

## **Environment and Sustainability Committee**

### **General scrutiny of the Minister for Natural Resources**

This paper responds to the Natural Resource elements of the Committee's letter of 6 June addressed to the Minister for Natural Resources and Food.

#### ***Biodiversity***

1. The Nature Recovery Plan will set out the strategic actions the Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) and others will take in order to halt the loss of our biodiversity and nature, increasing the resilience of our natural environment and enhancing the benefits to the economy and society of Wales.
2. A consultation on the Nature Recovery Plan will be launched at the Wales Biodiversity Partnership Conference on 10 and 11 September, with the final version due to be published in early 2015. The work has been developed through a cross-sectoral board including representatives from nature and environmental bodies, farming unions, forestry and landowner interests, and local government.
3. The Nature Recovery Plan aims to support the move from the traditional approach to biodiversity action to the integrated area based approach of Natural Resource Management (NRM), which will be a key feature of the forthcoming Environment Bill. The plan aims to give a clear focus for biodiversity action as an integral part of NRM.
4. The NRM approach focuses on increasing the underlying resilience of our natural systems to provide a platform for both biodiversity gains and strengthening wider public benefits. It recognises the reality of the interdependence between nature and social and economic factors, and emphasises the landscape scale approach needed if we are to truly halt the decline in biodiversity and sustain the services our natural environment provides.
5. The Welsh Government has been developing an Information Hub over the last year, working closely with NRW. The purpose of the Information Hub is to improve access to and sharing of data and information relating to the environment of Wales. The initial Information Hub website is now live, providing a tool for accessing up-to-date, robust data: <http://lle.wales.gov.uk/environment>.

#### ***Action Plan for Pollinators***

6. The Welsh Government will continue to work closely with Defra and a host of public, private and voluntary bodies to deliver the Action Plan for Pollinators outcomes. The Wales Pollinator Taskforce is now established to take forward the Plan, and it brings together representatives from wildlife organisations, bee keepers, local authorities and government.

7. We are working alongside Defra and the other devolved administrations on building the evidence base on pollinators, and work has begun on developing and testing a national pollinator monitoring scheme.
8. Roadside verge management has been identified as an area for action, and the Pollination Taskforce has compiled and shared good practice with highway authorities. The Welsh Government has recently announced a five year Road Verges for Wildflowers initiative for the motorways and trunk roads of Wales, that will create and protect new and existing wildflower verges as well as improving conditions for wildflowers through appropriate maintenance.
9. Glastir contains the appropriate tools, such as traditional haymeadow management and creating traditional orchards, which will help to create and enhance diverse and connected flowering habitats across farmland. Within Glastir Advanced there are target objectives for important bee and butterfly species. Contracts will be evaluated later this year, and this will inform whether delivery could be improved in certain areas, for example, the target objectives that support the Action Plan for Pollinators. Management advice for land managers has also been provided through Gwlad and is being developed further with Farming Connect.
10. To raise awareness of the loss of habitat for pollinators in Wales and to show just how easy it is to create local habitats for our bees and butterflies over 200 schools and community groups, involving 7,500 volunteers, were awarded Welsh Government funding through Keep Wales Tidy's Wild Weekend for Wales. A 'one year on' report is currently being prepared.

## ***Forestry***

11. The Welsh Government has the lead policy role on forestry supported by NRW in its management of the Wales public forest estate. The Welsh Government supports the role of the Wales Forest Business Partnership which is responsible for supporting business and supply chains, as well as all round support for the sector. We are working with NRW and the private forestry sector to develop a timber strategy for Wales to ensure we get the best economic outcomes from the harvest of timber from both public and private woodlands. This is a fully inclusive process, working with the sector to ensure that a robust and realistic strategy is produced that is sustainable and achievable, to safeguard long term investment in the Welsh timber processing industry.
12. In response to the concerns expressed by the sector in the recent National Assembly for Wales Environment Committee scrutiny sessions, NRW has strengthened its forestry team with the appointment of an experienced forestry official (Ruth Jenkins) to a senior management role with the support of a number of other staff with forestry expertise. This move has been welcomed by the private sector and should enable better communication between NRW, the Welsh Government forestry policy team and the private sector in the future.

13. NRW has organised seminars for contractors, private growers and the sector to look at best practice for forestry operations, held a number of tree health seminars and met with the sector to discuss the streamlining of felling licence administration. NRW representatives from the timber sector and wider stakeholder groups sit on the Welsh Government Tree Health Steering Group which has developed strategies for tree health and for managing *Phytophthora ramorum*. The Group has developed a programme for the long term recovery of woodlands in Wales from the damage caused by *Phytophthora ramorum*.
14. NRW now meets with the sector regularly and has established a Wales Land Management Forum which includes two representatives from the forestry sector to guide how it delivers its forestry remit as part of wider NRM. They are looking to strengthen its role and breadth in order to include more forestry representation, the position regarding NRW approach to forestry in Wales and its relationship with private owners has improved.
15. The announcement at the Royal Welsh Show of the award of support under the Nature Fund to NRW and Coed Cymru to promote woodland creation and management has been welcomed as demonstrating the Welsh Government's commitment to supporting forestry in Wales.
16. The Welsh Government has set a target to create 100,000 hectares of new woodland over the next 20 years and measures in the RDP 2014-2020 proposals provide strong support for forestry and woodland creation in Wales. Subject to the confirmation of the RDP these measures should support a continued increase in woodland creation in the coming years.

### ***Climate Change***

17. The Welsh Government's annual report on climate change in December 2013 showed that we are making progress in Wales to reduce our emissions against the targets in the 2010 Climate Change Strategy. The report also sets out the key action we have taken to tackle the causes and consequences of climate change in Wales.
18. While the report shows that we have exceeded our 3% annual emission reduction target for 2011 data, sustaining this reduction will become increasingly more challenging. In addition, the annual report shows that further action is needed if we are to meet our more challenging 40% reduction in emissions by 2020. Further work needs to be done to build on this progress.
19. A written statement on a policy refresh was published in July, confirming our intention to review progress on delivering practical action and to take account of the contributions we have recently received from the Climate Change Commission for Wales and expert bodies, to help to identify action to further increase momentum.
20. The policy refresh will focus on the practical action we can take to deliver not only on our emissions targets but also how it can serve to deliver our wider

government priorities in striving for a low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive Wales.

21. The Agriculture and Land Use sector accounts for 21% of emissions covered by the 3% target and has a baseline emission level of 5.96 Mt CO<sub>2</sub>e.
22. Agriculture and land-use emissions have risen since 2009, largely due to an historical legacy of aging forestry in Wales and an associated sharp decrease in the modelled forest sink in Wales inventory. This increase in overall sector emissions reflects the maturation of forestry crops which were largely planted in the 1950s-1970s. However the sharpness of the impact between 2009 and 2010 is considered to have been overestimated by the model.
23. Given the slight increase, we have commissioned a review of the Land Use Climate Change report, which will consider the refinement of both mitigation and adaptation policy in this area as part of our next steps. The Review will use the recommendations in the Land Use Climate Change Group report as a starting point.
24. The Sectoral Adaptation Plans are the principal mechanism through which the Welsh Government seeks to deliver climate resilience in our sectors' aims and objectives for the coming century.
25. The Welsh Government has been working with the Climate Change Commission's Adaptation Task and Finish group to produce guidance, tools and resources for the sectors.
26. Progress to date has varied between the different sectors but Sectoral Adaptation Plans will cover the following five sectors:
  - Natural Environment,
  - Infrastructure,
  - Health,
  - Communities and
  - Business and Tourism
27. The Health Sector has an established Sectoral Adaptation Plan in place. We are currently working with the tourism sector on a project which will look to identify the risks to the tourism industry, create a high level risk assessment for tourism businesses in Wales and provide a number of tools and resources to support businesses following this.
28. We are currently working on developing a Sectoral Adaptation Plan for the natural environment sector with the Climate Change Commission for Wales.

### ***Water Strategy***

29. We have recently consulted on our Water Strategy for Wales. This set out the future direction of water policy in Wales and how we will ensure that water continues to meet the needs of communities, business and the environment.

30. Key to the approach we set out in the consultation is the development of a more integrated method of managing our water resources, as part of the wider approach to NRM. This will involve coordinating the management of land, water and other related resources to drive not only benefits to the environment, but benefits to the wider society and economy.
31. The consultation on the Water Strategy for Wales closed on 4 July. In total 59 responses were received from a broad variety of organisations including the water industry, conservation and environmental groups, private individuals, businesses, local government, public health organisations, regulators, professional bodies and consumer representatives.
32. A summary of responses will be published this autumn and my consideration of these responses will inform the development of the final strategy.

### ***NRW's Wales Coastal Flooding Review***

33. NRW carried out a review into coastal flooding, following the winter storms of December 2013 and January 2014. This review has been published in two parts, the first focussing on the impacts and associated costs and the second part looking at the lessons learnt and recommendations to take forward.
34. The first part of the review, published in February, identified that as a result of our continued investment in flood and coastal risk management, during the winter storms less than 1% of the properties and agricultural land at potential risk experienced flooding. The second part of the review was published on 30 April and contained 47 recommendations. A written response to this review was published on 22 July 2014 accepting all 47 recommendations either outright or in principle. This work was done with input from the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport and the Minister for Finance.
35. The first recommendation is for a delivery plan to progress the recommendations and identify priorities, appropriate leads and necessary resources. NRW will lead on the production of a delivery plan, alongside Welsh Government officials and Risk Management Authorities. An initial workshop on 31 July began scoping out the delivery plan. In order to succeed this needs to be a collaborative piece of work involving input from across government departments and all flood and coastal risk management authorities.
36. In addition to the recommendations for a delivery plan, a further ten recommendations are already underway including work on rebranding NRW's Flood Warning Service, preparation for a coastal evacuation exercise and an assessment of environmental change brought about by the storms.
37. The recommendations present the future challenges we face to maintain and build resilience to such events, particularly in light of the increasing risks posed from climate change. The Welsh Government response can be found at: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/epq/flooding/studies/coastal-review-part-2/>.

## ***Forthcoming Government Bills***

38. Officials have worked with counterparts in Communities & Tackling Poverty and Housing & Regeneration Departments to ensure alignment of the Environment Bill provisions with those of the Well-being of Future Generations and Planning Bills. Particular attention has been paid to achievement of the shared aim for these Bills: to simplify and clarify current regulatory processes and to put in place an effective and joined-up legislative architecture for sustainable development.

### Well-being of Future Generations Bill

39. The Environment Bill will establish a framework for the sustainable management of our natural resources, embedding sustainable development as a guiding principle to help deliver environmental well-being. This approach will inform the better decision making and long-term thinking which is at the heart of the Well-being of Future Generations Bills, and help to optimise the environmental, social and economic outcomes for Wales.
40. The Environment Bill will complement the proposals within the Well-being of Future Generations Bill, in particular in relation to Natural Resources Wales' contribution to the proposed Future Generations Commissioner's Advisory Council, and as a future statutory member of Wales' Public Service Boards. In practical terms this approach will help ensure that key evidence and priorities in relation to natural resource management at the local level will inform the delivery of public services across the piece. In addition, the complementary proposals within the two Bills will mean that the sustainable management of our natural resources is at the heart of the proposed Future Generations Commissioner's periodic report on behalf of future generations in Wales.
41. The Environment Bill proposes to introduce Area Statements which will set out the opportunities and challenges to sustainably manage the natural resources in a given area. Through Natural Resources Wales' membership of the Public Service Boards this information will inform the development of the Well-being Plans.
42. Under the Well-being of Future Generations Bill we will establish a new progress measurement framework for Wales to underpin the goals set on the face of the Bill. This will build on and replace our current suite of sustainable development indicators for Wales which already measure our efforts to address environmental issues, including climate change through measuring greenhouse gas emissions.

### Planning Bill

43. We have worked closely to ensure alignment between the Environment and Planning Bill. The Environment Bill's area-based approach aims to provide a higher quality evidence base on opportunities and risks in an area to provide a clear and consistent evidence base that can inform the preparation of Local

Development Plans. This will support the objectives of the Planning Bill to improve local planning service delivery.

44. The approach would also provide a clear and consistent basis for NRW to provide advice on planning applications.