

The 2026 Living Planet Report

THE SCIENCE OF HOPE

BOARDROOM BRIEFING

Introduction: Living Planet Report key findings

8 minute read

For three decades, WWF's Living Planet Report has charted the shocking decline in the state of nature. The 2026 edition, the 'Science of Hope', shows that wildlife continues to be lost at an alarming rate. But the report also emphasises the continued value of hope: when we act together, nature can recover.

Boards will be critical to making this recovery a reality. Understanding the impact of nature loss and the opportunities presented by the transition to a more sustainable future is becoming core to business strategy and directors' duties to promote the success of the company, both now and in the long-term.

This note summarises the key findings of the Living Planet Report for the boardroom. It includes a deep dive on food and finance, two of the three key systems that the Living Planet Report identifies as responsible for driving nature's decline, along with energy. It also offers reflections on what nature competency in the boardroom can look like and proposes specific next steps – including applying the 'Science of Hope' to boardroom discussions and using the power of positive tipping points to drive collective progress.



"Change is in motion, but its course is still being written. Whether early progress develops into something more sustained will depend on the choices made now – and the pace at which they are carried forward. We have the knowledge, the tools and the pathways. What matters now is our collective resolve to act – together."

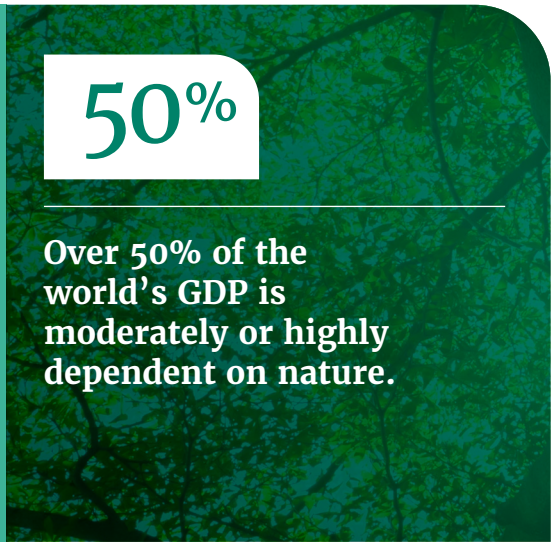
Kirsten Schuijt
Director General, WWF International

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE LIVING PLANET REPORT

- The Living Planet Report 2026 shows an average decline of 73% in the size of wildlife populations since 1970
- There are signs of hope and conservation can work – but we need to change the energy, food and finance systems to reverse global nature loss.
- A positive tipping point in the energy system is already underway with the take-up of solar and wind power. But the energy transition needs to go much faster – and we need to do more to transform our food and finance industries.
- While the window for a different future is narrowing, it remains open. The business and finance community will be central to the transformation required – and boards have a critical role to play in making this a reality.

"Reversing out of the path to destruction that we are on is becoming ever more urgent. Companies can only play their part in achieving that reversal if they have knowledgeable board members who understand how dire the situation is and who are aware of the emerging opportunities for companies to take action. So, I commend the report as an important up-to-date picture of where we are and what we now must do."

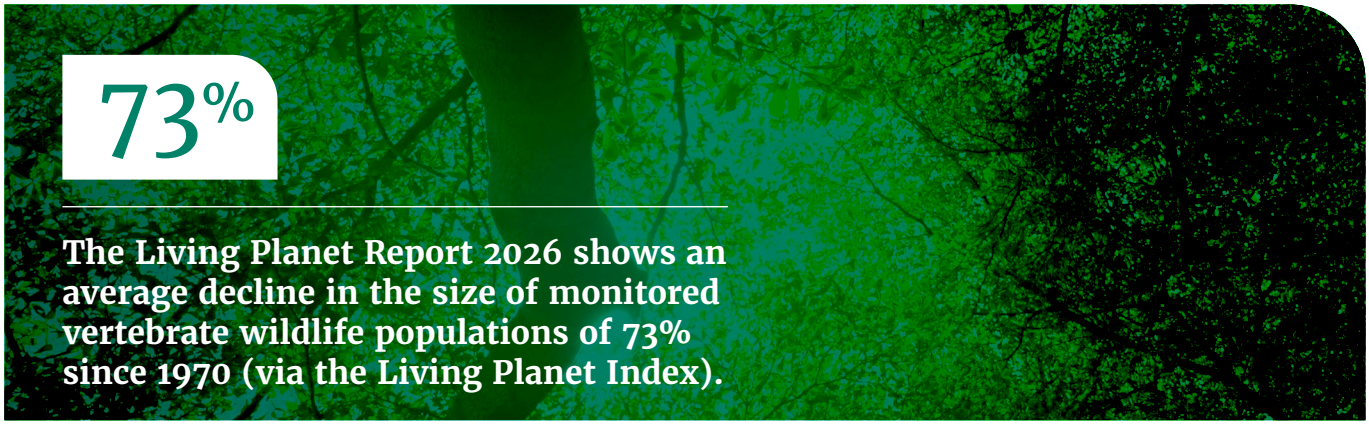
Orna NiChionna
Chapter Zero Fellow; Chair, Eden Project;
Senior Independent Director, Burberry Group



Nature and the boardroom

THE NATURE-BUSINESS DEPENDENCY

- Over 50% of the world's GDP is moderately or highly dependent on nature. Even industries with less dependence on nature in their own operations are exposed to risk in their value chains.
- Global ecosystem degradation and collapse poses a direct threat to UK national security and prosperity.
- The UK's food security and supply chains are vulnerable to ecosystem and geopolitical shocks that could drive geopolitical competition for food.
- Insect pollinators, whose populations are under threat, are worth £630 million a year for the UK's fruit, vegetable and oil seed rape production.
- Around half of the £4 trillion in assets held by UK financial institutions are at least moderately dependent on ecosystem services.
- Approximately 29 million people in the UK were subject to water-use restrictions during the August 2026 drought; and some water companies applied to introduce bans on non-essential business use.
- 57% of the world's largest companies that make up the S&P Global 1200 have a significant nature dependency risk across their direct operations.
- 84% of investors surveyed are concerned about the impact of nature loss on their portfolios.



73%

The Living Planet Report 2026 shows an average decline in the size of monitored vertebrate wildlife populations of 73% since 1970 (via the Living Planet Index).

The Living Planet Report 2026 shows a continued dramatic decline in the state of nature worldwide. **The size of wildlife populations has fallen on average by a staggering 73% since 1970.**

This matters to business boardrooms because nature is not a nice-to-have. It provides critical infrastructure that every business depends on, from flood and water management services and natural cooling, to vital raw materials and food production. More than half of global GDP is moderately or highly dependent on nature and the services it provides, and all industries have at least some risk exposure given dependencies in their value chains.

A biodiverse world also supports our ability to adapt and maintain resilience to changing climate conditions, which will be increasingly important for businesses to continue to operate in a warmer world. For example:

- **Recent heatwaves and water shortages in France have limited nuclear power production, with impacts on EDF's profits and investment plans.**
- **Degraded soils mean conventional agriculture is increasingly reliant on artificial fertilisers – costs of which surged in 2022 and 2026 reflecting global conflicts.**
- **The Green Finance Institute and others estimate environmental deterioration could lead to a 6-12% GDP loss by the 2030s.[1]**

The challenge is significant, but the Living Planet Report also highlights reasons for hope. Around half of the wildlife populations monitored are stable or increasing, showing that nature can recover when governments, businesses, communities and conservation organisations work together.

From a business perspective, the transition towards a more nature-positive future also presents clear opportunities. For example, research from Bloomberg found over 900 businesses in the UK developing nature-based solutions, together raising £2.8bn in capital.

"All businesses have dependencies on both biodiversity and ecosystem services. It goes without saying that the deterioration of these gives rise to systemic risks that will inevitably disrupt 'business as usual'. WWF's 2026 Living Planet Report provides us with yet another stark reminder of the extraordinary pace and scale of degradation in biodiversity, and of the potential for this to be reversed if urgent action is taken.

It is imperative that boards now consider how nature-related dependencies and impacts could give rise to financially material risks and opportunities in the short, medium and longer term. Board directors should not only be integrating nature-related risks into their risk appetite and management frameworks, but also discussing what stewardship activities their businesses might benefit from in capital allocation decisions and stakeholder engagement practices."

Julie Hirigoyen
Portfolio Non-Executive Director, The Kings Cross Group, Willmott Dixon Holdings and Thriving Investments

The opportunity is real – and while the changes required are not easy, we can meet the scale of the challenge, particularly if we apply the 'science of hope' and the power of positive tipping points.

[1] For comparison, the financial crisis of 2008 took around 5% off the value of UK GDP, while the Covid-19 pandemic cost the UK up to 11% of its GDP[1]



The science of hope

Hope can be more than just a feeling, a sense of optimism or wishful thinking. It can also be a process to drive transformational change when goals, agency and pathways combine, and resilience provides the fortitude to move forward when barriers are encountered. The Living Planet Report considers hope as a process, tied to a goal, a pathway to achieving it and the agency or belief that the goal can be achieved despite uncertainty.



More than a feeling, hope can also be a process for driving transformational change – and as relevant to discussions in the boardroom as to conservation outcomes in the field.

In many ways, board directors are uniquely placed to apply the 'science of hope' in exercising their duties to promote the long-term success of the company for its members as a whole, including meeting the interests of employees and considering the impact of the company on the community and the environment.

Boards can work with executives to set goals, develop and approve roadmaps and pathways, for example, relating to transition plans. Directors also have agency to set strategic ambition, challenge and lead. This leadership can be particularly impactful when focused on harnessing the power of positive tipping points.



The power of positive tipping points

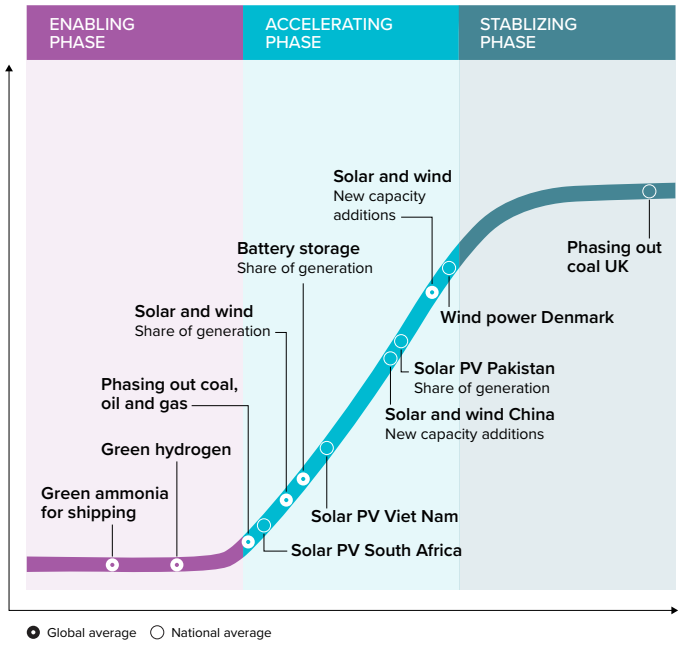
The Living Planet Report provides inspiring examples of how the 'science of hope' has delivered remarkable conservation outcomes, such as a 70% increase in wild tigers, and bluefin tuna being brought back from the brink of commercial extinction.

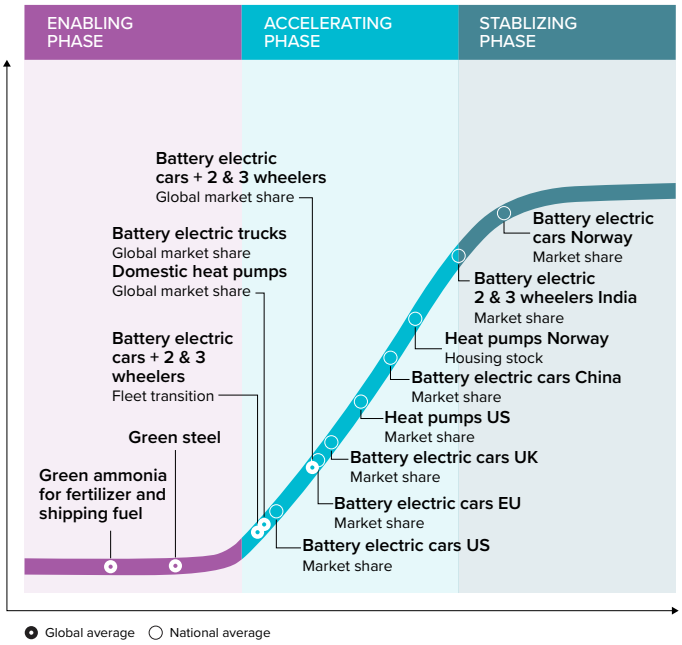
As powerful as these examples are, the systemic risks of biodiversity and nature loss cannot be addressed one species at a time. Halting and reversing nature degradation requires transformation of the three major systems – food, energy and finance. Doing this will require harnessing the power of positive tipping points to trigger acceleration and drive self-propelling change.

The good news is that there is already evidence of positive tipping points in the energy system, both for renewable energy supply and demand. To address nature loss we must accelerate the energy transition; as well as find and accelerate positive tipping points in both food and finance systems.

Board directors can use the science of hope and positive tipping points to identify areas for catalytic capital allocation, investing to accelerate innovation and translate tipping points into market opportunities.

POSITIVE TIPPING POINTS IN RENEWABLE ENERGY SUPPLY AND DEMAND





With this in mind, we have provided a deeper dive on each of the food and finance sectors, setting out: why do the findings of the Living Planet Report matter to food and finance sector NEDs (non-executive directors); how can food companies and financial institutions respond; and what questions can NEDs ask to help accelerate the transformation required.



Building nature competency in the boardroom

As set out in Chapter Zero's recent publication on climate competency in the boardroom, all directors are entrusted with promoting long-term success, balancing risk and opportunity and stewarding the organisation through uncertainty.

How effectively this oversight is exercised ultimately depends on the individuals around the board table. Boards act collectively, but governance is exercised through the judgement of individual directors. As climate impacts become ever more evident, the scope of officers' duties continues to evolve in the face of climate threats to economic systemic resilience, as set out in 'Fiduciaries' Duties in Flux: Directors' and Pension Trustees' Action on Systemic Climate Threats in the Face of a Commons Dilemma' by David Rouch, Freshfields (2026).



"Officers do now need to give substantive attention to the implications of climate threats for organisational goals they are required to pursue and are clearly permitted to take appropriate action notwithstanding individual action dilemmas. They may also conclude it is legally required."

Rouch, David, 'Fiduciaries' Duties in Flux: Directors' and Pension Trustees' Action on Systemic Climate Threats in the Face of a Commons Dilemma', Freshfields (July 09, 2026).
Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=7096158 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.7096158

Key attributes of climate competency in the boardroom: knowledge, skills and mindset, apply equally to nature as they do for climate. For example, as a non-executive director:

KNOWLEDGE

- Are you aware of the latest developments on nature-related risks and opportunities and their relevance to your business, such as the findings of the recently published UK's National Security Assessment on global biodiversity loss, and have you tabled this for board discussion?

SKILLS

- Do you feel equipped to bring nature into the boardroom, using the knowledge gained above to provide effective oversight and challenge on strategy execution and transition progress?

LEADERSHIP & MINDSET

- Is competence on climate and nature viewed as a key element to delivering directors' duties and creating value, both now and over the longer term?

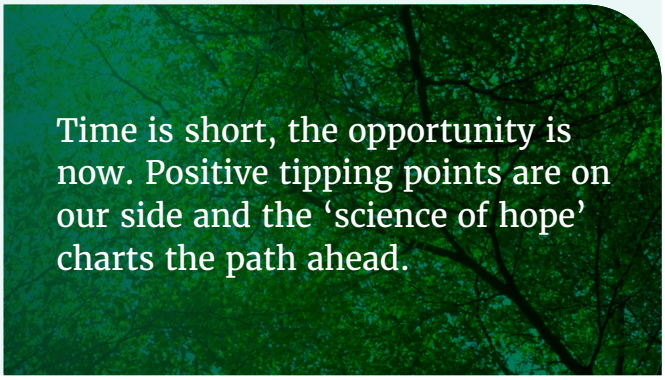
Next steps

WWF's Living Planet Report is a clear call to action; while the findings are stark, positive tipping points are already evident and can be accelerated further with the right knowledge, skills, leadership and mindset.

Directors will have a critical role in making this happen, consistent with their duties to take appropriate action to support the future viability of the businesses they represent.

AS IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS, WE ENCOURAGE DIRECTORS TO:

- Read the Living Planet Report, and related publications such as the UK's National Security Assessment. Evaluate your board's skills and competencies on nature to identify knowledge and composition gaps.
- Consider how the 'Science of Hope' could inform your boardroom discussions and enable your organisation to take a leadership stance. This could include:
  - Encouraging the use of ambitious transition planning to identify positive tipping points in the climate and nature transition relevant to your business, reflecting nature, as well as climate, in scenario planning.
  - Working with executives to define what your business will do in response, reviewing targets and incentives.
  - Challenge executives to conduct a full assessment of your nature dependencies, impacts, risks and opportunities (using frameworks like TNFD), including systemic risks, and assess whether your transition plan and risk register adequately reflects these.
- Interrogate whether you have sufficient understanding of your investors' and stakeholders' expectations on nature, and if your current reporting and disclosure approaches are fit for purpose.
- Engage with your peers to discuss best practice, accelerate collective progress and help to build climate and nature competency in the boardroom, consistent with directors' duties to promote the success of the company, both now and for the long term.
- For food and finance sector NEDs, consider the sector-specific priorities and actions in the subsequent sector deep dives.
- For further inspiration on questions you can explore with your board, read Chapter Zero and TNFD's Asking Better Questions on Nature.



DEEP DIVES

Explore our sector deep dives on food and finance on Chapter Zero's Knowledge Hub.





FURTHER READING:

- WWF & Themis Environmental Crime Financial Toolkit
- Transition Plan Taskforce Disclosure Framework and other resources
- TNFD Guidance on Nature in Transition Plans
- Global Tipping Points | understanding risks & their potential impact
- UK Legal Opinion: Nature-Related Risks and Directors' Duties - Chapter Zero
- Nature for boards: A primer - Chapter Zero
- Taking TNFD to Your Board - Chapter Zero
- Audit Committee Dialogue: Integrating nature-related financial disclosures - Chapter Zero
- Directors' Duties on nature and climate for insurance NEDs - Chapter Zero
- Directors' Duties on nature and climate for food, beverage and agribusiness NEDs - Chapter Zero