

The Right Hon Lord David Cameron
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs
Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office,
King Charles Street,
London, SW1A 2AH

29 November 2023

CC: Andrew Mitchell MP, Minister for Development and Africa
Lord Benyon, Minister of State at FCDO and DEFRA
David Rutley MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Americas and Caribbean

Dear Foreign Secretary,

For most of November, the Pantanal wetland in Brazil has been ravaged by record-breaking wildfires, presenting a crisis for the climate, biodiversity, and the people who call it home. We urge you to urgently meet with Brazil's Foreign Minister, Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, and the Brazilian Ambassador to the UK to discuss how the international community can support Brazil to address this issue and safeguard the future of this irreplaceable biome.

The Pantanal is a place like no other. As the planet's largest tropical wetland, it is a vital carbon sink in the fight against catastrophic environmental breakdown and a hub for rich and threatened biodiversity. It supports over 270 communities and contains 11 Indigenous territories, for whom the wetlands are not only the foundation of livelihoods but also central to identity and culture. The loss of this precious biome would spell disaster for the global effort to halt the twin climate and biodiversity crises; yet it continues to be plagued by devastating fires that have become the new normal in recent years.

Drought and the current heatwave, exacerbated by climate change and El Niño weather patterns, have created the ideal wildfire conditions in the Pantanal. November alone has accounted for over half of the estimated 1.2 million hectares recorded to have burned in the Pantanal this year, with an estimated 8390 km² of land burned in the first three weeks of November – an area over five times the size of London.

The flames have reached key areas like the Parque Estadual Encontro das Águas, home to the highest density of jaguars in the world, and the Transpantaneira highway, the region's main road, and have threatened the densely forested habitats beyond and the communities of Porto Jofre and Pocone, which are well known for the ecotourism value they bring to the region. The remains of perished animals can still be found littered across the scorched earth, and those that have survived must now contend with the

loss of habitat and food sources. While rain in recent days has brought relief, experts and conservationists on the ground remain on guard for the fires to return if the hot weather continues.

With COP 28 upon us, it is critical that the international community addresses the situation in the Pantanal in recognition of the central role it plays in our ability to avoid catastrophic climate breakdown. Conservationists are doing all they can to support local firefighting crews and the communities that are now under extreme threat, but support is desperately needed. It is time to sound the alarm and work to secure international cooperation to save this biome, or risk losing one of our greatest allies in the climate emergency.

We therefore request that you meet urgently with Brazil's Foreign Minister, Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, and the Brazilian Ambassador to the UK, to address the situation in the Pantanal and support Brazil in expanding its protections of this unique ecosystem, marking a new era of international cooperation to safeguard its future. This includes increasing support and measures for firefighting and fire prevention, fundraising for restoration of the Pantanal, and targeted assistance for impacted communities in recovering from its degradation.

Lula da Silva's administration has committed to end all deforestation by 2030 and has already achieved a 60% reduction in the rate of Amazon rainforest deforestation. Strong international backing will help the Brazilian government to build upon and emulate this progress in the Pantanal. Alongside this, the UK must lead at COP to drive real action to protect our planet's precious ecosystems and get us back on track to limit global heating to 1.5 degrees.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Steve Trent, CEO, Environmental Justice Foundation
Sam Lawson, CEO, Earthsight
Francisco Ferreira, CEO, Associação Sistema Terrestre Sustentável
Luciana Leite, General Coordinator, Chalana Esparança
Alex Sobel MP
Caroline Lucas MP
The Baroness Harris of Richmond
Bob Blackman CBE MP
Fabian Hamilton MP
The Baroness Lister of Burtsett
Zarah Sultana MP
Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP
The Baroness Cox
The Baroness Brown of Cambridge
Ian Byrne MP