



Care for the environment

The EU has been one of the main drivers behind environmental legislation in the UK over the past 30 years, setting new standards across a range of areas.

Examples of EU environmental action include:

- water quality, including drinking water, waste water treatment, and the quality of river and bathing waters.
- waste management, including recycling and restrictions on landfill.
- air quality, including monitoring of pollution in urban areas.
- regulation on the use of dangerous chemicals.
- environmental impact assessments.
- wildlife and habitat conservation, for example through the Natura programme.

This work has resulted in a range of directives that require EU member states to put in place legislation to meet common EU environmental standards. Various programmes offer support for scientific research and funding for environmental projects. The EU also supports the European Environment Agency which monitors environmental standards across Europe.

Much EU policy in this sphere was originally established in response to environmental damage and pollution caused by industry. However, it has grown to embrace wider challenges of promoting sustainable development, action on climate change and safeguarding biodiversity, making a vital contribution to United Nations treaties on all these themes. The EU will have an important role in ensuring member states implement the 2015 Paris agreement on climate change (CoP21) and it has made a commitment to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases by 40% across the EU by 2030 from 1990 levels. However following the Paris agreement, some critics have called for the EU to raise its ambition in responding to climate change.

The EU has undoubtedly had a great impact in raising basic environmental standards across Europe: bathing water has become cleaner, air quality in urban areas better, and less waste goes to landfill. It has contributed significantly towards global action on climate change and can claim that it has succeeded in promoting economic growth in Europe while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and Common Fisheries Policy have been criticised by some environmental groups for not doing enough to preserve and protect natural habitats. Many species and habitats remain at risk due to intensive fishing and farming practices, including fish stocks in some European waters and populations of farmland birds that continue to decline in some countries. Some people argue that the economic foundation of the EU and its continuous drive for growth are incompatible with a more sustainable way of living.

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Reflection

Christian concern for the environment arises out of an understanding that we have a duty of stewardship and care for creation that is ultimately God's. As *Hope in God's Future*, produced by the Methodist, Baptist and United Reformed Churches, observes "God is present and active in sustaining creation from moment to moment. We are not, therefore, stewards acting in place of an absent landlord, but servants called to play our part in response to God's care for creation."

Questions

- In what ways does concern for the environment fit into our worship of God and service of others?
- As we look to the future, how do we think the EU will help or hinder our care of God's creation?

While we recognise that Bible passages are written in a particular context and often with a particular purpose, you may find some of the following readings helpful as you reflect on the issue of environment. You may also find it helpful to consider other passages from Scripture or different texts in your reflection.

- "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good." – Genesis 1:28-31
- "The earth is the LORD's and all that is in it..." – Psalm 24:1-6
- "The earth is full of your creatures." – Psalm 104:24-25