

The following notes are based on Sue Miller's speech to Quakers on 16 September 2023.

Ecocide (severe damage to the environment) was intended to be one of the crimes against peace listed in the **Rome Statute**, the founding document for the International Criminal Court (ICC). This has been discussed by lawyers and academics since the early 1970s.

However, two years before the Rome Statute was signed in 1998, ecocide was dropped from the discussions during a closed doors meeting.

Research revealed that most countries supported the inclusion of ecocide and only four states are on record as having objected to it: (UK, Netherlands, France and United States. What exactly happened remains a mystery.

Making ecocide an international crime creates personal liability for the key decision-makers behind the destructive acts. No director wants to be branded an international criminal. No company wants an international criminal prosecution damaging its reputation or reducing its share value. Banks and investors will think twice about putting funds into a project that could be illegal. Insurance companies will refuse to insure projects which might be ecocidal.

Stop Ecocide Foundation convened a panel of 12 independent legal experts to draft a definition of ecocide for inclusion in the Rome Statute. Here is their definition, which was launched in 2021:

Ecocide means unlawful or wanton acts committed with knowledge that there is a substantial likelihood of severe and either widespread or long-term damage to the environment being caused by those acts.

This has been well received, and some individual states are considering creating their own ecocide laws based on this definition. The UK government has so far been unwilling to engage with ecocide law, but there are strong indications that a future Labour government would support it.

There will be headwinds against an ecocide law. The polluting industries will argue against it. It is too easy for politicians to bow to that pressure and to say that ecocide law is a nice idea but perhaps the time isn't right. **They need to know that there is a groundswell of popular support to give them the courage to get it over the line.**