



## Y Pwyllgor Amgylchedd a Chynaliadwyedd

### Environment and Sustainability Committee

Alun Davies AM  
Minister for Natural Resources and  
Food  
Welsh Government

1 May 2014

Annwyl Alun

You will recall that the Committee undertook an inquiry into marine policy in Wales, which we reported on in January 2013. Our report made 13 recommendations to the Welsh Government, ten of which were accepted in full and three in principle. To monitor the progress made since the publication of our report, we held follow up sessions with stakeholders in February 2014.

Further to this evidence, we set out below our assessment of progress. We also seek further information from you in a number of areas.

#### **1. Priority of marine policy**

- 1.1 During the initial inquiry, stakeholders expressed concerns about the lack of priority afforded to marine policy in Wales. This lack of priority was emphasised through the absence of references to marine policy in consultations associated with key Welsh Government strategies for managing natural resources in Wales, such as Sustaining a Living Wales and the creation of NRW.

- 1.2 During our follow up sessions, developments such as the publication of the Wales Marine and Fisheries Strategic Action Plan were welcomed by stakeholders. However, concerns were expressed that marine policy is still being viewed as a stand-alone sector and isn't mainstreamed across Welsh Government policy. Witnesses referred to the White Paper on the Environment Bill as an example of where marine policy had not been sufficiently integrated into proposals for natural resources management.
- 1.3 Furthermore, stakeholders expressed particular concern about the lack of reference made to the proposals for a marine planning process in the Positive Planning consultation and the Draft Planning Bill, stating that they do not identify the links between the terrestrial and marine planning systems.
- 1.4 In our report, we recommended that the Welsh Government should afford a higher priority to marine policy. Whilst we welcome the publication of a Marine and Strategic Action Plan as an important step forward we are disappointed that marine environment has not been given greater consideration within the Environment Bill White Paper or within the Positive Planning and the Draft Planning Bill.
- 1.5 **We would be grateful if you could provide further detail as to how marine policy is being mainstreamed across your department and the Welsh Government and on how the marine planning process relates to the proposals contained on Positive Planning and the Draft Planning Bill.**

## **2. Integrated Coastal Zone Management**

- 2.1 Witnesses told us that they felt that Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) would be the key to ensuring that terrestrial

and marine planning processes interact effectively. As part of our initial inquiry, we recommended that the Welsh Government should review its ICZM strategy as soon as possible, but not later than by April 2014. This recommendation was accepted in principle.

2.2 We note that no reference is made to Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Marine and Fisheries Strategic Action Plan.

2.3 **We ask that you provide us with an update on the progress made by the Welsh Government in reviewing the ICZM strategy and details of how work on ICZM is being fed into work on the marine planning process and work on the Draft Planning Bill.**

### **3. Marine spatial planning**

3.1 During our original inquiry, we were persuaded of the importance of the marine spatial planning process for the future of the Welsh marine environment.

3.2 We warmly welcome the commitment made in the Marine and Fisheries Strategic Action Plan to establish a marine planning process in Wales by 2015.

3.3 We are mindful that stakeholders told us in the follow-up sessions that this was an ambitious timetable that would require significant resourcing. We were pleased to hear the reassurances you provided, during the general scrutiny session with us, that you were content that you had sufficient resource to deliver the marine planning process to time.

3.4 **Given the scale of this task and the other commitments for marine policy made in the Marine and Fisheries Strategic Action Plan we would ask that you keep the resourcing of these actions**

under review and keep the Committee updated on progress towards the 2015 target.

#### **4. Marine protected areas**

##### *An ecologically coherent network*

- 4.1 Since the publication of our report in January 2013, we have received positive feedback from stakeholders about the work that has been done to build consensus around both the management of existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and the designation of additional Marine Conservation Zones. We welcome this.
- 4.2 We also note your announcement that the Welsh Government is undertaking an assessment of the current Marine Protected Areas Network to identify any gaps, as part of a wider UK process. However, some stakeholders expressed concern about progress made since the announcement in July and questioned whether the assessment will be completed in time to allow Wales to meet the Marine Strategic Directive Framework requirement to have an ecologically coherent network of sites in place by 2016.
- 4.3 Natural Resources Wales told the Committee that it did not know, as of yet, when the assessment would be completed but expected to get further information on the project this year.
- 4.4 **Given the lack of clarity over the timetable for completion of the assessment, and the length of time available to meet the 2016 target, it would be helpful if you could provide us with confirmation that you are content that this target will be met.**
- 4.5 **Additionally, we ask that you provide us with a detailed timetable for the completion of the assessment and actions thereafter to designate any additional sites.**

### *The offshore Marine Conservation Zone process*

- 4.6 Recommendation 11 of our original report was that the Welsh Government should engage with the offshore MCZ process being run by the UK Government and facilitate Welsh stakeholder input to this process.
- 4.7 This recommendation was accepted by the Welsh Government. The Welsh Fishermen's Association have expressed concern that this recommendation does not appear to have been progressed. **We ask you for an update on action to implement this recommendation.**

### *Existing Marine Protected Areas*

- 4.8 In relation to the management and assessment of existing MPA's, Natural Resources Wales has informed us that it has developed a set of shared principles for MPA management with the Welsh Government.
- 4.9 We were surprised that other stakeholders didn't appear to have been consulted during the development of these principles. That said, we have noted Natural Resources Wales' comments that further stakeholder engagement will take place. During our original inquiry, we received concerning evidence about the status of Wales' existing MPAs and we therefore welcome the development of these shared principles.
- 4.10 **However, we would be grateful if you could confirm that consultation with stakeholders on the shared principles will take place and outline the timeline for such consultation.**

## **5. Article 17 report**

- 5.1 Concern was expressed to us by the Welsh Fishermen's Association and Bangor Mussels Producers Ltd about the accuracy of the Article 17 report produced by Natural Resources Wales (to comply with the requirements of the Habitats Directive). We note that NRW has been in discussion with these organisations in order to address their concerns and hope that any outstanding issues have been resolved.

## **6. Stakeholder engagement**

- 6.1 We noted in our report the importance of ensuring good stakeholder engagement, and this was also raised during our follow up sessions.
- 6.2 In evidence, Wales Environment Link (WEL) stated that it believes there is a need to develop a permanent mechanism for engagement with stakeholders on marine policy.
- 6.3 WEL told us that it did not want to see the momentum gained through the stakeholder review group on MCZs being lost. It also called on the Welsh Government not to underestimate the likely scale of stakeholder interest in the marine planning process.
- 6.4 To assure us, we ask you to confirm:
- a) how you are going to ensure that the momentum gained through the review of the MCZ process is not lost;
  - b) whether you plan to establish a permanent mechanism for engagement; and (if so)
  - c) the steps you will take to establish such a mechanism.

## 7. Data

- 7.1 We heard evidence from stakeholders about the gaps in the data and evidence on the marine environment and that there was a need to better coordinate the data that different organisations already hold. The need to do this was particularly emphasised in relation to the marine planning process.
- 7.2 We welcome the commitments made in the Marine and Fisheries Strategic Action Plan to publish a marine evidence strategy and to develop a marine data planning portal.
- 7.3 We also welcome the assurance given during our general scrutiny session with you in March that the Joint Nature Conservation Committee will be continuing to collect data on seabird colonies.
- 7.4 We intend to keep these data and evidence gathering arrangements under review as they progress and **we ask that you keep us informed as these developments take place.**

## 8. Monitoring

- 8.1 We were told of stakeholders' concerns that proposals within the joint consultation on the monitoring programme for the marine strategy framework directive were not ambitious enough. Stakeholders believed that an increase in monitoring was required rather than merely using existing monitoring programmes. Concern was also expressed that some of the monitoring measures would not be finished until as late as 2020 as good environmental status also needs to be delivered by the same year.
- 8.2 **Now that the consultation has closed, we would be grateful if you could provide an update as to how the monitoring arrangements will be taken forward.**

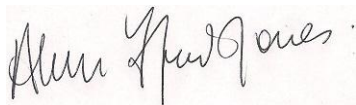
## **9. The Environment Bill White Paper**

9.1 We are aware of the proposals on Several and Regulating Orders contained in the Environment Bill White Paper.

9.2 Although these issues did not form part of our initial inquiry, we were disappointed to hear during the follow-up sessions that the industry did not feel that it had been consulted with or listened to during the development of these proposals.

9.3 We ask that due consideration is given to these concerns as you progress with your work to develop proposals for the Environment Bill.

Yn gywir,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alun Ffred Jones', is written over a light-colored rectangular background.

**Alun Ffred Jones AM**

Chair of the Environment and Sustainability Committee