POLICY THUMBNAIL

A Matter of Life & Death

How To Save More Lives For Less Money



JULY
2026

Centre for Small State Conservatives



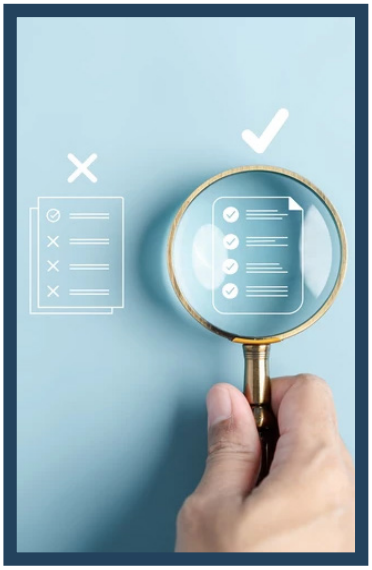
THE PROBLEM

Multiple Quangos & Regulators have legal powers to protect the lives of people & wildlife, but they don't co-ordinate or compare how much money they require citizens, companies, public bodies or charities to spend doing it. As a result, we spend much more protecting the lives of some animals (like HS2 bats[1] or Ebbsfleet spiders[2]) than on humans needing life-saving medical treatment[3], or on rare breed Dartmoor ponies[4]. And we spend very different amounts on protecting the life of a person working in a nuclear energy plant[5] compared to one involved in a road accident or needing medical treatment in a hospital too.

This means we randomly spend far more or far less on saving or improving the lives of some humans & wildlife than we do on others, which is not only morally wrong & unfair but also means we could save more lives (not only humans but wildlife as well) for less cost if we were more transparently consistent about it.

The National Institute for Health & Care Excellence (NICE) is an impressive exception when it decides how much to spend on new medical treatments. They do it by calculating the number of Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs) each new treatment will give NHS patients, & comparing the cost of each extra QALY to existing treatments so the NHS saves as many lives per £££ as possible. The current cost of a human QALY is about £30,000.

THE SOLUTION

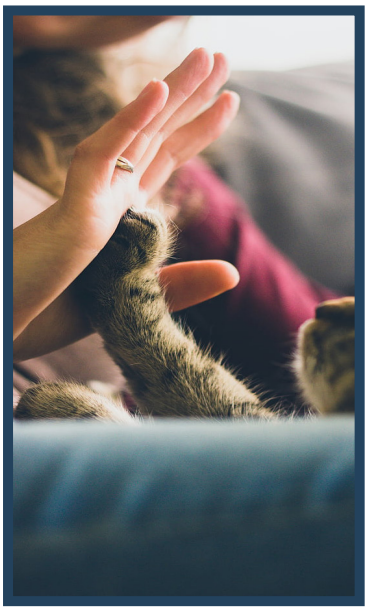


We will introduce a transparent & consistent new system to control how much regulators & officials are demanding is spent on improving & preserving the lives of people & wildlife, so everyone can see which ones are too high or low (eg where human lives are given lower value than animals) and Parliament can adjust them as needed. This will mean:

a) Updating the Government's evaluation framework (the 'Magenta Book') to outline a consistent, fair approach (equivalent to the one already used by the NHS in NICE) to calculating the value of preserving & improving the lives of people & wildlife.
b) Publishing independently-audited costs of the safeguards that regulators, quangos & Government agencies are imposing to improve or preserve the lives of humans & wildlife, using the newly-updated evaluation standards, so the results can be clearly & consistently compared.
c) Organise detailed Parliamentary scrutiny of the newly-published costs by elected representatives, and a timetable for Ministers to propose & deliver any legal & regulatory changes which are needed for a fairer & more consistent approach.
d) Cap the legal powers of regulators & quangos to bring the costs they impose into line with this new democratically-agreed structure.

[1] HS2 Bat Tunnel: Cost, Controversy, and the £216m Story
[2] Conservation charities step into set the record straight after PM wrongly claims spiders stopped 15,000 development - Buglife latest news
[3] Changes to NICE's cost-effectiveness thresholds take effect | NICE
[4] Row over potential cull of Dartmoor hill ponies - BBC News
[5] Taskforce calls for radical reset of nuclear regulation in UK - GOV.UK

The costs of each measure will be independently audited to prevent Ministers or quangos from marking their own homework, and the success or failure of each one in achieving its intended outcomes will be independently measured & published to check whether it is working better or worse than originally expected. There is more detail on how to deliver this in A New Productivity Act.



THE BENEFITS

This approach to the costs of saving or improving human lives in different settings, and of different types of wildlife too, will have multiple benefits:

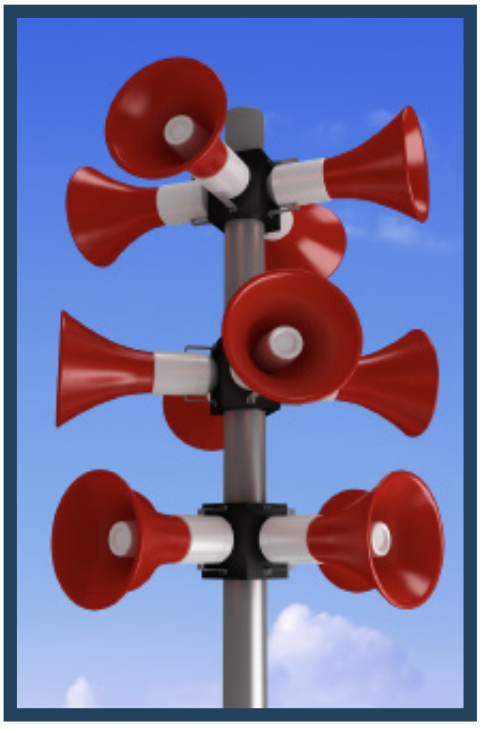
- Improved consistency, so the lives of bats or fish aren't randomly given higher values than people, & so individual human lives aren't accidentally given different values if someone is injured on a road rather than in a nuclear site.
- Better transparency, so where some lives are given deliberately higher or lower values (eg by spending more on protecting a rare species of animal or plant than a common one) the reasons for the difference are clearly understood & underpinned by democratic consent.
- More regulatory certainty, by making official decisions easier to predict reliably in advance.
- Stronger economic growth, by making sure the real costs of rules & regulations to protect humans & wildlife are independently checked, & in proportion to each other, to save more lives for less money.

THE SOUNDBITES

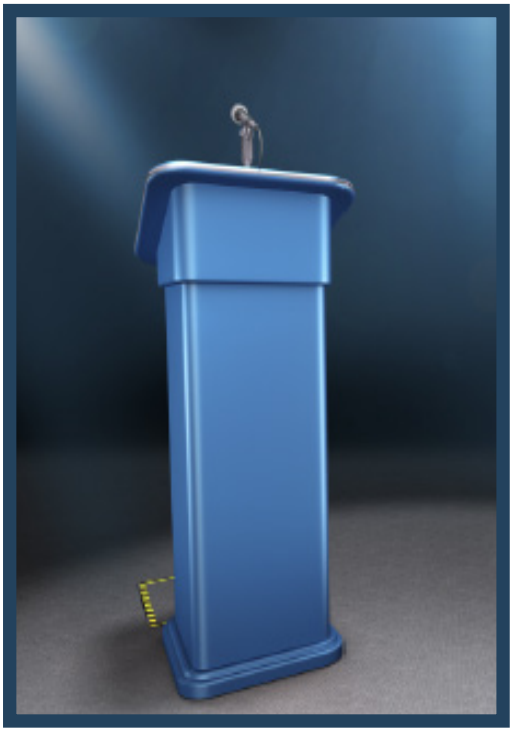
"Why do regulators spend more on saving the life of a bat or a salmon than a person? It makes no sense"

"Why do regulators think the life of a person using a busy road is worth any more or less than someone working in a nuclear plant or getting treated in a hospital? It makes no sense"

"Why do regulators think the life of a spider is worth millions of pounds, but the life of a Dartmoor pony is almost zero? It makes no sense"



THE REBUTTALS



1. *Why are you ruining Britain's environment by trashing the Environment Agency & Natural England's powers to protect it?*

These reforms won't stop regulators protecting the environment, just make sure they're doing it more consistently, transparently & cheaply in future.

2. *Won't these changes make Britain's roads and nuclear power stations more dangerous?*

Quite the opposite – these reforms will make safety budgets go further, protecting more lives for less money by making sure high quality safety protections are delivered with consistently & transparently better value for money in future too.

3. *Regulators like the Environment Agency & Natural England already spend huge amounts of money transparently explaining their decisions. Aren't you just adding even more expense & bureaucracy for something that's already happening?*

You're right that many regulators spend lots of taxpayers' money trying to explain & justify their decisions, but almost none include the numbers which would show if they're succeeding. If they did, their reports would be a lot shorter, cheaper, less bureaucratic & more useful too.

4. *Some things should be beyond price, like a human life. Isn't this an example of knowing the price of everything & the value of nothing?*

You're right that human lives are incredibly valuable. So how can we justify spending more on saving the lives of globally-common bats or spiders than we do on humans?

