralisation of the relationship between them and biodiversity, notwithstanding both count among the biggest contributors to the decline in biodiversity worldwide. Notably, there is no mention at all of greenhouse gas emissions in the KMGBF.

Implementation and implications for the UK

As a decision made under an international treaty, it is ultimately for the UK Government and the devolved nations to determine how to implement the KMGBF. In its final report to the Convention regarding progress under the Aichi Targets the UK identified some areas where it was on track to achieve a particular target but a significant number of other areas where it was making progress but at an insufficient rate.

Some of the measures that the UK is already taking as part of its exit from the EU tie in with the new targets in the KMGBF: for example, provisions on environmental targets, biodiversity objective, biodiversity reports, biodiversity net gain and nature recovery in the Environment Act 2021. The recently published [environmental targets](#) resonate somewhat with the KMGBF, including the aim of halting the decline in species populations by 2030 and restoring 70% of features in marine protected areas. On 28 September 2020 Boris Johnson committed, on behalf of the UK Government, [to protect 30% of UK land by 2030](#) in order to aid nature recovery – although that is not included within the Environment Act 2021 targets.

The UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework and the devolved nations’ biodiversity action plans have been superseded by the KMGBF and will need to be updated. The [UK Government has indicated](#) that the KMGBF will be implemented through the new [Environmental Improvement Plan](#) published on 31 January 2023, although [this only applies to England](#). A recently published [report](#) by the Office for Environmental Protection, assessing progress in England against environmental targets previously set by government, identifies a worrying decline in the abundance of priority species in England and indicates that there is a long road ahead for environmental improvement.

[Esther Drabkin-Reiter](#) is a barrister at Francis Taylor Building specialising in environmental, planning and public law. She is the co-commissioning editor of this blog.

The content of this post was originally presented at FTB’s Quarterly Environment Seminar on 26 January 2023.