



# The Conservative Environment Network Annual Report 2021-22

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**CONSERVATIVE  
ENVIRONMENT  
NETWORK**

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## Chair's note

The past year saw huge growth in CEN's membership at every level. Our grassroots supporters, councillor network, and parliamentary caucus all expanded significantly. For the first time, we also brought together centre-right legislators from around the world in support of a set of environmental principles, including the need to reach net zero by 2050.

By coordinating and amplifying the campaigning of our members, we have achieved positive changes to environmental policy, ensured the environmental debate is not dominated by those on the left of politics and created a community of like-minded conservatives who are comfortable talking about the environment.

CEN's members played a central role in a significant year for environmental policy in the UK. As we were heading into COP26 and the government was developing its net zero strategy, CEN supported its network of 'net zero champions' inside parliament to make the positive case that net zero is an economic opportunity, as well as moral responsibility. We also proved our resilience to less favourable political circumstances. When Russia invaded Ukraine, we helped promote the narrative that reducing dependency on fossil fuels through renewable energy and insulation would help defeat Putin.

At COP26, CEN realised our long-standing ambition of convening the global centre-right to discuss the importance of applying our conservative values to the

greatest threats we all face. This showcased CEN's unique convening power.

A particular highlight for me was CEN's nature programme. Launched at the start of 2020, we have sought to reconnect the conservative movement with its long-standing tradition of nature conservation - going all the way back to Teddy Roosevelt in the United States, who founded the national parks - and applying it to modern challenges of unsustainable farming practices and development.

At the same time as so effectively driving the green policy agenda, I've been proud of how the CEN team has developed. We've continued to mature as an organisation, creating new operations and communications functions, strengthening our corporate governance, and improving our internal policies. We've continued to diversify our funding sources, establishing a network of private donors and increasing the number of foundations we receive funding from.

UK politics is very volatile at the moment. The need for strong conservative voices on the environment, advancing market-friendly solutions, has never been greater. I'm very grateful that CEN is thriving, so we are able to continue to help maintain the political consensus on the environment and drive change.

**Ben Goldsmith**

## About CEN

We're the independent forum for conservatives in the UK and around the world who support net zero, nature restoration and resource security.

We have a board, including Ben Goldsmith (Chair), Benet Northcote (Deputy Chair), Luke Graham (Treasurer), Ben Caldecott, Guy Thompson, Rosa Stewart, Jane MacBean, and Dorothee Irving.

The board is advised on strategy by a steering committee which includes Isabella Gornall, Adrian Gahan, Stanley Johnson, Joe Porter, Resham Kotecha, and Rachel Wolf.

Our mission is to:

- To promote and champion conservative environmentalism in the UK and overseas;
- To find consensus within the conservative movement on environmental issues, and direct it towards positive environmental policy change; and
- To provide a platform for different parts of the conservative movement to express and debate views on how to achieve better environmental outcomes.

How we work:

- We are a broad network, bringing people together and giving people a shared identity around conservative environmentalism.
- We convene conservatives to debate environmental issues in a trusted setting, and find common ground.

- We coordinate environmental action within the conservative movement and mobilise conservatives to achieve positive environmental policy change.
- We do not undertake policy research ourselves, rather we rely on peer-reviewed research to inform our work.
- We promote conservative voices within the environmental policy debate.
- We support conservative environmentalists to become the next generation of political leaders.

We have four main programmes - climate, nature, international, and outreach - through which we seek to advance our mission. We have cross-cutting communications and operations teams that support the work of CEN's main programmes.

Our strategy for 2021-2024 identified the following principal development areas:

- Establishing the nature programme
- Getting ready for the next election
- Improving our engagement with the media
- Engaging grassroots conservatives
- Making our convening more effective
- Building our international network
- Creating a pipeline of talented people

## Our year at a glance: highlights and key metrics

Caucus size - from 95 MPs and 15 peers to 125 MPs and 18 peers

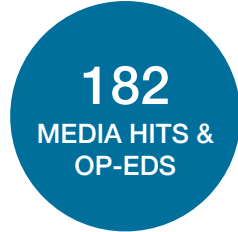
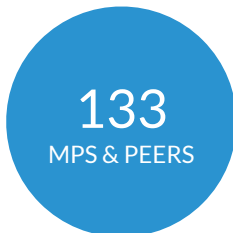
Councillor network size - from 202 councillors to 453 councillors

Supporter network size - from 88 supporters to 514 supporters

International declaration signatories - 349 legislators from 53 political parties in 46 countries

Media mentions: 150 media mentions and 32 op-eds in the first six months of 2022

Conservative Party conference 2021, where we hosted 19 fringe events in three days



## Policy wins:

- Mandatory EV charge points in new-build homes
- Zero-emission vehicle mandate
- VAT eliminated on energy-saving products
- Natural History GCSE
- A 2030 deadline for halting species decline
- Stronger duties on water companies to tackle storm overflows

We hosted the inaugural Sam Barker Memorial Lecture, in memory of our former director, with keynote speaker Theresa May.

We co-hosted the first-ever Global Conservative Climate Summit with our American and Australian partner organisations on the fringes of COP26 in Glasgow. We hosted speakers from 10 countries and had a virtual keynote address by former Prime Minister Theresa May.

For the first time, we hosted two events at Scottish Conservative conference and secured agreement from MSPs to establish a CEN Scottish Parliamentary Group.





## Climate and clean air

Our climate and clean air programme has been in the vanguard of efforts to combat increasingly vocal net zero scepticism within the conservative movement. We have worked closely with two dozen 'net zero champions' inside parliament, providing them with the support to make the positive economic case for the net zero transition and push for further market-based policies required to achieve our targets in an economically efficient way. Successes include the introduction of mandatory charge points for new build developments and a zero-emissions vehicle mandate.

We have also successfully assembled coalitions of MPs in support of particular policy campaigns - such as our campaign for 15 gigawatts of floating offshore wind by 2035, and a group of 12 MPs who wrote to the Chancellor ahead of the Spring Statement to ask for a VAT cut on insulation and other energy saving measures in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Through publishing articles and briefings, our green finance programme supported the introduction of mandatory transition plans, which was announced at COP26.

Concerns about the cost of net zero were exacerbated by rising inflation and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, so we've concentrated our efforts on making the case for moving away from volatile oil and gas markets, bolstering the argument for specific net zero policies and clean technologies. We've been active in the media through broadcast appearances, quotes in news stories, and op-eds, promoting these arguments.

To support the political case for net zero, we commissioned Stack Data to poll Conservative voter attitudes towards net zero and the political impacts of weakening climate ambition. The polling, widely covered in the media and shared with MPs in a private briefing event in parliament, found wide support for net zero and that the Conservative Party would lose voters if it reneged on current commitments.



Our clean air programme has focused on expanding our councillor network, with regular outreach emails to councillors, particularly targeted on environment brief holders. We have developed our relationships with Conservative metro mayors on a range of environmental policy issues, especially housing retrofits and clean transport, giving them a platform to speak to CEN councillors. We published our Net Zero Toolkit, which has been very popular among councillors, along with a map of case studies showcasing the best environmental policies delivered by Conservative-led councils.

Coming up this year, the climate and clean air programme will be focusing on improving financing options for energy efficiency improvements, introducing better carbon pricing, including border adjustments, reforming the electricity market to make it cheaper and encourage electrification, and developing more conservative policy solutions to air pollution as part of designing more beautiful neighbourhoods.

# Nature

This was the first full year of CEN's nature programme. We convened some of the leading voices within the conservative movement on nature. This includes a well-attended nature conference, with over 370 online viewers, to develop and advance the



conservative case for restoring nature, with prominent speakers including the Environment Secretary, three backbench MPs, and popular historian Tom Holland. In particular, the participants emphasised the importance of conservatives focusing on championing certain at-risk species with national resonance.

For the first time, we led trips to conservation projects for CEN parliamentarians and councillors, helping to connect them to tangible environmental issues and see the impact of policies on the ground. We took 11 MPs to the Knepp rewilding estate and arranged further visits to a marine protected area in Plymouth, a regenerative farm in Gloucestershire, and the Thames Tideway super sewer in London. We organised a councillor webinar on green infrastructure and hosted a dinner for Cumbrian councillors on the reintroduction of white-tailed eagles. We also hosted a discussion on a new Scottish Nature Bill at the Scottish Conservative Party Conference.

CEN has played a key role in a number of nature policy victories. We organised a letter from 36 Conservative MPs and peers into Defra, urging the government to

enshrine a legal target to halt the decline in nature by 2030, alongside two well-timed op-eds in the media,



which helped to secure the target. We convened MPs in support of Philip Dunne’s campaign for stronger duties to tackle storm overflows in the Environment Act and helped our MPs to add a new natural history GCSE to the curriculum. We coordinated the parliamentary campaign

for a new Wildbelt designation to protect areas being managed for nature’s recovery, including a well-attended Westminster Hall debate with 11 of our MPs. We are building on these campaigns this year by publishing a manifesto to clean up our rivers and address all the pressures on our water environment, as well as supporting parliamentary campaigning to strengthen the environmental elements of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.

We actively supported the government’s reforms to farm payments - a long-standing CEN policy priority. We published an essay collection on agriculture and land use, with contributions from 12 CEN parliamentarians, with some of these recommendations being included in the government’s food strategy. This year, we’ll be launching a waste and resources programme to develop conservative narratives and policies in favour of greater resource efficiency and security and reinforcing the case for the Environmental Land Management Schemes to reward sustainable farming and attract private funding for nature restoration.

## International

2021 was the first full year of CEN's international programme, through which we work with conservatives from across the world to promote ambition on climate change. In the run-up to COP26 in Glasgow, we hosted virtual discussions between legislators in the UK and other key countries like Australia, USA, Germany, and Canada, on net zero, energy security, and the politics of climate action.



We built on these relationships and established new connections by launching a world-first Centre-Right Climate Action Declaration for legislators from across the world. The declaration committed signatories to net zero by 2050 and outlined a series of conservative principles to guide the way there. We secured almost 350 signatories from 53 different political parties in 46 countries, including key countries like Australia, Germany and India.

We launched the declaration with a reception in Glasgow during COP26 - the first international gathering specifically for the centre-right at a climate COP. We also hosted the world's first Global Conservative Climate Summit in the second week of COP26. This featured a day of public panel sessions with legislators from countries including Sweden, Malawi, Bangladesh, Canada and Australia. This was followed by a day of private workshops for legislators on effective messaging,

climate politics and climate security, enabling us to forge much stronger links with those who joined us.

We were delighted to organise a delegation to the UK of representatives from Australia's Liberal and National parties. As well as taking part in our COP events, we arranged meetings with ministers and think tanks in London and a site visit to the Siemens Gamesa blade factory in Hull.

We've also provided advice and support to a new CEN-type organisation Oikos in Spain - with our Director speaking at their launch event in Madrid. We have also started a case studies project, sharing best practice on climate policy by conservative governments from across the world. This has helped us connect with policy experts and legislators in other countries and share effective policies with our international network.

Our plans for the rest of this year will see our international reach expand further with a delegation of UK politicians to Alberta and Ottawa in Canada to meet key members from both provincial and federal Conservative parties and learn more about Canada's approach to climate change. We will also host a European Climate and Security Summit in London to bring together legislators from across Europe for a series of private roundtable discussions on issues related to climate change and energy security. And we will continue to support other organisations promoting conservative environmentalism by sending representation to a major conservative conference in South America and putting on events with our American and Australian partners at COP27 in Egypt.

## Outreach

The outreach programme, targeted at grassroots conservatives, relaunched the supporters' network to help more people get involved with CEN and learn about conservative environmentalism.

This involved improving the offering to supporters, such as regular correspondence, exclusive events, competitions, early access, and a private Facebook group. Sign-up was then actively promoted via social media and at physical events, such as Conservative Party Conference and Spring Conference.



We also relaunched the ambassador programme for people across the UK or with expertise in a certain area of environmentalism to help promote the work of CEN. We have expanded the ambassador programme to 25 people and provided them each with tangible ways they can support CEN, such as writing for our blog.



In October, the CEN team hosted 19 events at Conservative Party Conference 2021. This involved a series of panel events covering topics such as “the environmental case for the union”, “the future of English farming”, and “the end of the gas boiler”. Our annual

conference reception featured speeches from Alok Sharma and Ben Houchen.



We were busy preparing for our first-ever CEN Academy which will be held in August 2022. This will be a two-night residential course for twenty university students and recent graduates in Oxford. Attendees will learn more about conservative environmentalism through a series of interesting talks and facilitate group work to brainstorm policies, debate ideas and deliver presentations. We have received far more applications than places, indicating substantial interest in the environment amongst young conservatives.

In the year ahead, we will also be continuing to build our grassroots network ahead of the next general election and a possible future Conservative leadership contest. In the event of a leadership contest, we would look to mobilise our supporter network to make the case for ambitious environmental action during the leadership contest. We would look to organise a hustings for our supporters to hear about the environmental commitments made by the leadership candidates and arrange for the final two candidates to contribute to the CEN blog.



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