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Concern for the health of the natural biodiversity historically have not been hallmarks of the Hong Kong government's environmental policies to date. However, the December 2025 release of the second phase of its Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan hopefully is an indication that the current government will take more seriously its responsibility to ensure our natural environment is not completely degraded by "development" and other private and public activities.

The Editors

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HONG KONG'S STRATEGY FOR BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION AND ENHANCEMENT

Biodiversity

"Biodiversity" is defined by *Britannica* (of encyclopaedia fame) as "*the variety of life found in a place on Earth or, often, the total variety of life on Earth. A common measure of this 'variety', called 'species richness' is the count of species in a defined area. 'Biodiversity' also encompasses the genetic variety within each species and the variety of ecosystems that species create*".

The usual way of monitoring the health of biodiversity is to count or estimate the number of different species living within the subject area. Such surveys can demonstrate the comparative health of different areas.

Another approach is to recognise the unique biodiversity of those habitats which contain few, but unusual species; e.g. volcanoes, thermal vents and hot springs.

Similarly, distinct natural environments have their own unique biodiversity. Perhaps best-known examples are: rain forests and other forests; coral reefs; and wetlands/riverine ecosystems.

Although small in land size (110,000 hectares), Hong Kong has a surprisingly rich terrestrial biodiversity which, thus far, generally co-exists to an extent with our heavily urbanised population. The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) maintains a "biodiversity hotline," which is a valuable resource for those interested in the state and extent of our biodiversity. In short, the AFCD says that Hong Kong has approximately: 55 species of terrestrial mammals; 580 species of birds (including, importantly, tens of thousands of yearly migratory birds which depend on Hong Kong's limited wetlands); 91 species of butterflies; 135 species of dragonflies; and 3species of reptiles; 203 species of freshwater fish; 25 species of amphibians (frogs); 249 species of butterflies; 135 species of dragonflies; and 3,300 species of vascular plants (in addition to many other species of insects).

International acceptance of the importance of promoting biodiversity

Since at least the 1950s environmental scientists and NGOs have warned governments throughout the world of the alarming levels of biodiversity impairment and loss due to human activities and exploitation.

Gradually the international community took note of the evidence of the alarming rate of biodiversity deterioration, through such activities as: massive land-clearance for agriculture; large-scale timber harvesting (particularly of rain forests, which are now critically depleted);

mining; over-fishing and destructive fishing methods; (e.g. trawling, and dynamite/chemical fishing in coral reefs); and urban expansion.

Eventually, on 5 June 1992 the Biodiversity Convention (BC) was adopted at the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro: The BC came into force on 29 December 1993 following ratification by 30 countries. Today, all members of the UN are parties to the Convention, except for the USA. China became a party in 1995 and extended application of the BC to Hong Kong in 2011.

The BC has three broad, fundamental objectives:

- conservation of biological diversity;
- ensuring human use of biodiversity does not cause long-term damage or depletion;
- encouraging fair and equitable sharing of biodiversity's resources.

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

Since 1993 there have been regular conferences of the parties to the BC (COPs) to further the mechanisms and aims of the BC. The 15th COP (chaired by China), which took place in Kunming and Montreal in 2022, produced the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

The GBF provides more details and specifics of what is required of parties to the BC to comply with its principles and objectives. The GBF contains 23 targets to be achieved by 2030. Examples of these are:

Target 1: "Ensure that all areas are under participatory, integrated and biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning and/or management processes addressing land and sea use change, to bring the loss of areas of high biodiversity importance" close to zero, "while respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities".

Target 2: Restore at least 30% of degraded terrestrial, inland water, coastal and marine ecosystems areas.

Target 3: Ensure that at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water and coastal-marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity "are effectively conserved and managed these ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures" – but recognizing traditional and indigenous territories where applicable and recognizing rights of indigenous peoples and local communities.

Target 4: Integrate, biodiversity in decision-making at every level.

Target 6: Reduce the introduction of invasive species by 50% and minimise their impact. Eliminate, reduce or mitigate "the impact of invasive species on biodiversity and ecosystem services" by eradicating or controlling invasive alien species by at least 50%, "especially in priority sites, such as islands".

Target 9: "Manage wild species sustainably to benefit people". Ensure that "the management and use of wild species are sustainable, thereby providing social, economic and environmental benefits for people…"

Target 12: "Enhance green spaces and urban planning for human well-being and biodiversity". Significantly increase the area, quality and connectivity of, and access to, "green and blue spaces in urban and densely populated areas" sustainably.

Target 17: "Strengthen biosafety and distribute the benefits of biotechnology"

The GBF also has 4 broader, long-range goals to be achieved by 2050. Briefly, these are:

1. *Protect & Restore*
   Ensure the integrity, connectivity and resilience of all ecosystems "are maintained, enhanced or restored, substantially increasing the area of natural ecosystems by 2050";
2. *Prosper with Nature*
   Adopt practices and polices aimed at valuing, maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and ecosystems to achieve sustainable development for the benefit of present and future generations;
3. *Share Benefits Fairly*
   Ensure that monetary and non-monetary benefits from use of "genetic resources" are "shared fairly and equitably"
4. *Invest & Collaborate*
   Provide adequate means of implementation of the Global Bio Framework – including financial resources, capacity-building and technical/scientific cooperation – to developing countries, especially small island states, to progressively close "the biodiversity gap of $700 billion per year".

Hong Kong's biodiversity protection strategy

Parties to the BC are obligated to publish and implement a biodiversity strategy and action plan (BSAP) to give effect to the objectives of the BC and the applicable framework agreed at successive COPs, currently the GBF.

The government adopted its initial BSAP in 2016, which was replaced by the current BSAP in December 2025 covering the period to 2035 (BSAP2035). The government said at the time that the update was made "to align with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the China National Biodiversity Conservation and Action Plan (2023-2030)." The government's approach to biodiversity matters and its BSAP obligations in particular, is partly described in the BSAP2035 as follows:

The Government is committed to enhancing biodiversity conservation for our future generations, supporting the sustainable development of Hong Kong, and contributing to national and global efforts on biodiversity conservation. Having duly considered the extensive feedback gathered through consultations with the general public and stakeholders from academia, professional bodies, the rural sector and private organisations, and taking into account local actual conditions, the Government promulgated a city-level Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP) on 21 December 2016.

To take forward a total of 67 specific actions falling under four strategic areas, namely "Enhancing Conservation Measures", "Mainstreaming Biodiversity", "Improving Our Knowledge" and "Promoting Community Involvement", in the first phase of BSAP, the Government set up in 2016 a dedicated inter-departmental working group to coordinate and monitor the implementation of actions among relevant bureaus/departments. The Government has also actively invited stakeholders to participate in their implementation, particularly in measures aimed at strengthening biodiversity conservation and mainstreaming biodiversity. Furthermore, the Government has regularly sought advice from the Advisory Council on the Environment (ACE) and reported to it the implementation progress.

The government's broad biodiversity mission is stated as:

Our mission is to value, conserve and restore the rich biodiversity of Hong Kong, to ensure that it is sustainably managed and wisely used, and to promote the mainstreaming of biodiversity issues and values across all sectors of the society, with social and economic aspects duly considered and balanced, so that ecosystems of Hong Kong will be resilient and will continue to provide essential services, and the precious environment that supports and enriches the life of Hong Kong people will be passed on to the future generations.

The BSAP (2035) has 10 specific "overall targets", namely:

1. *Refined policies, regulations, institutional frameworks and technological innovations for biodiversity conservation*
2. *An expanded network of effectively managed protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures*
3. *Enhanced and widely mobilised societal efforts in habitat restoration*
4. *Strengthened protection of endangered species against poaching and trafficking*
5. *Effectively managed risks and impacts posed by invasive alien species*
6. *Further consolidated Hong Kong's position as an international green and sustainable finance hub*
7. *Reduced pollution in aquatic environments, enhanced waste recycling rates, and advanced the implementation of a circular economy*
8. *Widely adopted nature-based solutions and upgraded urban blue-green spaces*
9. *Enhanced public knowledge of biodiversity, raised awareness and boosted community participation*
10. *Launched a series of biodiversity-positive joint initiatives, demonstrating more cohesive and effective collaboration across jurisdictions and stakeholders*

The BSAP2035 is divided into 6 separate "conservation sections" (plus additional sections dealing with Long Valley Wetland Park and other such geographical areas, as well as sub-topics, such as "*genetically modified organisms*"), namely:

- endangered species
- flora
- fauna
- wetland
- marine
- nature

The BSAP2035 has 30 rather vague priority conservation broad objectives. For example, in the "Flora Conservation" section, it is noted that Hong Kong has approximately 3300 varieties of plants, of which 2100 are native. The priorities here are: (a) the study of flora using the Hong Kong Herbarium, and (b) encouraging the establishment of native flora.

For marine conservation, the emphasis is on monitoring marine animals, such as the Chinese white dolphin. There is no firm plan for adding to Hong Kong's meagre(approximately 6%) portion of our marine biodiversity currently designated as marine sanctuaries and parks', which is a sharp contrast to the 40% of land dedicated by the British administration as country parks.

Conclusion

This is necessarily a superficial overview of the BSAP (2035). It is an important document which deserves our full attention and support. The government is to be commended for addressing the vitally important issue of biodiversity – that is, ecological health – in an apparently serious way.

However, the government's approach is, as usual, heavily anthropocentric, rather than valuing the health of our environment for the environment's own sake, which is the approach of more enlightened environmental agencies.

As well, proposed conservation steps are generally expressed in very vague terms; they are mostly "mother-hood" statements of good intentions, as versus clear, factual proposed steps to be implemented; e.g. aim for at least 40% (?) of our marine ecosystems to be protected as marine parks/sanctuaries. Above all, there are times when development proposals should be rejected if they are likely to result in significant loss or impairment of biodiversity. It is difficult to recall a single instance of this occurring thus far.

No doubt, however, it is better for the future of Hong Kong and its much-pressured environment to have in place BSAP (2035) than to not have it, if the government backs up the fine words with effective on-the-ground action!

TOWN PLANNING

Kam Tin North Outline Zoning Plan referred back for amendment

On 30 April 2026, the Town Planning Board announced that the Secretary for Development has referred the approved Kam Tin North Outline Zoning Plan (OZP) to the Board for amendment to reflect the latest land use proposals.

The OZP incorporating the respective amendments will be exhibited for public inspection under the provisions of the *Town Planning Ordinance*.

[*Town Planning Board Press Release*, 30/04/2026]

Tsz Wan Shan, Diamond Hill and San Po Kong Outline Zoning Plan amended

On 15 May 2026, the Town Planning Board announced amendments to the approved Tsz Wan Shan, Diamond Hill and San Po Kong Outline Zoning Plan (OZP).

The amendments mainly involve:

1. rezoning a site abutting Choi Hung Road from "Open Space" ("O") and "Government, Institution or Community" ("G/IC") to "Open Space (1)"; and
2. rezoning a site abutting Sheung Hei Street from "O" and "G/IC" to "G/IC".

[*Town Planning Board Press Release*, 15/05/2026]

Fanling North Outline Zoning Plan amended

On 22 May 2026, the Town Planning Board announced amendments to the approved Fanling North Outline Zoning Plan (OZP).

The amendments mainly involve:

1. rezoning a site in Area 10 from "Government, Institution or Community" to "Residential (Group B)1" ("R(B)1");
2. rezoning of two sites in Area 10 from "Residential (Group B)" to "R(B)1";
3. rezoning a site in Area 7 from "Village Type Development" to "Residential (Group C)" ("R(C)");
4. revising the building height restriction for a site in Area 7 zoned "R(C)";
5. rezoning a site in Area 3 from "Other Specified Uses" ("OU") annotated "Logistics Facility" ("OU(Logistics Facility)") and "Agriculture" ("AGR") to "OU" annotated "Industry"; and
6. rezoning a site in Area 3 from "OU(Logistics Facility)" to "AGR".

[*Town Planning Board Press Release*, 22/05/2026]

Approved Tuen Mun Outline Zoning Plan referred for amendment

On 5 June 2026, the Town Planning Board announced that the Secretary for Development has referred the approved Tuen Mun Outline Zoning Plan (OZP) to the Board for amendment to mainly reflect Lingnan University's campus expansion plan.

The OZP incorporating the amendments will be exhibited for public inspection under the provisions of the *Town Planning Ordinance*.

[*Town Planning Board Press Release*, 05/06/2026]

DIGEST OF LEGISLATION

Revised emissions standards for cleaner commercial vehicles

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) announced amendments to the qualifying standards (QS) for first registration tax concessions for heavy and light duty environment-friendly commercial vehicles (EFCVs). These changes will apply from 1 April 2026, to 31 March 2027. Key updates include:

1. Heavy Duty Commercial Vehicles (over 3.5 tonnes):
   - New QS requires at least 30% lower nitrogen oxide (NOx) emissions than the China VI-b or Euro VI emission limits.
   - Since China VI-b and Euro VI NOx limits are currently the same, the actual emission threshold remains unchanged.

2. Light Duty Commercial Vehicles (up to 3.5 tonnes):
   - For non-taxi vehicles: QS tightened to require NOx emissions no higher than the China 6b limit (which is 40–60% of the Euro 6 standard).
   - For taxis: QS remains unchanged, requiring at least 80% lower NOx emissions than the Euro 6 limit.

The tax concession rates and caps for EFCVs will remain the same. The government has offered these incentives since April 2008 to promote cleaner commercial vehicles and improve air quality. The EPD reviews the QS annually based on technology, market conditions, and emission regulations.

[*Press Release, Government of Hong Kong*, 09/03/2026]

Dogs to be permitted in certified restaurants

A new legislative proposal, published in the Government Gazette on 13 March 2026, introduces amendments to the city's food premises regulations. The *Food Business (Amendment) Regulation 2026* will be presented to the Legislative Council on 18 March for deliberation and approval.

The primary amendment will modify the *Food Business Regulation (Cap 132X)* to authorise the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene to approve the presence of dogs in designated food establishments. This permission will be conditional upon meeting stipulated regulatory and hygiene standards.

A government spokesperson highlighted that the policy aims to support the catering sector by opening new, pet-inclusive business avenues, while fostering a more accommodating social environment for pet owners. The design ensures optional participation: food business operators must apply for authorisation, and approved venues will be required to post clear notices at their entrances, enabling the public to make informed choices.

The roll-out will adopt a cautious, phased approach, prioritising public health and hygiene. The initial phase proposes a limited quota of 500 to 1,000 approved establishments. The government will oversee the implementation and adjust subsequent phases based on practical experience and feedback.

Following Legislative Council endorsement, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will publish detailed guidelines for the application process. The first set of approvals for eligible restaurants is projected to be issued in approximately mid-2026.

[*Press Release, Government of Hong Kong*, 13/03/2026]

Government advances green maritime fuel goals

The *Dutiable Commodities (Amendment) Bill 2026* gazetted on 29 May seeks to amend the *Dutiable Commodities Ordinance* (Cap. 109) by creating specific offences and a presumption-of-fact provision targeting the misuse of duty-exempt methyl alcohol (methanol). This forms part of the government's two-stage plan to support Hong Kong's ambition to become a green maritime fuel bunkering hub.

Stage one commenced in October 2025 with a regulation granting duty exemption for methanol used as fuel in outbound vessels. Stage two, addressed by the new Bill, introduces offences for using, selling, or supplying duty-exempt, non-denatured methanol outside its authorised purpose, and requires delivery with a prescribed notice emphasising its restricted use. It also establishes a presumption that certain methanol is dutiable unless proven otherwise.

The Transport and Logistics Bureau noted that Hong Kong has already conducted its first two methanol bunkering operations, in March 2026. With demand expected to rise, the Bill aims to deter misuse, safeguard the dutiable commodities control regime, and underpin the city's role as a green maritime fuel centre. The Bill is to be tabled in the Legislative Council on 10 June.

[*Press Release, Government of Hong Kong*, 25/05/2026]

WEST KOWLOON CULTURAL DISTRICT (WKCD)

West Kowloon cultivates global cultural hub

The West Kowloon Cultural District (WKCD) has transformed 40 hectares of reclaimed harbourfront land into a world-class cultural precinct, establishing itself as Hong Kong's definitive "city living room". At its core is an 11-hectare waterfront Art Park, a landscaped public realm where visitors picnic, exercise, and engage with outdoor art installations. This green lung provides critical recreational space and frames the district's iconic architectural ensemble, which harmonises Eastern heritage with global contemporary art. The district's programming and infrastructure have proven immensely popular, attracting over 17 million visitors in 2025 alone.

Architecturally, the district is a dialogue between tradition and modernity. The Hong Kong Palace Museum and the Xiqu Centre, dedicated to Cantonese opera, anchor the cultural heritage wing. In contrast, the M+ Museum of visual culture and the Freespace performing arts venue represent cutting-edge contemporary expression. This architectural ecosystem will expand with the planned 2027 opening of the WestK Performing Arts Centre, designed to host international dance and theatre productions, further enriching the cultural offering on this reclaimed site.

From an urban planning perspective, the district exemplifies sustainable placemaking. The extensive waterfront park mitigates the urban heat island effect and promotes low-carbon leisure activities, while the pedestrian-priority layout encourages walking and reduces vehicular reliance. The integration of large-scale cultural facilities with accessible green space has created a vibrant public domain that supports major events like Art Basel Hong Kong and the Hong Kong International Cultural Summit, which gathered over 2,000 global representatives in 2024.

Having evolved from a greenfield reclamation project to a mature cultural hub in just over two decades, the WKCD now rivals established global centres. With nearly 70% of its museum visitors coming from the Mainland and overseas, it has cemented Hong Kong's role as an international arts nexus. Future plans involve deepening collaborations with mainland and international partners to further strengthen the city's position as a super-connector for cultural exchange between China and the world.

[*China Daily*, 29/03/2026]

Government proposes acceleration legislation

The Hong Kong government has formally submitted a legislative proposal to the Legislative Council aimed at accelerating the development of the Northern Metropolis. The paper outlines six core policy areas designed to overcome procedural bottlenecks, including streamlining urban planning, expediting land resumption, and facilitating the use of innovative construction technologies.

A key focus is reforming the process for obtaining Construction Noise Permits. The Development Bureau argues that, given the urgent, industry-led timeline of the Northern Metropolis and its low residential population, procedures can be simplified. The new "target-oriented" approach would allow applicants more flexibility in planning noise mitigation based on the actual environment, rather than adhering to rigid, predefined rules.

Additional proposed measures include extending the standard validity of these noise permits from six months to one year to reduce administrative burdens. The legislation also seeks to facilitate cross-border resource flow for infrastructure and proposes using a "whitelist" system to manage personnel movement in the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Co-operation Zone.

Finally, the government is seeking a foundational power to establish statutory corporations for specific areas, such as industrial parks, through subsidiary legislation. Should such corporations be created in the future, any necessary capital injections would subsequently be applied for through the Legislative Council’s established funding mechanisms.

[*The Standard*, 17/03/2026]

Legislation aims to lure developers

The Development Bureau has stated that the proposed dedicated legislation for the Northern Metropolis is designed to increase the area’s appeal to developers. A central goal is to significantly expedite the lengthy process for changing land use in non-conservation zones, aiming to reduce the current nine-month procedure to just two months.

Permanent Secretary for Development, Doris Ho, explained that corporate efficiency is a key priority. She noted that investment promotion colleagues have emphasised the necessity of making industrial sites available quickly, as lengthy planning timelines can cause firms to lose interest and invest elsewhere.

Regarding the scope of the streamlined procedures, Ho clarified that they would not automatically apply to sensitive areas like wetland buffers. Eligibility will depend on the statutory land use of each specific site, with areas containing conservation zones being excluded from the fast-track process.

Ho also highlighted the complementary role of innovative construction technology. Adopting such methods is expected to further boost the mega project’s efficiency by reducing both construction time and overall costs, making development in the Northern Metropolis more viable and attractive.

[*RTHK*, 20/03/2026]

Northern Metropolis evictions of villagers

When Law Yin-ping moved into a village house in Yick Yuen Tsuen in Lam Tei more than a decade ago with her granddaughters, it never crossed her mind that they could one day be made homeless – and forcibly separated.

The Tuen Mun village falls within the government’s planned Hung Shui Kiu/Ha Tsuen New Development Area, which is set to become a high-end professional services and logistics hub under the Northern Metropolis megaproject.

Law, who is nearly 70, said yesterday it was not until Friday that she was ordered by the Lands Department to move out by the end of the month.

Law was among about 100 villagers from Yick Yuen Tsuen and nearby Sun Fung Wai who were told to move out by the end of the month. The notifications had only been made in the past week, they said, leaving them very little time to prepare.

The villagers added that many of them had only been assigned public housing flats in the past few months or even weeks, and the homes were not ready. They would have to move twice if they were forced to leave this month, they said.

The villagers have called on the government to extend the deadline by three or four months and stipulate exact deadlines in writing.

Ken Mak, who lives at a flower farm that he runs in Sun Fung Wai, was abruptly notified two weeks ago to leave by the end of May. A fourth-generation villager, Mak has about 15 trees planted by his grandfather, and he has been giving them away for relocation. The sudden announcement has made it difficult to relocate the trees in time.

Mak, nearly 50, also expressed concerns over the fate of dogs kept by the villagers. “Under the current policy, dogs could only be brought to public housing flats as companion dogs, which would require medical proof,” he said.

Mak added that each household was only allowed one companion dog, meaning that some residents with multiple pets had to resettle them elsewhere, but all animal welfare organisations that initially offered to help had reached their capacity.

Mak estimated that between 800 and 1,000 dogs could be affected by the land acquisition.

Also facing eviction are 100 residents from Tin Sam Tsuen in Yuen Long.

Villager Vicky Chan, in her forties, said her family had only been told by the Lands Department last Thursday that they should move out "next week", without specifying a day.

Chan was also told the government had expected "fierce resistance" and that police officers would be present to assist with land acquisition.

She added the government's buy-back offer for her family-owned house was 30 to 40 percent lower than the market rate, while the alternative relocation options were either remote or posed potential health hazards. Chan accused the Lands Department of forcing them out of their homes without addressing their repeated concerns.

In response to the South China Morning Post's inquires, the Development Bureau said it had issued letters and statutory notices to affected residents, telling them of the expected deadlines years ago, while extending the period at its discretion.

"The government's consistent policy is to ensure no one would become homeless because of the government's land acquisition," it said. It added that it would also refer cases, including Law's case, to the Social Welfare Department with residents' written consent.

According to the bureau, there were about 560 households in the area, with 240 of them ineligible for rehousing.

Some 200 households had moved out as of mid-April, while about 90 were required to leave in May or July, it added.

[*SCMP*, 11/05/2026]

Lawmakers demand clarity on sports project

Hong Kong legislators have raised concerns over the HK$9.96 billion (US$1.27 billion) joint-user development in the Northern Metropolis, questioning whether its planned fencing arena can justify the cost and meet international standards. The project, located in Kwu Tung North and Fanling North, forms part of the broader Northern Metropolis initiative to boost housing, economic growth, and community infrastructure. Facilities will include a sports centre with a fencing hall, a community hall, retail spaces, and a multipurpose building for government services, a library, and childcare. Construction is slated to begin later this year, with completion targeted for 2030.

Permanent Secretary for Development Doris Ho Pui-ling defended the budget, stating that cost-control measures were implemented and further savings could emerge through tender evaluations. She confirmed that more detailed plans — covering design, layout, and justification — would be presented to the Legislative Council's public works subcommittee in June.

Sports-sector lawmaker Kenneth Fok Kai-kong stressed the need to clarify the venue's purpose: whether it will serve purely local community needs or host elite international fencing tournaments. He noted Hong Kong currently lacks a permanent dedicated fencing arena, resulting in repeated setup costs. Fellow lawmaker Vincent Cheng Wing-shun echoed calls for transparency, highlighting that hosting global events requires extensive facilities beyond seating capacity, including transport links, premium seating, and hospitality services.

Ho responded that the Kwu Tung venue is designed to accommodate Fencing World Cup events, with potential for temporary retractable seating to expand capacity. The Development Bureau will consult legislators, relevant bureaus, and the Fencing Association of Hong Kong, China ahead of the June meeting. The project follows Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu's 2023 policy address, which pledged to expand dedicated sports facilities following Olympic successes by fencers Cheung Ka-long and Vivian Kong Man-wai.

[*SCMP*, 29/05/2026]

HONG KONG BRIEFING

New nature-based solutions design guidelines

The Civil Engineering and Development Department and the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department have jointly launched the Hong Kong Nature-based Solutions Design Guidelines (HKNbSDG). The guidelines provide practical planning and design frameworks for infrastructure projects, aiming to promote the use of Nature-based Solutions (NbS) to address societal challenges. By protecting, sustainably managing, and restoring ecosystems, the HKNbSDG seeks to balance development with nature conservation while enhancing Hong Kong's climate resilience and supporting sustainable development.

The guidelines are built upon three core principles: promoting ecosystem diversity at multiple scales, embracing human-nature coexistence for mutual benefit, and improving resilience through NbS. Developed with reference to international standards, as well as Mainland and local practices, the document provides clear technical guidance and local case studies. This is intended to help engineering teams seamlessly integrate ecological considerations into their project workflows, taking into account Hong Kong's unique natural and urban context.

Speaking at the launch, Under Secretary for Environment and Ecology Miss Diane Wong highlighted that NbS is key to achieving harmony between humans and nature. She noted that the Hong Kong Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2035 advocates the wider application of NbS in urban planning to tackle urban challenges while strengthening conservation. Under Secretary for Development Mr David Lam added that NbS is not new to Hong Kong, citing existing "blue-green infrastructure" and eco-shoreline projects. The guidelines will help mainstream these approaches, with the Northern Metropolis—particularly the San Tin Technopole—serving as a key opportunity to integrate NbS into large-scale development.

[*Press Release, Government of Hong Kong*, 03/03/2026]

HK Electric dismantles sole commercial wind turbine

HK Electric will decommission and dismantle Hong Kong's only commercial-scale wind turbine, known as Lamma Winds, located on Lamma Island. The company stated that the turbine, which reached the end of its 20-year designed lifespan in February 2026, has fulfilled its mission of assessing local wind power feasibility and raising public awareness of renewable energy. The primary reason cited for its removal is the inability to source specialised spare parts or a suitable replacement model for the site.

Over its operational life since 2006, the 71-metre turbine generated approximately 16 million kilowatt-hours of electricity. This output is equivalent to about 5.19 hours of generation from the adjacent Lamma Power Station. According to HK Electric, the project saved an estimated 13 million kilogrammes of carbon emissions, equating to the annual carbon absorption of around 560,000 trees.

The company emphasised its commitment to renewable energy, highlighting that the combined capacity of solar panels within its supply area in 2025 was about 22 times that of Lamma Winds. It also pointed to its solar Feed-in Tariff Scheme and cooperation with the government to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. However, the decision comes amid broader global climate concerns, with recent reports warning of record planetary energy imbalance.

Despite previous proposals for larger offshore wind farms near Lamma, plans have been put on hold due to cost concerns. The dismantling of Lamma Winds leaves a gap in Hong Kong's utility-scale wind power generation, as the city faces predictions of abnormally high temperatures in 2026.

[*Hong Kong Free Press*, 26/03/2026]

Climate change disrupts kapok bloom cycles

Hong Kong's iconic kapok trees, locally admired as "hero trees" for their striking spring display, are increasingly failing to shed their leaves in winter. This has resulted in a less dramatic bloom, as red flowers now often appear alongside green foliage. Conservationists view the changing appearance as a worrying indicator that nature's rhythms are being disrupted by a warming climate.

According to Lam Chiu-ying, former director of the Hong Kong Observatory, it has become common over the past decade to see kapoks with both flowers and leaves simultaneously. The phenomenon is linked to increasingly mild winters, with Hong Kong having just recorded its warmest winter on record—a mean temperature of 19.3 °C from December to February, two degrees above normal.

Ecologist Angie Ng notes that blooming now occurs approximately two weeks earlier than usual, likely influenced by temperature and moisture changes. She explains that when trees have to sustain both old leaves and new flowers, a tree's resources are diverted, potentially leading to fewer blooms. This shift not only diminishes the trees' visual spectacle but also risks disrupting local ecosystems.

The ecological impact could extend further, as changes in flowering timing affect birds and bees that rely on nectar and pollen. Ng warns that such desynchronisation within the intricate web of species interactions may trigger ripple effects across broader ecological chains, underscoring how climate change is unsettling even long-familiar natural patterns in the city.

[*Hong Kong Free Press*, 04/04/2026]

Electric minibus trial

An electric minibus tailored for the city's roads, went on display at the Hong Kong Science and Technology Park in Sha Tin on 11 May 2026.

A Hong Kong electric commercial vehicle solutions company has teamed up with a mainland Chinese manufacturer to launch the vehicles. The government is set to stop registering new fossil-fuel commercial vehicles in 2035.

Home-grown Wai Lik New Energy unveiled five new electric models. Founder Ng Chi-wai said the vehicles were engineered specifically for the city's narrow streets and steep gradients. The models include minibuses, buses and a medical vehicle.

The company, which partnered with Fujian-based Wisdom Motor, expects to deliver the new electric minibus in the third quarter of this year.

Of the city's more than 4,000 minibuses, only about 10 are currently electric, according to Chau Kwok-Keung, one of the chairmen of the Hong Kong Taxi and Public Light Bus Association.

Wai Lik New Energy aims to capture more than half of the local market in three years. "With the government's goal to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and a full halt on new registrations of petrol and hybrid vehicles by 2035, the introduction of zero-emission public minibuses has become inevitable," Ng said.

Ng said each vehicle would cost more than HK$1 million.

[*SCMP,* 12/05/2026]

Call to prioritise hydrogen adoption

The adoption of hydrogen and related facilities, such as refuelling stations for heavy vehicles at container terminals and other industrial areas, should be prioritised to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050, a think tank has said.

Our Hong Kong Foundation set out nine recommendations in a policy research report released yesterday to advance hydrogen use, covering vehicle uptake, testing facilities, supply and governance.

The report was unveiled at the three-day International Hydrogen Development Symposium at the Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wan Chai.

Speaking at the launch, the Foundation's president, Jane Lee Ching-yee, said the city should seize opportunities in emerging industries and establish a distinct role in the country's broader hydrogen energy strategy.

"The next few years will be a critical juncture for Hong Kong's hydrogen development to transition from pilot projects to widespread adoption," Lee said.

"Hong Kong must foster close collaboration among the public, government, business, academic and research sectors, to integrate the city into the mainland's overarching energy strategy and find Hong Kong's own unique positioning."

Hydrogen is considered a potential low-carbon energy source. It contains no carbon in its molecular structure and produces only water vapour when used in fuel cells, helping to reduce air pollution.

According to the city's *Climate Action Plan 2050*, the transport sector accounted for about 18 per cent of Hong Kong's total carbon emissions in 2019, making it the second-largest source after power generation, which contributed 66 per cent. The plan identified hydrogen as a key energy source to help the sector eventually achieve zero carbon emissions.

According to the Our Hong Kong Foundation report, the city should prioritise hydrogen adoption scenarios with greater emissions-reduction efficiency and scalability, such as building refuelling stations for heavy-duty vehicles in industrial areas.

The report said it was advantageous to focus on heavy transport, as heavy-duty vehicles that ran on hydrogen benefited from significantly shorter refuelling times of around 10 to 15 minutes, compared with an hour or more for electric trucks.

The Foundation also suggested implementing incentives, such as extending land lease terms to encourage new areas, including the Northern Metropolis, to build hydrogen facilities.

Testing and accreditation services for hydrogen energy equipment, such as fuel cells and high-pressure containers, should be set up to attract enterprises for professional testing, the report said. Noting hydrogen energy projects involved the environment, transport and development bureaus, the report also called for setting up a steering committee and an energy office to improve coordination.

[*SCMP,* 20/05/2026]

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE ENVIRONMENT (ACE)

The 273rd meeting of the Advisory Council on the Environment (ACE) featured discussions on two major development projects.

Concerning the San Tin Technopole (STT) Project, the discussion centred on updates to the Habitat Creation and Management Plan, particularly the Sam Po Shue Wetland Conservation Park (SPS WCP). Members reviewed cross-border wetland collaboration with Shenzhen, the application of AI for wildlife monitoring, phasing plans for the SPS WCP (Phase 1 by 2031, Phase 2 by 2039), and the integration of Nature-based Solutions (NbS) and green finance. The Council commended the Civil Engineering and Development Department (CEDD) for its efforts to balance development with ecological conservation, and encouraged the CEDD to aim for a net gain in conservation.

In relation to the Reclamation at Lung Kwu Tan (LKT), the discussion focused on the EIA report's recommendations from the 163rd EIASC meeting. Members reviewed proposed mitigation measures including eco-shorelines, artificial reefs, AI-powered cameras for egret monitoring, and a marine mammal exclusion zone. The Council unanimously endorsed the EIA report with four specific conditions requiring submission of detailed plans for smart marine mammal watching, an Environmental Committee for the eco-shoreline, an Artificial Reef Deployment and Management Plan, and AI-powered egretry monitoring devices. Members appreciated the project proponent's proactive engagement with environmental groups and responsiveness to comments.

Updates on the implementation of Environmental Plans, Environmental Monitoring and Ecological Mitigation / Enhancement Measures of the San Tin Technopole Project

The Chairman invited Members to refer to ACE Paper 1/2026, which detailed the Habitat Creation and Management Plan, the Interim Wetland Enhancement Plan, the Implementation Plan for Wetland Enhancement Measures at Mai Po, the Detailed Design Plan for Establishment of Wildlife Corridors, and environmental monitoring results. These were required under Approval Conditions for the San Tin Technopole (STT) project EIA report. There was no declaration of interest.

Presentation and Q&A session

Ms Joyce Lau (Project Manager (North) at CEDD) made opening remarks while Mr Freeman Cheung briefed Members on the STT project's progress.

Wetland management

Regarding cross-border collaboration, Ms Joyce Lau explained that the CEDD had studied Shenzhen Futian Mangrove Nature Reserve's successful experiences. A member added that a 2000-hectare wetland conservation park would be provided in the Northern Metropolis (NM) development, and AFCD had signed an MoU with Futian to facilitate ecological data exchange and coordinated management efforts, including removal of invasive species like Sonneratia, and joint bird surveys.

On water supply for the Mai Po Lung Village Egretry, Ms Joyce Lau shared that CEDD's initial plan was to create water ponds through accumulation of rainwater, with final designs pending consultation with environmental groups and AFCD. Regarding desilting works at *gei wai*, Ms Lau noted key challenges of safety and site accessibility. The CEDD will explore more cost-effective and environmentally friendly methods, potentially requiring a new water channel into Deep Bay for desilted material disposal.

AI applications

A Member suggested that AI could provide useful data for habitat preservation and flood management, and such data should be shared with the public. Ms Joyce Lau said that the CEDD had made reference to the EPD's AI bird recognition system in preparing tender specifications. Data would be managed by the government and shared with the public as far as possible, excluding sensitive information such as exact locations of rare species. A member commented that intelligent sluice gates and an integrated control centre would use AI for water level control, visitor management, and wildlife monitoring.

Project management

In respect of the phasing plan for the Sam Po Shue Wetland Conservation Park (SPS WCP), Ms Joyce Lau said Phase 1 (works requiring no land acquisition) would be completed by 2031, while Phase 2 (involving land acquisition) would be completed by 2039. A Member highlighted the importance of green finance tools. Ms Lau informed members that Nature-based Solutions (NbS) Design Guidelines were promulgated in early March, and CEDD would consult stakeholders on green finance. Regarding management of the SPS WCP, a member explained that a mixed model involving different stakeholders (fisheries groups, NGOs) would be adopted, similar to Long Valley Nature Park.

Nature-based solutions (NbS)

Ms Joyce Lau explained that the CEDD had worked closely with the AFCD on the NbS Design Guidelines, which provided a framework for integrating natural ecosystems into infrastructure projects. On bird-friendly building designs, Ms Lau confirmed that the CEDD had developed guidelines referencing overseas standards. A member responded that the EPD would explore working out a generic guideline for future EIA projects.

Public engagement

Ms Joyce Lau explained that a public consultation exercise would be conducted in March and April 2026 to gather views from fisheries organisations, eco-tourism groups, green organisations, and academics. CEDD would maintain close communication throughout the development process.

Members were pleased with CEDD's efforts. The Chairman noted that the STT project could provide valuable insights for future updates of the NbS Design Guidelines and demonstrate Hong Kong's commitment to balancing development and ecological conservation.

Internal discussion session

A Member hoped the STT project could be expedited in the context of the national 15th Five-Year Plan. Ms Fabia Tam (Secretary of the meeting) responded that the Government was committed to expediting NM development, including introducing dedicated legislation for simplified statutory procedures. The Chairman sought clarifications on whether three fish ponds were part of the SPS WCP or STT project. A member indicated the ponds fell within the SPS WCP boundary.

A Member opined that the STT project could serve as an exemplary model for nature finance, such as blue-green bonds. Regarding bird-friendly design, a member responded that the EPD would explore working out a generic guideline for future projects.

A member complimented the CEDD for its responsiveness in showing video records demonstrating environmental benefits. He stressed that CEDD should use data to scientifically validate enhancement measures for other NM projects. The Chairman remarked that CEDD should be encouraged to achieve net gain in conservation, and the ACE would issue a letter to encourage CEDD.

A Member suggested outdoor education could commence before the SPS WCP's completion. Mr Simon Chan noted security concerns for areas under construction. Ms Fabia Tam considered that Long Valley Nature Park could serve as a reference. A member remarked that the CEDD could be requested to submit a reply letter addressing Members' comments on publicity, AI application, and implementation timeline.

Report on the 163rd Environmental Impact Assessment Subcommittee meeting

The Chairman invited Members to refer to ACE Paper 2/2026, which reported the EIASC's recommendations on the EIA report for Reclamation at Lung Kwu Tan (LKT).

Presentation and Q&A session

Mr Ricky Wong (Head of Civil Engineering Office at the CEDD) briefed Members on the project background while Mr Franki Chiu (representative of the Project Consultant) reported key EIA findings and mitigation measures.

Green channels

Mr Ricky Wong explained that the government would conduct studies before reclamation to ensure integrated development of green channels with amenity, pedestrian pathways, and low-rise building height with appropriate setback to protect the local egretry. Mr Franki Chiu added that new sewage treatment works would prevent direct sewage discharge into the eastern green channel. Regarding the 34 hectares of existing land, a member responded that roughly half was privately-owned (primarily brownfield operations) and half was government land.

Environmental impacts

A Member appreciated the proposed improvement measures including reduced reclamation area, natural shoreline preservation, and building height restrictions. On artificial reefs, Mr Ricky Wong said details would be worked out in consultation with AFCD. On AI monitoring for the egretry, Mr Ricky Wong shared that the CEDD would proceed with installation of AI cameras in 2026 for continuous monitoring beyond the breeding season.

Regarding the sea-crossing bridge, Mr Ricky Wong said a separate EIA would be submitted tentatively by 2027. Reclamation works would mainly use marine vessels to minimise road traffic impacts, with construction tentatively commencing in 2031 subject to funding approval.

Internal discussion session

A Member sought clarification on the egret monitoring period. Mr Simon Chan (Assistant Director (Conservation) at the AFCD) clarified the typical breeding season is March to August, but observation started from February to account for climate fluctuations. A member noted the pre-construction survey would cover February to August as recommended in the EIA report.

Following previous principles, the ACE would include a brief introduction to the proposed conditions. The meeting unanimously agreed to endorse the EIA report with the following four conditions.

- During marine dredging and DCM works, a marine mammal exclusion zone (250m radius) would be implemented, with a 30-minute scan prior to work start. Condition (1) required details of smart initiatives (Passive Acoustic Monitoring, AI camera) to enhance marine mammal watching.
- Eco-shoreline spanning about 2km would be provided. Condition (2) required setting up an Environmental Committee (including government, green groups, academics) to advise on the Eco-shoreline Study Report.
- Condition (3) required submission of an Artificial Reef Deployment and Management Plan covering design, quantity, location, maintenance, and monitoring.
- Condition (4) required setting up an AI-powered device to enhance pre-construction and construction-phase monitoring of the Lung Kwu Sheung Tan Egretry.

The Project Proponent should submit to the Director of Environmental Protection for agreement or approval: (i) details of smart initiatives for marine mammal watching (3 months before construction); (ii) establishment of an Environmental Committee with terms of reference (3 months before construction); (iii) an Artificial Reef Deployment and Management Plan (3 months before construction); and (iv) setup of an AI-powered device for egretry monitoring (3 months before pre-construction survey).

CLIMATE CHANGE

Funding gap threatens next round of IPCC climate science reports

The latest IPCC session in Bangkok was clouded by persistent differences over when its flagship reports should be published and concern over cost-cutting proposals

A lack of money is hampering the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and a substantial funding boost is needed to ensure its scientists can complete their next set of flagship reports, the chair of the UN body has warned.

Funding from governments fell in 2024 and 2025 and the organisation could run out of money by 2028 unless it receives fresh funds or implements spending cuts, chair Jim Skea told an official meeting of IPCC scientists in Bangkok last week, according to the Earth Negotiations Bulletin (ENB), which provides coverage of UN negotiations.

Skea told the IPCC's 64th session that without a substantial increase in contributions, the completion of the next set of reports, known as AR7, would be jeopardised.

To deal with this crisis, the IPCC is now considering cutting costs by holding meetings virtually, reducing staff travel, media training, recruitment, pay and website upgrades and cutting down on the editing, translating and printing of its reports, according to scenarios prepared by the IPCC secretariat.

Nepal's representative Manjeet Dhakal told Climate Home News he was concerned about the situation, while the ENB report said Japan's government had called the funding crunch alarming.

While South Korea and Sweden announced increased funding, the European Union – a major funder – cautioned against assuming past contributors will continue to give the same amounts, ENB reported.

No end to row over reports

The five AR7 reports, which will assess how the climate is changing, how to adapt, how to cut emissions, a synthesis report and a special report on climate change and cities – are further threatened by a long-running disagreement over when they should be completed.

While some countries want them finished by 2028, so they can feed into the UN climate process's five-yearly global stocktake, others say this is too rushed and want to stick to the IPCC's usual seven-year cycle, meaning reports would be finished by 2030.

Despite not being on the initial agenda, this issue dominated much of the scientists' time in Bangkok. With time running out as delegates flew home, the meeting was unable to agree even on a plan to reach agreement by the next meeting in October 2026, ENB said.

Delegates also failed to agree to approve reports of previous meetings, after arguing over transparency, and were divided on how to respond to a scientific conference on climate tipping points.

Funding cuts

To fund its work, the IPCC relies on voluntary funding from governments. Most of the money is spent funding the participation of scientists from developing countries, the IPCC says.

But a report prepared by the IPCC secretariat for the Bangkok meeting said that "in recent years, the IPCC's financial situation has come under strain, including amid current geopolitical challenges".

It did not mention any governments, but reduced US funding has had a major impact, the IPCC's financial documents show.

During Joe Biden's presidency, the US gave the IPCC an average of $1.7 million a year, but President Donald Trump announced he would end US support and the latest data shows the US contributed no money in the first half of 2025.

The IPCC spent more money than it received in 2024 and the shortfall grew in 2025, prompting the raft of cost-cutting proposals – from switching to online meetings to cutting budgets for translating reports.

Further cost savings could be achieved, the IPCC said, by suspending IPCC travel to outreach events, freezing non-essential updates to the IPCC's website, not creating any new staff positions until at least 2029 and no longer providing media training for the IPCC's scientists.

Richard Klein, a scientist who has been involved in the IPCC since 1994, told Climate Home News there was "a growing discrepancy between the ambition of the IPCC and what is feasible given the budget".

"In the end it means more pressure on authors who are already volunteering their time, and quite possibly less inclusivity of experts from developing countries," he said.

Nepal's Dhakal, who advises the Least Developed Countries group, called on governments to give more money to the IPCC and for the IPCC secretariat to "explore options to reduce costs without compromising inclusivity, particularly for small delegations and those with limited capacity to engage".

Bitter divides on timeline

Since January 2024, delegates to IPCC meetings have been arguing over when the deadline for the AR7 reports should be. Some delegations, including Saudi Arabia and India, have opposed attempts to ensure that the reports are published by 2028, in time to inform the second global stocktake.

The issue was not included on the Bangkok meeting's formal draft agenda, with ENB reporting that Skea said this was because he did not think delegations had shown enough flexibility to be able to resolve it.

After pressure from Saudi Arabia, India and several others, the issue was added to the agenda despite delegations complaining that their governments had not authorised them to discuss it and that many countries were not represented at the meeting.

But, after four days, delegates were unable to even agree on a plan on how to reach agreement by the next meeting in October. Nepal's Dhakal said he was "concerned with the lack of agreement on delivering the full AR7 package by 2028 to inform the second global stocktake".

France's Environment Ministry said in a statement that it had "deep concern at attempts to slow down and arbitrarily delay the publication schedule for the reports".

Klein said that, while scientists are continuing their work on these reports, the likelihood of them being finalised before the second global stocktake "diminishes with every delay in making a decision".

Transparency and tipping points

Delegates were also divided on the usually-routine issue of approving the summaries, prepared by the IPCC secretariat, of previous meetings.

According to ENB, France, Germany and Belgium wanted reports to specify speakers' names. While France said reports should include everything that has been said by all delegates, Saudi Arabia responded that this would be unacceptable. The issue was deferred to the next meeting in October.

Saudi Arabia and India also objected to a reference in a report to a workshop that took place at Paris's Sorbonne University in November on "tipping points and their consequences". They argued that the concept of tipping points, which are thresholds beyond which the Earth's climate changes suddenly, was contentious at the IPCC, ENB reported.

While journalists are not allowed to observe IPCC sessions, staff from ENB – which is an arm of the IISD think tank – are allowed to watch sessions and report on what is said.

[*Climate Home News*, 02/04/2026]

US targets World Bank's green goals

Closed-door talks over the World Bank's climate agenda have stalled, as the US pushes to scrap green targets and expand support for fossil fuels.

The World Bank's work to tackle climate change is under threat as the Trump administration pushes the lender to ditch its green targets and step up support for fossil fuel infrastructure in the developing world.

With the World Bank's key climate policy framework set to expire in June, closed-door negotiations between shareholders and the bank's management over its successor have stalled, sources familiar with the discussions told Climate Home News.

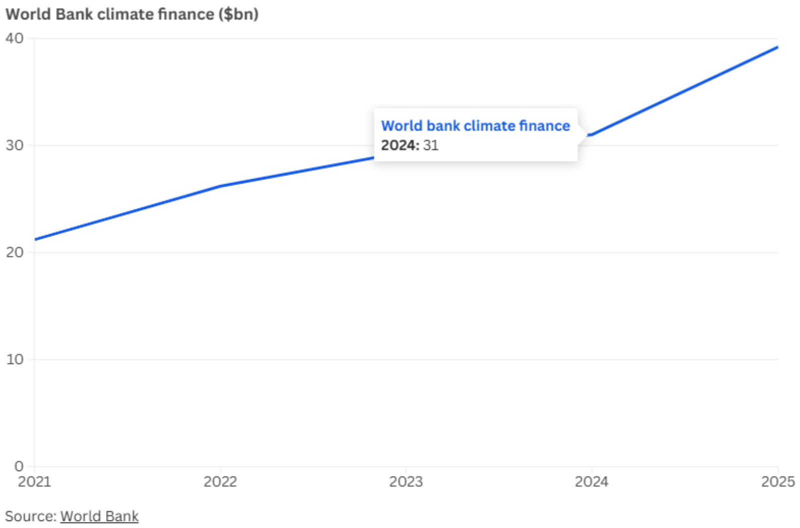
This throws into doubt the future direction of the world's largest provider of international climate funding to developing countries. Rajneesh Bhuee, just transition lead at campaigning group Recourse, said that scrapping the bank's climate targets and markers would be "worrying".

First introduced in 2021, the Climate Change Action Plan (CCAP) has driven an expansion in the World Bank's funding for emission-cutting projects and support for vulnerable communities dealing with the growing impacts of climate change.

The plan embedded climate considerations across the bank's lending practices and committed it to directing a defined share of its annual budget – now 45% – to projects with climate benefits.

Since the plan was introduced, the World Bank's climate funding nearly doubled from $21 billion in 2021 to $39 billion in 2025.

World Bank climate finance has nearly doubled since the climate plan was introduced



Trump administration's attack on climate change action

That trajectory is now under threat. Since Trump's return to the White House, the US – the bank's largest shareholder – has waged an aggressive campaign against the bank's climate commitments.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said on Wednesday that the World Bank should abandon its "distortionary" climate finance target, claiming without evidence that it "undermines efforts to reduce poverty and spur economic growth".

"We welcome the coming expiration of the Climate Change Action Plan, and upon its long-overdue expiration, expect the bank to immediately shift its myopic focus on climate," he added in the statement issued during the World Bank's Spring Meeting in Washington DC this week.

Earlier in the week, Bessent pushed back against the scientific consensus that human activities, and the burning of fossil fuels in particular, are the dominant drivers of global warming.

Progress called into question

With negotiations heading for a crunch, battle lines are hardening. Sources familiar with discussions told Climate Home News that European countries, backed by some Latin American nations and small island states, are holding firm in their push to see a version of the climate plan extended.

But nations reliant on the production of fossil fuels, like Russia and the Gulf States, have sided with the US, they said. The decision will ultimately be taken by the bank's management, led by Biden appointee Ajay Banga, but with powerful advice from the governments that make up the bank's shareholders.

Jon Sward, environment project manager at the Bretton Woods Project, said that any watering down of the World Bank's climate agenda would be damaging.

"Over the past decade until last year, the scope and depth of the bank's climate work, though still imperfect, had been expanding. That feeling of progress is being called into question," he told Climate Home News.

Multilateral development banks (MDBs) led by the World Bank have been handed an increasingly central role in providing funding for climate action to developing nations, as many rich governments channel a large share of their climate finance through the MDBs.

MDBs accounted for over 40% of public international climate finance in 2022, the latest year for which data is available. Growing support from MDBs and shrinking overseas aid budgets in developed countries suggest their role is likely to have grown even bigger since then.

'Imperfect' plan better than no plan

The World Bank's climate approach has faced repeated criticism. Activists accused the lender of relying heavily on loans and adding to the debt piles of vulnerable countries, and of inflating its climate finance numbers by overstating the real climate benefit of its projects.

But Recourse's Bhuee, said that, despite its flaws, a weak climate action plan is still better than no climate action plan. "Imperfect as the current plan is, it provides a basis for accountability," she added.

While experts do not expect an immediate drop in climate funding, the removal of formal targets could weaken internal incentives to prioritise climate projects and reduce transparency over how funds are allocated.

In the short term, it would give the US administration a big symbolic win in its wide-ranging quest to hollow out international financing for climate action and boost support for planet-warming fossil fuels.

Gas compromise

"The US strategy is to run out the clock," an expert with knowledge of the discussions told Climate Home News. "It is using the June deadline to either get rid of the plan altogether or as leverage to extract concessions on a weakened climate plan in exchange for something else like funding upstream gas".

The World Bank committed to stopping support for gas extraction projects in 2019, but that ban has been reconsidered since Trump's return to office. Bessent said on Wednesday that the World Bank should support an "all-of-the-above" approach to energy, including gas, oil and coal.

"The US has outsized importance over the World Bank's policy," the expert said, "but it is incumbent on the European shareholders to show some spine here".

[*Climate Home News*, 16/04/2026]

Climate scientists urge abandoning fossil fuels

Unveiled on Friday in Santa Marta, Colombia, a set of a dozen policy recommendations, summarising the Santa Marta Academic Dialogue, is intended to feed into ministerial discussions on equitable ways to reduce dependence on coal, oil and gas during next week's "First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels".

The policy insights urge countries to create "whole-of-government" plans to "dismantle legal, financial and political barriers" to the energy transition.

Johan Rockström, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), said the push for a global transition away from fossil fuels offers "a light in the tunnel" during a "very dark moment" of geopolitical conflict and climate extremes.

"Science is here to serve," Rockström told a packed Santa Marta Theatre. "We're today launching the Science Panel for the Global Energy Transition (SPGET) as a service, as a global common good for all countries, all sectors, all regions to connect to the best science enabling a transition away from fossil fuels."

Draft roadmap for Colombia

Colombian Environment Minister Irene Vélez Torres said the new SPGET panel "addresses a longstanding shortcoming" in international climate science, by creating a scientific body dedicated solely to overcoming the world's reliance on fossil fuels.

"It's a first-of-its-kind, designed to organise in the next five years the scientific evidence that allows cities, regions, countries and coalitions to take the big leap," Vélez told the event in Santa Marta.

As an example of how countries can move forward – even when their economies are closely tied to the production and use of dirty energy – a group of European scientists presented a draft roadmap to phase out fossil fuels in Colombia, with inputs from the Colombian government. It will be used as a basis for further consultation in the Latin American nation to define the way forward.

Piers Forster, director of the Priestley Centre for Climate Futures at the University of Leeds and co-author of the roadmap, said it shows "a clear pathway to economic and societal benefit", with average annual investment of $10.6 billion producing net economic benefits of $23billion per year by 2050.

The document says fossil fuels in Colombia can be phased out through energy efficiency measures, coupling renewable generation with energy storage, and switching to electrified transport. But, it adds, the government will need to plan for reduced revenue from fossil fuel exports, which roughly half by the mid-2030s.

"What matters now is moving beyond headline targets to create credible, policy-relevant roadmaps, enabling a just and effective transition," Forster said in a statement. Brazil is also working on a national roadmap for its own economy, as well as leading a voluntary process to produce a global roadmap.

IPCC hobbled by politics

Currently, the world's top climate science body – the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) – requires countries to sign off on each "summary for policymakers" of its flagship science reports. This has led to a politically fraught process that has increasingly seen some oil-producing governments making efforts to weaken its recommendations.

In a bid to focus scientific debates on the phase-out of fossil fuels, the new SPGET was created based on a mandate from last year's COP30. It is also meant to come up with scientific recommendations at a faster pace than the IPCC's seven-year cycle.

Natalie Jones, senior policy advisor at the International Institute of Sustainable Development (IISD), called the new scientific panel "historic", as it will be "more specific, more targeted and potentially more agile" with its advice on phasing out coal, oil and gas than the IPCC's exhaustive scientific synthesis reports.

The panel will be co-chaired by Cameroonian economist Vera Songwe, PIK's chief economist Ottmar Edenhofer and Gilberto M. Jannuzzi, professor of energy systems at Brazil's Universidade Estadual de Campinas. It will be composed of between 50 and 100 scientists divided into four working groups: transition pathways, technological solutions, policies and finance.

Under the 12 insights for the Santa Marta process, the other group of scientists recommended banning new fossil fuel infrastructure, mandating "deep cuts" in methane emissions, implementing carbon levies on imports, and de-risking clean energy investments via interventions from central banks, among others.

[*Climate Home News*, 25/04/2026]

Iconic Antarctic species now endangered

Two Antarctic species – the emperor penguin and Antarctic fur seal – were downgraded to "Endangered" on the Red List of Threatened Species, the world's most comprehensive information source on the global conservation status of animal, fungus and plant species.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the global authority on the status of the natural world, which compiles the list, made the announcement on Thursday. It said climate change was the main reason behind the reclassification.

The emperor penguin was downgraded from "Near Threatened" to "Endangered" based on projections that its population will halve by the 2080s owing to changes in sea-ice. Meanwhile, the Antarctic fur seal has moved from "Least Concern" to "Endangered" following a nearly 50% decrease in its population between 1999 and 2025 caused by a reduction in food availability.

Rising ocean temperatures and shrinking sea ice are pushing krill – a food source for seals – to greater ocean depths in search of colder water. The IUCN said krill shortages at South Georgia, an island in the South Atlantic Ocean, have "dramatically" reduced the survival of pups in their first year, leading to an ageing breeding population.

A global outbreak of avian flu, which started in 2020, has also decimated populations of the southern elephant seal, leading to its reclassification from "Least Concern" to "Vulnerable".

The new assessments will be published on the emperor penguin and seals' species profiles as part of a broader Red List update later this year.

[*Earth. Org*, 30/04/2026]

Sea temperatures nearing peak

The European Union's climate monitor has reported that ocean temperatures are edging towards record highs as conditions shifted to a potentially powerful El Nino weather pattern.

Samantha Burgess from the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF) said sea surface temperatures in recent days were just shy of the all-time highs of 2024 – and May looked set to break its own record.

"It's a matter of days before we are back in record-breaking ocean SSTs (sea surface temperatures) again," Burgess, strategic lead for climate at ECMWF, said.

The Copernicus Climate Change Service said daily sea surface temperatures in April "gradually inched" towards near-record highs, reflecting the transition to El Nino expected in coming months.

Copernicus, which is overseen by the ECMWF, said sea surface temperatures in April were the second-highest measured, with marine heatwaves breaking records in the ocean between the tropical Pacific and United States. Last month, the World Meteorological Organization said El Nino conditions could develop as soon as May to July.

One phase of a natural climate cycle in Pacific Ocean temperatures and trade winds, El Nino influences global weather and increases the likelihood of drought, heavy rainfall and other climate extremes. It also adds heat to a planet already warmed from burning fossil fuels. The last El Nino helped make 2023 and 2024 the second-and first-hottest years on record, respectively.

Some weather agencies forecast the coming event will be even stronger-possibly rivalling a "super" El Nino 30 years ago.

Zeke Hausfather, a scientist at Berkeley Earth, an independent climate research organisation, wrote last week that a strong El Nino could significantly raise the chances of 2027 becoming the hottest year ever recorded.

Burgess said it was still too early to predict the event's intensity with confidence as forecasts made during the northern hemisphere spring could be unreliable. But she said regardless of its strength, this El Nino would not go unnoticed.

"We are likely to see 2027 exceed 2024 for the warmest year on record," she said. El Nino's impact on global temperatures typically came the year after its peak, she added.

Copernicus said the upturn in ocean temperatures over March and April indicated the transition from neutral conditions to El Nino was under way.

Scientists stress that El Nino alone is not driving the extraordinary ocean warmth or its knock-on effects, such as coral bleaching and marine heatwaves.

The phenomenon was unfolding against a backdrop of long-term global warming caused primarily by greenhouse gas emissions, with oceans absorbing around 90 per cent of the excess heat generated by human activity.

In its monthly bulletin, Copernicus said April was the third-hottest globally and 1.43 degrees Celsius above the 1850-1900 pre-industrial benchmark.

Arctic sea ice remained near record lows in April while Europe endured varied conditions that set the stage for a hotter and drier summer at risk of drought or wildfires, it said.

"We just keep seeing extremes. Every month we have more data that the climate change impact is creating these extreme events," Burgess said.

[*SCMO*, 09/05/2026]

UK halves Green Climate Fund contribution

After promising £1.6 billion to the UN's flagship climate fund in 2023, the UK government has now said it will only hand over half as much.

The reduction, which is part of a wider UK shift from development aid to military spending, will restrict the GCF's ability to fund projects that help developing countries cut emissions and adapt to climate change.

Harjeet Singh, director of the Satat Sampada Climate Foundation, called the UK's decision "moral bankruptcy", noting that Britain has an historical responsibility for climate change "as a nation built on fossil-fuelled industrialisation".

Liane Schalatek, who observes GCF board meetings for the Heinrich Böll Foundation, said the UK's move was "an unfortunate signal", especially as it comes just before the GCF launches its next fundraising round.

She noted that the UK has been the biggest contributor to the GCF, and "with the UK halving – where doubling would be needed – this will give permission to others to do the same".

There are fears that other countries could follow suit as governments in Europe trim their aid budgets, while the US has refused to deliver any further money under climate change-sceptic President Donald Trump and has also given up its seat on the GCF board.

The GCF was established in 2010 and has since funded over $15 billion of climate projects across the developing world. Its financing comes mainly from developed countries pledging money in regular replenishment rounds.

During the last GCF replenishment round in 2023, the UK's previous Conservative government promised £1.622 billion ($2.18 billion) for the 2024-27 period, with then development minister Andrew Mitchell saying the pledge "underlines our sustained commitment to tackling climate change".

But, as of March 2026, the UK had only handed over £655 million ($885 million) of that pledge, which is its third to the fund, and has now informed the GCF it will only deliver £815 million ($1.1 billion). The GCF's total funding for the 2024-2027 period is $10.149 billion.

[*Climate Home News*, 14/05/2026]

WHO urged to declare climate crisis a public health emergency

An independent pan-European commission convened by the World Health Organisation has concluded that the climate crisis should be declared a global public health emergency. In a report presented to European ministers, the 11-strong commission argued that without urgent action, millions more people will die unnecessarily.

The commission recommended that the WHO issue a "public health emergency of international concern" (Pheic) – the highest level of health alert, previously used for infectious diseases such as Covid and Mpox. While such a declaration would not reverse climate change on its own, it would trigger the coordinated international response that the scale of the health crisis demands but has not yet materialised.

Katrín Jakobsdóttir, a former prime minister of Iceland who chaired the commission, told the Guardian: "The climate crisis may not be a pandemic, but it's still a public health emergency that threatens humanity's very health and survival. If we don't act more quickly and comprehensively, many millions more people could die or face life-changing illness."

The report cites multiple health threats justifying a Pheic. These include the international spread of vector-borne diseases such as dengue and chikungunya, as well as health impacts from extreme weather events, global heating, food insecurity, and air pollution from wildfires. The commission stated that climate change poses "an immediate and long-term threat to health, economic, food, water, environmental, personal, community and national security."

Sir Andrew Haines, professor of environmental change and public health at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and the commission's chief scientific adviser, warned: "If we carry on emitting at current rates, that will accelerate the risks to health for both current and future generations including more people suffering and dying from excess heat, floods, infectious diseases, air pollution, preterm births and food insecurity."

The commission also urged governments to stop subsidising fossil fuels, which are directly responsible for 600,000 premature deaths a year in Europe alone. In 12 European countries, fossil fuel subsidies exceeded 10% of national health expenditure in 2023, and in four countries they exceeded the entire health budget. "European governments are subsidising the very industries responsible for their own citizens' premature deaths," Jakobsdóttir said. "We need health leaders to really step into the climate debate and not just be on the receiving end of it."

The report called for measures to tackle disinformation, greater use of national climate health impact assessments, and recognition that climate change is also a mental health crisis. It also recommended that healthcare systems become more resilient, noting that hospitals are often built on floodplains, are not energy efficient, and struggle with extreme heat. The healthcare sector accounts for 5% of global emissions worldwide.

Dr Hans Kluge, WHO regional director for Europe, responded: "The case for acting on climate now is not just environmental. It is a security argument, a health argument and an economic argument, all at once. And it is a moral imperative." He committed to ensuring that climate change is treated as the health emergency it is across the WHO European region's 53 member states.

[*The Guardian*, 16/05/2026]

WMO issues urgent El Nino alert

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has issued a stark warning: there is an 80% likelihood that an El Niño event will occur during June–August 2026; probabilities rise to near or above 90% for its continuation until at least November. Most forecast models suggest the event will be at least moderate and could become strong.

In a video statement, UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged immediate global action. "The science is clear: El Niño is arriving on our doorstep in the coming months with 90% certainty. The world must treat it as the urgent climate warning it is. El Niño conditions will pour fuel on the fire of a warming world," he said. He called for ending the addiction to fossil fuels, accelerating the shift to renewables, protecting the most vulnerable, and delivering early warning systems for all.

According to WMO observations, sea-surface temperatures in the central-eastern Equatorial Pacific—the key monitoring reference—were approaching El Niño thresholds from late April to mid-May. Unusually warm subsurface conditions across the tropical Pacific, with temperatures exceeding 6°C above average, are feeding this surface warming. The Southern Oscillation Index, the atmospheric component of El Niño, is also consistent with developing warmer conditions.

WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo emphasised the need for preparedness. "We need to prepare for a potentially strong El Niño event – which will exacerbate drought and heavy rainfall and increase the risk of heatwaves both on land and in the ocean," she said. She noted that the most recent El Niño, in 2023-24, was one of the five strongest on record and played a role in record global temperatures in 2024.

El Niño, part of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO), is characterised by warming of ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern Equatorial Pacific. It typically occurs every two to seven years and lasts around nine to twelve months. While there is no evidence that climate change increases the frequency or intensity of El Niño events, a warmer ocean and atmosphere amplify its impacts, including heatwaves and heavy rainfall.

Typical impacts of El Niño include increased rainfall in parts of southern South America, the Horn of Africa, and central Asia. Conversely, drier conditions are expected over Central America, northern South America, the Caribbean, Australia, Indonesia, and parts of southern Asia. During the boreal summer, El Niño's warm waters can fuel hurricanes in the central and eastern Pacific while hindering formation in the Atlantic Basin.

In response, the Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum predicts a high likelihood of below-normal rainfall during the critical June–September rainy season. South Asia is expected to receive below-average monsoon rainfall, and Central America anticipates drier and warmer conditions.

The WMO has also issued a complementary Global Seasonal Climate Update, projecting above-normal temperatures in nearly all parts of the globe for June–August 2026. These conditions increase risks of heat stress, compounding hazards, and accelerated drought development.

WMO Secretary-General Saulo confirmed that the organisation will carefully monitor conditions in coming months to inform decision-making by governments, humanitarian agencies, and climate-sensitive sectors. "Advance seasonal forecasts and early warnings are vital to save lives and cushion the impact on our economies and our communities," she concluded.

[*World Meteorological Organization*, 02/06/2026]

UN warns of AI's hidden environmental costs

By 2030, the global data centres powering artificial intelligence will consume 945 terawatt-hours of electricity annually – nearly triple the combined use of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nigeria, home to more than 650 million people. Even more striking, the associated water footprint will equal the basic domestic water needs of all 1.3 billion people in Sub-Saharan Africa, while the land footprint will exceed 14,500 square kilometres, roughly twice the size of the Jakarta metropolitan area.

These findings come from a new report, *Environmental Cost of AI's Energy Use: Carbon, Water and Land Footprints*, released on 3 June by the United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH). The scientists argue that assessing AI's environmental impact through carbon emissions alone is dangerously misleading.

"This report is not a case against artificial intelligence," said Professor Kaveh Madani, Director of UNU-INWEH. "It is a call for using it responsibly and addressing its unintended impacts proactively to make it sustainable and equitable."

Every kilowatt-hour of electricity used to train or run an AI system carries a water footprint from cooling and power generation, and a land footprint from energy infrastructure and supply chains. Crucially, these three footprints do not move in the same direction. Switching from coal to bioenergy, for example, can cut the carbon footprint of electricity by 70 per cent while increasing its water footprint more than thirty-fold and its land footprint a hundred-fold.

"What surprised us most is how often the choices that look greenest from a carbon perspective end up worse for water or for land," said Dr. Miriam Aczel, lead author. "If we keep judging AI sustainability by carbon alone, we might think renewables make AI infrastructure clean, but that is solving one problem while creating others, often in places that didn't ask for it."

Public discussion has focused on training massive models like GPT-3 or GPT-4. However, the report reveals that inference – the continuous running of models to answer everyday user prompts – accounts for 80 to 90 per cent of total AI energy use. ChatGPT alone processes an estimated 2.5 billion prompts daily, consuming roughly 383 gigawatt-hours of electricity per year. Offsetting associated carbon emissions would require 2.6 million tree seedlings grown for ten years. The water footprint equals the annual domestic needs of roughly 500,000 people in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Individual query energy varies enormously. A typical chat query uses approximately 200 times the energy of basic text classification. A single AI-generated image requires about 1,450 times that baseline, while a short AI-generated video can consume as much electricity as 200,000 spam classifications.

The report invokes the Jevons Paradox: as models become more efficient, they become cheaper and are used more frequently. Without explicit limits on tokens or resolution, efficiency gains are wiped out by volume growth.

The benefits and burdens are highly unequal. In Ireland, data centres accounted for 21 per cent of metered electricity in 2023, exceeding all urban households. The grid operator has paused new approvals around Dublin until 2028. In Querétaro, Mexico, expanding computer infrastructure is drawing on water supplies amid prolonged droughts. In Uruguay, plans for a water-intensive data centre coincided with a 2023 drought that left tap water unsafe to drink.

Furthermore, only 32 countries host AI-specialised data centres and over 90 per cent of capacity is concentrated in the United States and China. More than 150 countries currently lack sovereign AI computer infrastructure yet bear the burdens of critical mineral extraction and electronic waste processing. AI infrastructure could generate up to 2.5 million tonnes of e-waste annually by 2030 – equivalent to discarding nearly 250 Eiffel Towers each year.

The report calls for a six-principle framework: transparency, efficiency by design, equity and environmental justice, lifecycle responsibility, global cooperation, and sustainable use. Governments should integrate AI infrastructure into energy and water planning. Industry should treat model selection and default outputs as footprint determinants. Investors should treat carbon, water and land footprints as material risks.

“The global system building artificial intelligence must also govern it sustainably and fairly,” said Professor Tshilidzi Marwala, Rector of the United Nations University. “AI can certainly advance prosperity and human well-being. Whether it does so equitably is now a governance question, not a technical one.”

[*United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health*, 03/06/2026]

Missing Paris Agreement climate plans

A number of nations have still not submitted a nationally determined contribution to the UN, breaching a key requirement of the Paris Agreement.

At least fifty countries have yet to submit a nationally determined contribution (NDC) climate plan to the United Nations, even though the latest set of plans was due in 2025 – and among them, around half have failed to provide information on why they have not met the deadline.

More than a year past an initial deadline of February 2025, the Paris Agreement's Implementation and Compliance Committee (PAICC) met this March and said 55 countries had yet to communicate an NDC to the UN climate body. According to the UN's registry, two have since submitted their plans.

A key requirement of the landmark 2015 Paris Agreement is that governments publish a more ambitious NDC every five years, setting targets to reduce their planet-heating emissions and outlining their policies to adapt to climate change, in order to meet the accord's goals on limiting global warming and protecting people from its effects.

The latest set – the third round of plans, with new targets for 2035 – was due in 2025.

Following India's recent submission, those yet to publish their new NDCs are mostly poorer and smaller nations, with low emission levels. The biggest emitters in the group are Egypt, Vietnam, Argentina and the Philippines. The US and Iran are not signed up to the Paris Agreement, although the US submitted a 2035 NDC under the Biden administration before Donald Trump pulled the US out of the UN climate accords.

Some nations have argued that they cannot put together an NDC - which requires a significant amount of work in tracking emissions and consulting on how to curb them across the economy – due to exceptional circumstances. For example, a letter from a Sudanese official to the PAICC committee, seen by Climate Home News, says that the country's civil war has led to the suspension of its NDC preparation.

However, other countries have failed to communicate with the PAICC, which is tasked with encouraging governments to respect their commitments under the Paris Agreement.

In a report on its March 27 meeting, the PAICC board said it “noted with concern” that 28 countries had not provided information about either their NDCs or their biennial transparency reports on the climate action they are taking, or both. This was “despite several reminders”, it said.

Despite a push from some board members, the committee did not agree at this meeting to name these 28 countries. But it may do so at a meeting in September.

One source who has seen the list of countries told Climate Home News it was a “mixed crowd” of developing nations, including least developed countries, small island developing states, emerging economies and at least one government with a representative on the PAICC board.

The PAICC decided to send individual letters to these governments requesting that they engage with the committee and “reminding them that it shall take appropriate measures with a view to facilitating implementation and promoting compliance” with the Paris Agreement.

The PAICC's rules of procedure state that it should be “non-adversarial and non-punitive” and the strongest measure it can take is to issue a formal public finding naming a government that has breached the Paris Agreement rules - something it has yet to do. In 2023, it opted for a softer response in a report, noting that the Vatican had not filed an NDC and that Iceland had not told the UN how much climate finance it planned to provide.

Joanna Depledge, a historian of the UN climate process and research fellow at the University of Cambridge, said that “any measures stronger than naming and shaming would have been unacceptable” to some governments when they were negotiating the Paris Agreement.

She added that “naming and shaming in the international arena is not trivial” because governments do not like to be exposed as non-compliant. “But if the PAICC cannot even name, then that is a serious problem,” she warned.

Tejas Rao, who is researching the PAICC as part of a doctoral thesis at Cambridge, said the architects of the Paris Agreement made it less enforceable so as to try and prevent countries leaving or staying out of the agreement as happened with its predecessor, the Kyoto Protocol.

While the Paris Agreement asks all governments to set their own emissions-reduction targets, the 1997 Kyoto Protocol set specific targets for developed countries.

When in 2011 it became clear that Canada was not going to meet those targets, it quit the agreement rather than face formal non-compliance proceedings and a multibillion-dollar obligation to buy carbon credits to cover the shortfall, Rao said.

Japan and Russia also declined to endorse some of their emissions reduction targets and the US never ratified the Kyoto agreement. “Enforcement proceedings became politically toxic,” exposing “the limits of punitive compliance regimes”, Rao said.

The idea of the Paris Agreement's less stringent compliance system is to engage with governments and keep them within the system rather than threaten them with sanctions and potentially push them out, he added.

Rao said this was "the right trade-off" because governments comply when they feel they have chosen to sign up to the rules rather than having them imposed. He noted that back in April 2025, 171 governments had yet to submit their NDCs and this figure is now down to just over 50.

"We've got countries that are at least reporting NDCs," he said, adding that PAICC is "working as it was designed to". "It is issuing findings of fact and non-compliance, it's initiating discussions with parties and, as a result of those discussions, the non-compliance figures are coming down every time."

[This article was amended after publication, on May 13, to clarify that the PAICC has yet to issue a formal public finding naming countries that do not comply with the Paris Agreement.]

[*Climate Home News*, 12/06/2026]

REGIONAL & INTERNATIONAL

CHINA

Huge increase in China's solar exports

China exported a record amount of solar components and photovoltaic panels last month, signalling that manufacturers are benefiting from stronger demand for clean energy technologies as the Iran war has caused oil and gas prices to soar and threatens supply shortages.

The world's second largest economy exported solar panels, cells and wafers capable of generating 68 gigawatts (GW) in March – the equivalent of Spain's entire solar capacity, according to analysis of data from Chinese customs authority by global energy think-tank Ember.

March's volume was more than double exports in February and 49% more than the previous record set in August 2025. Three-quarters of the increase came from exports to Asia and Africa.

As well as the Middle East conflict, a rush by Chinese manufacturers to export solar modules and cells before an export tax rebate ended on April 1 – adding 9% to solar panel costs – was a major driver of the export spike.

"The volumes exported are absolutely gigantic," Euan Graham, senior analyst at Ember, told Climate Home News.

"We will see over the coming months how much of that was linked to the tax rebate and how much of that is additional demand – that might vary by region. But certainly a big part of this is the response to the energy crisis," he said.

China ends tax rebate on solar exports

For Qi Qin, China analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, March's export surge was most likely driven by the end of the tax rebate, which brought forward demand, with high energy prices bolstering the trend.

"Policy deadlines can create a sharp one-month jump in export, while by comparison, higher oil and gas prices caused by the war are… more likely to support demand over the medium term rather than explain such a strong spike in one single month," she told Climate Home News.

Earlier this year, the Chinese government announced that the solar export tax discount was coming to an end in an effort to prevent trade disputes and cut-throat competition for low-price exports among Chinese manufacturers.

In a note at the time, Trivium China, an analysis firm that specialises in monitoring Chinese government policy, said Beijing had become frustrated with state tax resources being used to subsidise overseas consumers. "The rebate end date is all but certain to trigger one of the largest module production booms in history" to beat the April export price hike, it said.

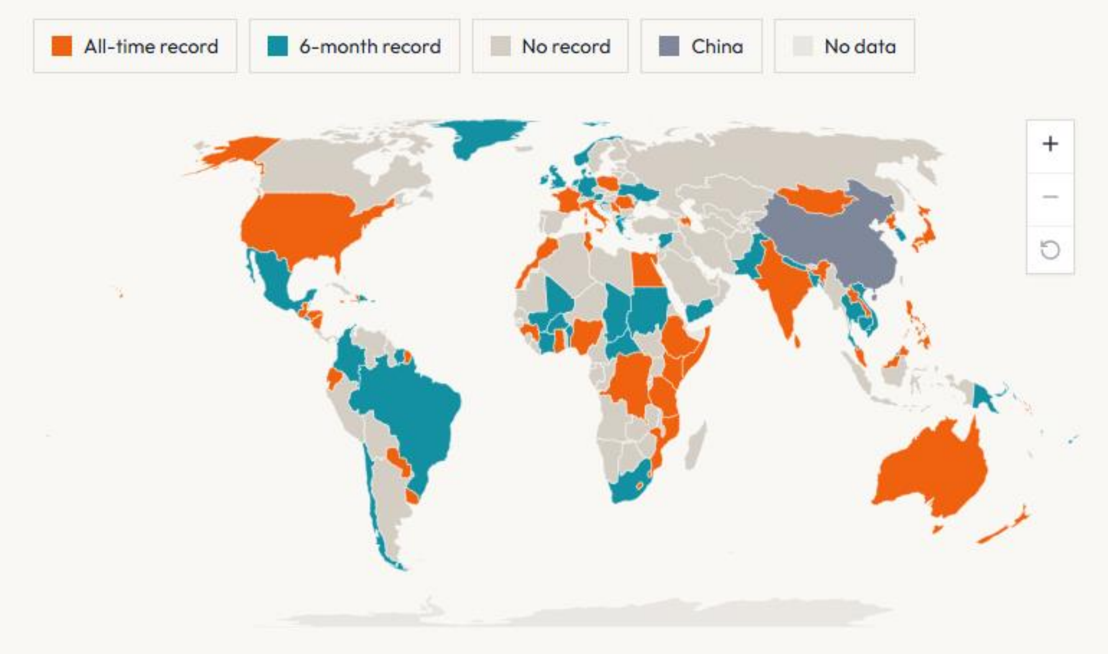
Solar manufacturing booms outside China

Across the world, 50 countries set records for Chinese solar imports in March, while a further 60 saw the highest import levels in six months. Chinese solar exports to Africa reached 10GW last month, a 176% increase compared with the previous month while exports to Asia doubled to 39GW.

The increase is partly driven by growing solar manufacturing and assembly capacity outside China, as countries seek to produce more of their own solar capacity as well as export panels to other markets. In October last year, Chinese exports of solar cells and wafers overtook already assembled solar panels. In March alone, Chinese solar panel exports reached 32 GW while cells and wafers exports amounted to 36 GW.

50 countries set all-time records for Chinese solar imports in March 2026

Countries setting Chinese solar import records, March 2026. Hover a country for the exact value, or click a legend item to highlight a group.



India, which is rapidly building out a solar manufacturing industry, is increasingly importing wafers from China, which can be manufactured domestically into solar cells and assembled into panels. Chinese solar exports to India were up 141% in March compared to February.

In Africa, Nigeria, Kenya and Ethiopia all imported over 1GW of solar for the first time in a single month, predominantly in the form of solar cells that are then assembled into panels. Exports to Nigeria, which is seeking to significantly ramp up its solar assembly capacity, rocketed 519% – the largest percentage increase.

[*Climate Home News*, 23/04/2026]

AFRICA

Human rights law drives climate action

As extreme droughts, floods, and heatwaves intensify across Africa, a landmark legal case before the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights is framing the continent's climate emergency not just as an environmental crisis, but as a profound legal one. The case, brought by the Pan African Lawyers Union and other civil society groups, is an application to the court for a crucial advisory opinion: What are African governments' legal duties to protect their citizens from climate harm under existing human rights law?

In a new *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) brief legal experts from the Mandela Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand argue that a safe and stable climate is a fundamental prerequisite for the rights enshrined in the African Charter. These include the right to economic, social and cultural development (Article 22), the right to a healthy environment (Article 24), and the right to national and international peace and security. The brief, supported by several organisations, stresses that without a stable climate, these rights cannot be realistically achieved by African citizens. The experts further argue that a safe climate is also essential for the right to freely control and benefit from natural resources.

Africa faces a stark injustice. Historically, the continent has contributed the least to global greenhouse gas emissions, yet it suffers disproportionately from climate disasters. Droughts, floods, heatwaves, and rising sea levels are threatening human health, food and water security, and economic development. These crises disrupt ecosystems, cause crop failures, and increase poverty and disease. In fact, climate change threatens to reverse decades of development gains across Africa. The brief emphasises that development in Africa cannot be measured by GDP alone, but rather by the ability of communities to shape their futures in a healthy and protected environment. This broader idea of sustainable development is already protected by the African Charter and other regional agreements.

The legal team urges African states to act urgently, cooperatively, and according to the best available science. They argue that governments have a legal duty to phase out fossil fuel projects that undermine people's rights. International agreements, including the Maputo Protocol on women's rights and the Algiers Convention on nature conservation, already stress that development must be sustainable, fair, and balanced. The brief argues that climate action and human rights are closely linked, and that African governments must prevent serious damage to the climate system. There is growing international agreement that fossil fuel projects, which have undermined people's rights in the past, must be phased out.

This push follows a powerful precedent. In July 2025, the International Court of Justice in The Hague issued an advisory opinion stating that all governments have legal obligations to protect the climate system and prevent serious environmental harm. Several African nations, such as Kenya, South Africa, Cameroon, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Mauritius, Burkina Faso, Egypt, and Madagascar, made submissions in that case. While not legally binding, that opinion helped establish that human rights, development, and climate justice must be considered before approving high-emission projects.

Whilst the African Court's upcoming opinion will also not be legally binding, it carries immense weight. It would serve as an authoritative guide for national courts, governments, and businesses across the continent, clarifying how existing human rights laws apply to the climate crisis. The Mandela Institute hopes the court will explicitly rule that phasing out fossil fuels is necessary to protect the rights to development, health, and a healthy environment. Such an opinion could shape how governments, businesses, and the public understand their responsibilities. As global pressure mounts to move beyond fossil fuels, this advisory opinion could become a turning point for climate justice in Africa. It would legally bind the continent's future development to the protection of both its people and its climate, offering a clear path towards accountability, sustainable progress, and the full realisation of fundamental human rights for all Africans.

[*The Conversation*, 01/06/2026]

ARGENTINA

Approval of controversial bill easing glacier protections

Argentina's Congress has approved a controversial bill promoted by President Javier Milei that weakens protections for the country's glaciers, a move aimed at unlocking billions in mining investment but condemned by environmental groups who vow to challenge it in court.

The legislation passed on 8 April with 137 votes in favour, 111 against and three abstentions, following Senate approval in February. President Milei is expected to sign the bill in the coming days. According to mining sector estimates, the new framework could unlock over $30 billion in investment over the next decade, with approximately 70% slated for new copper, gold and silver projects.

The original 2010 glacier protection law banned all mining activity on glaciers and within periglacial zones – areas of frozen ground that act as vital water regulators. The Milei administration's reform narrows these protections significantly. Under the new framework, only glaciers and land forms with "specific hydrological functions" would be shielded, with each province responsible for making that determination.

Argentina is home to 16,968 glaciers across the Andes and the South Atlantic Islands, covering 8,484 square kilometres. Glaciology experts warn that climate change is already causing glaciers to retreat at an accelerated pace, and scientists caution that weakening protections could jeopardise water security in arid regions.

Environmental groups, including Greenpeace and the Environment and Natural Resources Foundation, are organising a public class-action lawsuit, describing the bill's passage as a flawed process that dismissed public concerns over water safety. "If they refuse to listen in Congress, they will be forced to listen in the courts," the organisations said in a statement. Opposition lawmakers have labelled the legislation unconstitutional, contending that it rolls back essential environmental protections.

Mining Secretary Luis Lucero defended the reform, arguing the previous regulation featured "absolute prohibitions without room for exceptions or environmental impact studies." On his X account, President Milei hailed the new framework as a "significant improvement" that would strike a balance between environmental protection and economic development.

[*The Associated Press*, 10/04/2026]

GREENLAND

Greenland ice sheet continues to shrink

Continental glaciers and the Greenland ice sheet will continue to shrink in coming years, scientists say, after data showed that Europe has warmed twice as fast as the global average.

Loss of mass by Europe's glaciers was particularly apparent in Iceland, Svalbard and the periphery of Greenland.

The ice sheet that covers most of Greenland lost about 139bn tonnes of ice in the year to August 2025, or about 1.5 times the amount stored in all the glaciers in the European Alps.

The sheet contains enough fresh water to raise sea levels by more than 7 metres. Last year's melt raised the global average sea level by 0.4mm.

[*Financial Times*, 02/05/2026)

KYRGYZSTAN

Project to bring clean drinking water to residents

A major infrastructure initiative has been launched to provide clean drinking water to more than 158,000 residents of southern Kyrgyzstan's Osh Region. The US $60 million project, backed by the Eurasian Fund for Stabilisation and Development (EFSD), aims to overhaul dilapidated water systems in 32 rural villages across the Kara-Suu and Uzgen districts – one of the country's most densely populated areas.

According to Kyrgyzstan's Ministry of Water Resources, Agriculture and Processing Industry, the majority of the targeted population currently relies on unsafe sources or ageing networks built between the 1950s and 1980s. At present, only about 65% of the region's people have access to safe drinking water. The government will contribute an additional US $6.7 million in co-financing, bringing the total project cost to US $66.7 million.

The infrastructure plan is comprehensive. Over a five-year implementation period – with the financing agreement expected to be signed by the end of June – crews will construct or rehabilitate more than 890 kilometres of water supply and distribution networks. The project also includes drilling 33 artesian wells, building 54 water reservoirs, and installing 11 pumping stations. Importantly, the initiative incorporates sanitation improvements: 95 facilities in schools, kindergartens, and primary healthcare clinics are scheduled for renovation.

Access to clean water remains one of Kyrgyzstan's most pressing infrastructure challenges, particularly in rural areas. Government data show that out of 2,014 villages nationwide, only 796 currently have reliable access to clean drinking water. Water systems are under construction in 258 villages, while 960 communities remain entirely without adequate service. According to Bakyt Torobaev, formerly deputy chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers, the country requires approximately US $1.2 billion in investment to resolve drinking water issues across those 960 villages. Authorities say the new project will provide a stable, safe supply to participating communities and serve as a model for future rural water interventions.

[*The Times of Central Asia*, 04/06/2026]

PHILIPPINES

Unified enforcement manual for environmental crimes

The Philippine Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) has adopted a new nationwide enforcement manual aimed at tightening case build-up for environmental crimes and strengthening coordination across its field offices.

In a news release on Thursday, Environment Secretary, Juan Miguel Cuna, announced that the manual, formally known as the Environment and Natural Resources Law Enforcement Manual of Operations (ELEMO), is now the DENR's primary standard for pre-operation planning, surveillance, arrests, evidence handling, and prosecution.

"By standardising procedures nationwide, we ensure that every enforcement action – whether a forest patrol in the uplands or an anti-pollution operation in a major city – follows the same legally sound, transparent, and accountable process," Secretary Cuna said.

The ELEMO establishes clear guidelines for investigating, documenting, and prosecuting environmental crimes, regardless of location or violation type. The unified system will apply to illegal logging, wildlife trafficking, destructive mining, pollution, waste management offences, land disputes, and easement-related cases.

The manual addresses long-standing variations in enforcement practices across DENR regional and field offices, where differing capacities and interpretations of rules have affected case handling. By adopting a single operational standard, the DENR aims to reduce procedural gaps and improve coordination between local units and national enforcement priorities.

The DENR stated that the manual is part of a broader government approach under President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. that treats environmental crimes as threats to public safety, disaster resilience, and economic stability. The agency said illegal logging, wildlife trafficking, destructive extraction activities, and pollution are major drivers of environmental degradation and community vulnerability.

The new framework also strengthens coordination with local government units, law enforcement agencies, indigenous communities, and civil society groups through clearer engagement protocols. It includes provisions for informant reward systems to encourage community-level reporting of environmental violations, empowering ordinary citizens to help protect the nation's natural resources.

[*Philippine News Agency*, 14/05/2026]

SRI LANKA

Elephant habitat protected

In Sri Lanka's northwest Kurunegala District, forest grounds managed by an ancient Buddhist temple were cleared, destroying valuable elephant territory. ELAW partners celebrated in May when Sri Lanka's Supreme Court ordered the Director General of Wildlife Conservation to replant and restore the forest surrounding the Nakolagane Purana Raja Maha Viharaya temple. The cost will be borne by the temple's trustee.

"This landmark judgment ensures that the 'polluter pays' when damaging public and private forest lands, including critical elephant pathways," says Dr. Ravindranath Dabare, co-founder, Centre for Environmental Justice (CEJ).

Dr. Dabare and Savanthi Ponnamperuma filed suit on behalf of CEJ, alleging that approximately 1,500 acres of forest in the vicinity of the Nakolagane Purana Rajamaha Viharaya temple were illegally cleared by the temple monk.

CEJ reports that the monk distributed temple lands among influential individuals and companies, for commercial agriculture, granite quarries, and soil excavation.

Electric fences were erected around the commercial farms, disrupting elephant corridors, forcing elephants to move through villages and cultivated lands during seasonal migration.

"This increased crop raids and conflict with villagers," says Dr. Dabare, who thanked his friends in the ELAW Network for "remarkable legal and scientific assistance made available through the ELAW website" to help him win the case to protect forests, elephants, and local communities.

[*Elaw Press Release*, 28/05/2026)

THAILAND

Thailand seeks access to UN Climate Fund

Thailand has taken formal steps to secure access to a new international climate fund, as the country faces increasing risks from extreme weather driven by climate change.

The cabinet has approved the Department of Climate Change and Environment as Thailand's National Authority and National Focal Point for the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD), a financial mechanism established under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Deputy government spokeswoman Lalida Persvivatana announced that the department's director-general will serve as the authorised signatory for project proposals and funding applications submitted to the FRLD and other international climate finance mechanisms.

The FRLD was created to support developing countries facing losses and damage caused by climate change. Developed nations have pledged more than $731 million (23.8 billion baht) to the fund, which is accepting its first round of project proposals until 15 June. This represents a critical opportunity for nations like Thailand to secure resources for climate-related disasters.

The cabinet also revised earlier resolutions governing the Adaptation Fund and the Green Climate Fund, transferring signing authority from the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to the director-general of the Department of Climate Change and Environment. Officials say these changes will streamline procedures, align Thailand with international funding requirements, and enable faster access to financial support for climate-related projects and disaster recovery efforts.

The changes come as climate risks continue to intensify. The World Meteorological Organization warned on Tuesday (2 June) that El Niño conditions are developing in the tropical Pacific, with an 80% probability of emerging during June–August 2026 and a more than 90% likelihood of persisting through at least November. WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo urged governments to prepare for heightened risks of drought, heavy rainfall and heatwaves both on land and in the oceans. Such conditions could have severe consequences for Thailand's agriculture, water supplies and public health.

For Thailand, the formal appointment of a national coordinating agency is expected to strengthen its ability to seek support for disaster management, recovery of affected areas, water resource management, climate adaptation programmes, and assistance for communities impacted by natural disasters. As extreme weather events become more frequent and severe, accessing international climate funds is increasingly vital for the country's resilience efforts and for protecting its most vulnerable populations.

[*Bangkok Post*, 04/06/2026]

UNITED KINGDOM

Threats from heat, flooding and drought

The British way of life is under increasing threat from climate change, the UK's independent Climate Change Committee (CCC) has warned. In a new report titled *A Well-Adapted UK*, the country's climate advisors identify heat, flooding and drought as the three biggest risks facing every aspect of life in Britain.

Without urgent action, these risks will escalate dramatically. By 2050, the CCC projects that 92% of homes are likely to overheat, peak river flows will be up to 45% higher, and water supply shortfalls could exceed five billion litres per day.

The cost of inaction far outweighs the cost of acting now. The Committee's proposals require investment of approximately £11 billion a year, split broadly evenly between public and private funding. Without adaptation, the cost of climate change to public welfare could reach 1-5% of UK GDP by 2050 – equivalent to £60-£260 billion per year.

Baroness Brown, Chair of the Adaptation Committee, said: "Our lives, our landscapes and our homes are under increasing pressure from the changing climate. But we are not powerless. This report carries a message of hope. The solutions already exist, and proven technologies are available now to help the UK adapt effectively."

The report sets out eight key areas for government action. The most critical priorities are protecting people from heat, managing flood risk, and avoiding water shortages.

To protect people from heat, the CCC recommends investing in cooling across public services – including air conditioning, heat pumps and green shading – and establishing a national maximum temperature for workplaces.

For flood risk management, annual investment must rise to £1.6–£2.2 billion across the UK. The government should also avoid new construction in flood-prone areas where risks cannot be adequately reduced.

To avoid water shortages, the report calls for scaling up sustainable water storage, accelerating leakage reduction, and ensuring all new homes are water efficient from the outset.

Other priority areas include supporting nature to adapt, keeping farming viable through crop diversification and on-farm water storage, and understanding risks to food security. The CCC recommends making the Adaptation Reporting Power mandatory and extending it to large food companies.

The report also urges the government to maintain access to affordable insurance, providing urgent clarity on the future of the *Flood Re* reinsurance scheme. Finally, infrastructure must be adapted to avoid cascading disruptions across transport, energy and telecommunications systems.

Baroness Brown concluded: “The public want to see change and the government now has an opportunity to step up and protect our way of life.”

[*The Climate Change Committee*, 20/05/2026]

USA

Supreme Court to hear challenge to climate lawsuits

The US Supreme Court has agreed to hear arguments in a key climate deception lawsuit against Big Oil, marking the first time the court weighs in on such a case.

The lawsuit was filed in 2018 by the city and county of Boulder, Colorado. They sought damages from two major oil companies – Suncor Energy USA and ExxonMobil Corporation – for the climate change-related damages they sustained, which they argue were exacerbated by the companies. The claimants estimated that it would cost Boulder taxpayers some $100 million until 2050 to adapt the local infrastructure to the escalating impacts of climate change, including storms and more frequent wildfires.

Boulder also argued that the oil companies misled the public about the risks of climate change and knowingly contributed to it by producing and promoting more fossil fuels. Both companies deny wrongdoing.

“Communities like ours are exposed to destructive climate change impacts caused by the actions of fossil fuel companies while they reap record profits,” said Ashley Stolzmann, Boulder County Commissioner. “These companies need to pay their fair share to deal with the climate chaos they’ve created and take responsibility for the climate impacts.”

Last May, the Colorado Supreme Court ruled that the case could proceed toward trial, upholding a state court’s previous ruling that concluded federal law did not pre-empt Boulder’s claims, contrary to what the defendants had argued. In response to that ruling, Suncor Energy and Exxon appealed to the US Supreme Court, urging it to dismiss the case based on that same argument: that climate emissions are a matter of national concern and must therefore be adjudicated in federal court – where similar litigation has historically been dismissed.

On Monday, the justices agreed to review the state’s supreme court ruling. In granting the petition, the justices also asked the parties whether the court has the authority to hear the case.

“Two state supreme courts have ruled on this issue and both have rejected Exxon’s baseless arguments. No part of the Constitution, or any state or federal law, gives corporations the right to lie to the public about the dangers associated with their products simply because those products are fossil fuels,” said Alyssa Johl, Vice President of Legal and General Counsel at the Center for Climate Integrity.

“Today’s announcement makes clear the justices do not agree whether the Court even has the authority to hear Boulder’s case at this time. The Court should uphold what the Colorado Supreme Court and others have made clear: communities like Boulder have the right to seek accountability in their state courts when corporations have knowingly caused local harms,” Johl added.

The Supreme Court’s decision, which is expected within the nine-month term that starts in October, will likely have implications for dozens of deception lawsuits that have been filed around the country in recent years.

Should the justices rule against the oil companies, it would offer a favourable precedent for numerous ongoing deception lawsuits and for new ones to be filed by municipalities and local governments. Conversely, a ruling in favour of the oil companies would severely threaten these efforts, potentially invalidating over a dozen other active lawsuits based on similar legal arguments.

According to L. Delta Merner, Lead Scientist at the Science Hub for Climate Litigation, “fossil fuel companies have repeatedly tried to derail cases by forcing them into federal court, invoking pre-emption arguments, and delaying discovery.” However, recent rulings by state supreme courts and federal judges that allowed deception cases to proceed have begun to crack the defensive wall, Merner added.

[*Earth.Org*, 25/02/2026)

WORLD

Biodiversity loss could trigger debt crises

Financial markets are underestimating the economic risks of biodiversity loss, potentially exposing countries to sovereign debt crises and higher borrowing costs, according to research published late last week.

The study, led by economists from the University of Sussex, Sheffield and Heriot Watt, presented what they described as the world’s first biodiversity-adjusted sovereign credit ratings model.

It said existing ratings frameworks fail to take in to account environmental degradation, leaving some $83 trillion of global assets vulnerable to mispricing.

Using an adjusted version of S&P Global’s rating methodology, the researchers estimated that even a partial collapse of key ecosystems – including wild pollinators, marine fisheries and tropical forests – could increase annual global sovereign debt interest payments by $162 billion.

Ecosystems underpin the global economy through “ecosystem services”, like crop pollination and seafood production. Partial disruption to these could cut global GDP by approximately $2 trillion per year.

The effects on vulnerable nations’ creditworthiness could be severe, as lower credit ratings typically force governments to pay higher risk premiums on debt. The result could add roughly $50 billion to India’s annual debt interest bill and $70 billion to China’s.

The report also stated that some countries, such as Indonesia. Bangladesh and Malaysia, could face rating downgrades of four to six notches.

Across the 23 countries studied, home to 5.5 billion people, biodiversity-linked downgrades could represent almost three-quarters of global annual overseas development aid and a large chunk of the U.N, Global Biodiversity Framework’s target of mobilising $200 billion annually across 196 countries.

The authors urged regulators, central banks and rating agencies to integrate nature-related risks into financial models, saying the cost of protecting biodiversity is far lower than the economic consequences of its loss.

[*The Japan Times*, 10/06/2026]

This Quarterly Report does not constitute legal advice given on any particular matter. Whilst all effort has been made to ensure completeness and accuracy at the time of publication, no responsibility is accepted for errors and omissions. Further information and enquiries in respect of this quarterly should be directed to Fred Kan & Co.

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Convictions under environmental legislation: March to May 2026 (June data not available)

[Note: the EPD no longer classifies second (and subsequent) offences.]

The EPD's summary of convictions recorded and fines imposed during the above period is as follows:

March 2026

Seventy-one convictions were recorded in March 2026 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Six of the convictions were under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 1 was under the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance, 1 was under the Mercury Control Ordinance, 13 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 27 were under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, 2 were under the Product Eco-responsibility Ordinance, 16 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance and 5 were under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance.

A company was fined $30,000, which was the heaviest fine in March for importing controlled waste without a permit.

April 2026

Forty convictions were recorded in April 2026 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

One of the convictions was under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 7 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 2 were under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, 6 were under the Product Eco-responsibility Ordinance, 21 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance and 3 were under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance.

A company was fined $78,000, which was the heaviest fine in April for discharging waste/polluting matter into the water control zone.

May 2026

Thirty-eight convictions were recorded in May 2026 for breaches of legislation enforced by the Environmental Protection Department.

Three of the convictions was under the Air Pollution Control Ordinance, 1 was under the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance, 10 were under the Noise Control Ordinance, 14 were under the Public Cleansing and Prevention of Nuisances Regulation, 9 were under the Waste Disposal Ordinance and 1 was under the Water Pollution Control Ordinance.

A company was fined $30,000, which was the heaviest fine in May for exporting controlled waste without a permit.

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