

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith /
Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd / Priorities for the Sixth Senedd
PR36
Ymateb gan Sue Lewis/ Evidence from Sue Lewis

Dear Committee Members

Here are a few comments on the letter you received from the Minister and Deputy Minister, and on your future work programme.

1. I support previous comments from all parties that there should be maximum co-operation towards common goals.

The work of this committee should go beyond politics, and maintain its focus on a just transition to zero carbon, and the well-being of future generations. The main goal must be deep and rapid reductions in carbon dioxide emissions, which exceed the current plans in place. Therefore, I would like to see this committee seek advice from scientists and other technical experts, which enables them to properly understand, scrutinise and deliberate on, current targets, and the next carbon reduction plan, due out in November.

2. The Minister and Deputy Minister say they will "engage every person, community, business and public servant", in taking action on the climate and ecological emergency.

This is a very welcome intention, and I would like to see the Committee ensuring that the government provides the leadership and resources to do this. Currently I do not see this happening. The Committee could even contribute to it, as a cross-party group. Indeed, the Senedd as a whole needs to see this as their part of the national effort and therefore their responsibility. We saw this to a large extent during the Covid pandemic. Now the Government, the Committees and the Senedd need to apply the lessons learnt from the pandemic, to the climate crisis. If the public could see politicians regularly on their TV screens, accompanied by climate scientists and other experts, and questioned by well-informed journalists, this would start to build the public knowledge and awareness we need. Without public knowledge, understanding and support, I believe we will find it hard, if not impossible, to achieve effective action at system level

Furthermore, the proposed COP Cymru in November, as Wales' now annual climate event, will be an ideal platform from which to launch this.

In particular, I would like to see the Committee properly considering a Citizens' Assembly on climate in Wales, with the help of external experts on public engagement and deliberative democracy. This could be a powerful route to making a step-change in Wales in this respect. All too often, public engagement means talking to the 'usual suspects', who, it is true, do have vast amounts of knowledge of, and commitment to the subject under discussion, whilst also often having vested interests for a particular outcome. For the climate and nature crisis

we need to go beyond this, and ensure the involvement and views of ordinary people across the full range of interests. I would like to see the Committee proposing a Citizens' Assembly to the Senedd, building on the learning of previous events in other parts of the UK and the world. We could then use that as a springboard to engage and inform the wider public as effectively and as rapidly as possible.

If a cross-party group made such a proposal, the Senedd as a whole would be more likely to back it, and the Government would be more likely to properly fund it, and take on board its recommendations.

3. "Net zero public sector by 2030"

This urgently needs to include public sector investments in calculating the carbon emissions of each council area. Currently, carbon emissions from investment are not included. I am aware that pension funds, in particular, apply UK-wide rules which seem to justify them investing in fossil fuels and thereby funding climate breakdown. This should not be acceptable to a Government or Committee that supports the "net zero public sector by 2030" goal. Pension funds in Wales alone invest many millions in fossil fuel companies based on promises that they will change, which can usually be shown to be nothing but greenwash. I would like the Committee to press the Government to act on this, and find a way, within the rules of devolved government, for divestment from fossil fuels by pension funds, to be required by 2030.

4. "Increasing recycling and further reducing waste remain key"

Whilst Wales has been at the forefront in recycling, I believe that it is now time to move on from this, to a much more ambitious scenario. Ever-increasing amounts of waste being recycled, may only be telling us that we continue to increase our use of plastic trays and containers, bottles, bags, tins and other materials, and that the public has been influenced to put them in a particular bin. We know that the plastics industry is part of the fossil fuel industry, and that the proliferation of packaging is also one of the consequences of over-consumption and our throwaway society. The other two Rs - reduce and reuse, should be on everyone's lips, as the first resort. Recycling should be the last resort after those two, and I am concerned that measuring and rewarding large quantities of "recycling" is a perverse incentive.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation. I am submitting this as an individual. I am over the age of 18 and resident in Wales.

Yours sincerely

Sue Lewis