

Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Brif Weinidog ac Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet
dros Newid Hinsawdd a Materion Gwledig
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for
Climate Change and Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref PO/HIDCC/0261/25

Llyr Gruffydd MS
Chair
Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee

27 June 2025

Dear Llyr

Thank you for your letter dated 2 June following my attendance at CCEI Committee on 27 March, seeking clarification on issues raised during the session.

Forestry and Woodland

1. Recognising the need to deliver a major step-change in tree planting rates, 43,000 hectares of new woodland in Wales by 2030 remains our aspiration. We also need to consider these targets in light of more recent CCC advice (22,000 hectares by 2030, and 208,000 hectares by 2050, including 15% of open ground for biodiversity) and to work with stakeholders to consider the relative contribution of hedges, agroforestry and other smaller scale planting to carbon sequestration in Wales.
2. The Welsh Government is committed to working towards the CCC recommendations for tree planting. There are a number of factors which will affect year on year progress and as a result it is not our intention to set annual targets, but we will be closely monitoring progress on an annual basis in order to identify further actions that might be required. The newly established Tree Planting and Hedgerow Creation Stakeholder Delivery Group will have a key role to play in providing advice on annual trajectories for tree planting and hedgerow extension for land both within and outside SFS.
3. The single biggest area of land owned by Welsh Government is the Welsh Government Woodland Estate. In 'Making wood work for Wales', our consultation on a Timber Industrial Strategy which closed on 16th April, we proposed working with NRW to explore options for expanding the size of the Welsh Government Woodland Estate. This offers the most obvious route for new planting. The final Timber Industrial Strategy will be published later this year.
4. With the majority of land in Wales managed for agriculture we expect farmers will continue to contribute significantly to increasing woodland cover. But if we are to reach the level of tree planting that we need to deliver it will need a concerted effort across all landowners and managers. This requires a tailored approach with different types of land facing different challenges.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

We are establishing relationships with a wide range of landowners and managers to understand these challenges better and to provide the necessary support to enable large scale planting. We will be using the Tree Planting and Hedgerow Creation Stakeholder Delivery Group to prioritise actions including identifying and removing barriers to planting; trialling resources for advice and knowledge-sharing; using new mechanisms for promoting planting at a landscape scale including through the National Forest; and refining our strategic communications plan to increase awareness of grant schemes, local networks and the benefit of woodlands across sectors.

5. The final SFS scheme is still being developed.

6. The membership of the group is published here: <https://www.gov.wales/trees-and-hedgerows-stakeholder-delivery-group-terms-reference>

7. The Terms of Reference for the group are published here: [Trees and Hedgerows Stakeholder Delivery Group: terms of reference \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

8. The design of the SFS is in development and will only be signed off once all the work underpinning it has been completed. As the role of the CCC is to provide advice to us on a potential pathway that includes action across all sectors to reach Net Zero, we do not expect them to provide a separate assessment of the SFS's role in tree planting.

9. Under SFS each farmer will be required to produce a Trees and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan. This will require them to go through a series of questions that will help them identify how tree and hedgerow planting could benefit their farm and where they might best be located. These include questions on flooding under a Changing Climate theme. In addition, depending on the scale of planting involved they will be able to access advice from a registered woodland planner or other expert advice. Welsh Government officials will continue to liaise with Natural Resources Wales regarding appropriate management approaches, including continuous cover forestry, on the Welsh Government Woodland Estate.

10. The Woodland Finance Working Group published its recommendations in July 2022, and we have made good progress implementing them. We acknowledge there is a role for private investment in helping tackle both the nature and climate emergencies we face but want to ensure investment is secured in a way that works for Wales.

We also think woodland creation should be considered alongside other developing environmental services markets. We believe environmental markets must be well-designed and governed to prevent 'greenwash' and ensure they are high integrity, deliver real environmental improvement and both engage and benefit local communities. This position informed the development of our Sustainable Investment Principles, which we consulted on last year. We intend to use responses from the consultation to develop our approach to investment in nature-based solutions in a way which complements our existing commitments under the Well Being Act for Future Generations, Biodiversity targets and Net Zero ambitions. Our Timber Industrial Strategy which will launch later this year, will also create a real opportunity for foresters, timber processors and manufacturers in Wales to contribute to a "wood economy" and therefore drive long term investment not just in woodland creation but also the wider supply chain and infrastructure.

Air Quality

11. Work remains on track to develop new air quality targets for Wales in line with the statutory duties under the Act.

I expect to launch a public consultation on target options for PM2.5 during autumn 2025, subject to my on-going consideration of advice. There will need to be proper consideration of consultation responses in relation to the proposed targets. The specific date of laying will depend on the outcome of the consultation. Based on current planning, I fully expect the draft regulations will be laid by the end of January 2027 in line with the duties in the Act.

12. The guidance, which will be published by the end of July, will reflect the updated legislative commitments for local air quality that were designed, consulted upon and agreed during the development of the Act. Publication of the updated guidance will also ensure commencement of the appropriate sections of the Act, and will reflect the already agreed position of the Welsh Government.

13 and 14. It is our intention to publish a consultation on the draft promoting awareness plan by July. I have been considering advice from officials on stationary vehicle idling and domestic solid fuel burning with regard to policy options. I will announce my decision on these shortly.

Biodiversity

15. We have set out our response to the recommendations set out in the Audit Wales report which is attached as Annex A. These include the actions we propose to take to improve the awareness of and delivery of the section 6 duty, including our own compliance.

Deposit Return Scheme

16. A common UK-wide approach to DRS existed only up until the point the previous UK Government diverged from the collectively agreed scope. The competence to bring forward a Deposit Return Scheme is fully devolved and in line with the principles of devolution, it should be for the Government of Wales to bring forward proposals to the Senedd on a DRS which delivers for Wales, noting that this was not an issue under the EU's framework prior to Brexit. In the case of DRS, whilst we have a shared long term objective, it is clear that the different nations of the UK are at different stages of their journey towards it. As Wales is second in the world for recycling it means that for a DRS to be effective in a Welsh context it must deliver benefit over and above our current performance, which necessitates a broad 'all-in' scheme, which was the overwhelmingly endorsed outcome of the consultation, alongside a clear pathway to reuse.

I trust this information provides clarity for the committee on these important matters.

Yours sincerely,



Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS

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a Materion Gwledig

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs

Management response form

Report title: The Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty

Completion date: April 2025

Ref	Recommendation	Management Response Relevant commentary on the planned actions in response to the recommendations	Completion date Completion date for planned actions	Responsible officer (title)
R1	The Welsh Government should publish a list of public authorities covered by the duty. It should do this before the next reporting deadline at the end of 2025. It should update the list when any new public authority covered by the duty is created.	Accept. We will publish a list of public authorities covered by the duty before the next reporting deadline at the end of 2025. The list will be updated periodically, for example when any new public authority covered by the duty is created.	By the end of 2025	Marine and Biodiversity Team
R2	The Welsh Government should require that public authorities submit their biodiversity plans and reports to it when published	Accept. We will amend the reporting guidance to include a requirement that reports and plans should be forwarded to us. The section 6 FAQ document already includes a request for public authorities to forward	By the end of 2025	Marine and Biodiversity Team

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	<p>or revised. It should also follow up with public authorities if they have not published these plans and reports as expected.</p>	<p>plans to us (response to question 11), but we will include this requirement in future guidance.</p> <p>We will follow up where appropriate with public authorities who have not published plans and reports</p>		
R3	<p>The Welsh Government should publish reports that provide an overall view on public authorities' actions, progress, and compliance with the duty. It should do so every three years in line with the</p>	<p>Accept. Following each reporting round we will utilise the reports published by public authorities to set out our view on actions and progress. We will provide good practice guides in light of exemplar actions and work with public authorities to identify where improvements are needed to ensure compliance with the duty. The</p>	<p>Within twelve months of each reporting deadline</p>	<p>Marine and Biodiversity Team</p>

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	reporting cycle defined by the Act.	Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets)(Wales) Bill will introduce provisions to strengthen the monitoring, evaluation and reporting requirements for section 6.		
R4	Before the next reporting deadline at the end of 2025, the Welsh Government should lead by example in publishing a high-quality biodiversity plan and report specific to its own actions.	<p>Accept. We will publish a section 6 plan which will be developed alongside the update to the Nature Recovery Action Plan proposed for later this year.</p> <p>We will publish a section 6 report by the reporting deadline.</p>	December 2025 December 2025	Marine and Biodiversity Team

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R5	<p>The Welsh Government should work with public authorities to review and revise existing guidance and supporting information around the duty. This should include:</p> <p>a) integrating it seamlessly with material produced to support the proposed changes to environmental law;</p>	<p>Accept. We will work with public authorities to gather views and improve our understanding on practical implementation and challenges. We will look at what has worked well and what can be improved to inform new or refreshed guidance taking into account the evidence gathered by Audit Wales to inform their report and recommendations. Guidance will be co-designed and co-developed with public authorities.</p> <p>a) Accept. We will ensure any updates to the guidance and supporting information will take account of and reflect the proposed changes in the Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Bill. For example, we will work with public authorities to revise the guidance for the new biodiversity targets when they are set in secondary legislation.</p>	<p>Many of the recommendations here will be on an ongoing basis but we will work to align with the existing section 6 reporting cycles. Some will be triggered by the work required to implement the Environment (Principles, Governance and</p>	<p>Marine and Biodiversity Team</p>

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	<p>b) ensuring public authorities without specific biodiversity expertise can understand it;</p> <p>c) tailoring it for different sectors and types of public authority;</p>	<p>b) Accept. When new guidance is published or existing guidance refreshed it will be written in non-technical language, tailored to and appropriate for its target audience based on feedback received from public authorities.</p> <p>c) Accept. When new guidance is published or existing guidance refreshed it will be written in non-technical language, tailored to and appropriate for its target audience based on feedback received from public authorities. We will work with different types of public authorities to ensure guidance meets different requirements. For example, tailoring guidance for public authorities that cover the marine environment.</p> <p>d) Accept. We will ensure that all section 6 guidance documents are available through both the Wales</p>	<p>Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Bill. The timeline for the Bill is yet to be confirmed, but when the targets are set in secondary legislation they will be subject to specific schedules which will govern the timelines for any new or</p>	

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	<p>d) ensuring it is all easily accessible in, or through, one place;</p> <p>e) clarifying whether guidance has statutory force; and</p>	<p>Biodiversity Partnership’s and Welsh Government’s website.</p> <p>e) Accept. Guidance issued is statutory guidance. Public authorities (other than a Minister of the Crown or UK government department) “must have regard to” the guidance, as well as the other listed documents in section 6(5) of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. This means that public authorities must specifically consider these documents but how a public authority does so, i.e. what weight each is given in its decision making process, is for each public authority to determine is appropriate in the circumstances as it remains within their discretion as decision maker. We will include a statement explaining this when we update or publish guidance.</p>	<p>revised section 6 guidance.</p>	

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	f) adapting and sharing its own biodiversity toolkit and impact assessment guidance as resources for other public authorities.	f) Partially Accept. We will examine the feasibility and benefit of making them available, as part of how we can improve our overall support package for public authorities. This will include working with and assisting public authorities through existing support mechanisms such as the section 6 duty working group and the Wales Biodiversity Partnership. Any toolkit needs to be appropriate for the user – our own internal toolkit may not be of relevance to other public authorities.		
R6	The Welsh Government should provide public authorities with a planning template. It should	Accept. We will publish a planning template.	December 2025	Marine and Biodiversity Team

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	ensure this is adaptable to those with stand-alone plans and those that have integrated biodiversity planning into wider plans.			
R7	The Welsh Government should develop training for public authorities, targeted at staff responsible for developing biodiversity plans and reports. The training should cover the duty and additional requirements arising from the proposed changes to environmental law.	Accept. As noted in the responses to recommendation 3 and 5(f) we will work with public authorities to explore what additional support we can provide to assist them in complying with the section 6 duty. This will include looking at possible training provision but will include other options, such as opportunities to build on existing support packages, for example the NatureWise course offered by Academi Wales.	As linked to the Environment (Principles, Governance, and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Bill timelines will be governed by when targets are set in regulations.	Marine and Biodiversity Team

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R8	To improve quality and consistency, the Welsh Government should routinely provide feedback to public authorities on the plans and reports they submit.	Accept. We will use our existing governance mechanisms to provide feedback when appropriate including working with and through umbrella organisations. The Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets)(Wales) Bill will introduce provisions to strengthen the monitoring, evaluation and reporting requirements for section 6 and this recommendation will be considered as part of the work required to develop our approach to monitoring, evaluation and reporting.	Not applicable	Marine and Biodiversity Team

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R9	The Welsh Government should rigorously assess the costs of its proposed changes to environmental law and ensure there are adequate resources within (or provided to) public authorities to support effective implementation.	Accept. This will be considered as part of the Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Bill Regulatory Impact Assessment and further impact assessments that will be required when secondary legislation is developed. As part of the target setting framework proposed under the Bill there will be a consultation process which will allow public authorities to make representations.	Not applicable	Marine and Biodiversity Team