UK National Security Assessment: global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse.

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We are constantly fed images and messages about the fickleness and short termism of our politics and politicians, but the serious work of national security planning by government continues in the background and is fully attentive to possible future scenarios. The *Nature security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security* was, after some delay, published by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs on 20th January 2026. The delay was purportedly due to its alarming projections which may have triggered caution about the dystopian picture that could be painted. Like other national security plans, it assesses a reasonable worst-case scenario and applies the same uncertainty frameworks that are used in intelligence assessments.

It is a relatively short and concise document, barely a fraction of the length of the IPCC report. Its introduction stresses that it is not a scientific report but an assessment which draws on a broad range of sources, including both scientific literature and expert judgement. It sets out well-informed estimates of when a range of ecosystems might collapse and a set of consequences likely to arise from those collapses. The timescale is alarmingly short, with visible effects within the lifetimes of the millennium children and certainly their children. If its estimates are correct, then anthropogenic climate change has accelerated the rate of natural warming and cooling cycles by several orders of magnitude. However, except for estimates for coral reefs and mangrove swamps which are medium confidence, the confidence levels are stated to be low. The assessments are, after all, worst case scenarios, though application of the precautionary principle might take into account the way the worst-case scenarios of flooding, storms and wildfires made in 1992 for 2030 had been exceeded by 2025

Here is a summary of its estimates:

	Ecosystem	Period
From 2030 onwards	Coral reefs of S.E Asia	Within ten years
	Himalayas	50 – 1000 years
	Boreal Forests of Russia and Canada	40 – 100 years
From 2050 onwards	Amazon Rainforest	50 – 100 years
	Congo Basin	uncertain
	Mangroves of S.E. Asia	uncertain

Might all this be seen as purely a matter of the loss of natural habitats? Profoundly upsetting to David Attenborough and his followers, but "business as usual" that can be borne by populations that have in any case lost their connections to the natural world? The final extinction of the coral reefs will certainly be a marker of great significance. Many years ago, I went snorkelling on the Great Barrier Reef and visited its greater depths in a submersible. It was an unforgettable experience of the uttermost profundity, truly inspirational and awe inspiring, but would the billions who have never been privileged to have that experience value the reefs enough for action?

They are more likely to be attentive to the unavoidable impacts on comfort and national security that the assessment considers likely to be triggered by ecosystem collapse:

- A large and unmanageable increase in immigration;
- New diseases and new and more frequent pandemics;
- More rapid decline in standards of living and more widespread loss of economic security;
- A substantial rise in crime, exploitation and disorder;
- Increased threats from hostile and newly hostile states;
- Increased international competition arising from the loss of arable land, productive waters, safe transit routes and critical minerals.

Somehow, the government of the United Kingdom has to prepare for all this and shield its citizens from the worst effects.

Boat of Garten
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No AI was used in the creation of this summary.