



## Summary

1. The Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee is undertaking an evidence gathering session on a range of issues that includes nature targets as part of the consideration of priorities over the next 12-18 months.
2. In the Minister and Deputy Minister's letter to this Committee dated 31 July 2021 about the Welsh Government's priorities, we note there is no specific reference to adopting statutory nature targets. We also note the Ministers intention to introduce the Environmental Governance Bill and that this could provide the mechanism to introduce legally binding targets for biodiversity.
3. Targets can define the scale of change needed to successfully achieve our nature goals, thereby driving the allocation of resources while also encouraging innovation and also ensuring involvement across all sectors and stakeholders. To deliver national and global targets effectively we need to measure and understand change in biodiversity and ecosystems.
4. Setting nature targets requires clear delivery timelines to reflect the urgency of taking action and consideration of how to encompass behaviour change and accountability mechanisms which ensures ownership across all key sectors.
5. Appropriate monitoring, reporting and validation will be essential as is the development resource that will be needed to be 'target ready' alongside having a clear baseline from which to track progress.
6. Building on the proposed '30 by 30' target commitments, other nature recovery aspects also need to be considered to achieve resilient ecological networks for the benefit of people and nature to go alongside the actions that are now being taken to address climate change.

## Background

7. As a society we need to change the state of nature from its current situation of being degraded to being resilient and able to support all the direct and indirect benefits we get from it. That change of state requires action at multiple levels across society, starting now.
8. In response to the crisis of biodiversity loss, many Heads of State around the world have recently made hugely significant commitments for nature, notably through the Leaders' Pledge for Nature launched at the United Nations General Assembly in 2020, and the 30 by 30 commitment to protect 30% of our land and seas for nature by 2030. These commitments are far reaching, requiring transformational change across sectors in the way we protect, value, use and engage with nature. They are also consistent with the goals

and targets of the draft post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity and support the United Nation's Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, enabling us to become 'Nature Positive' by 2030.

9. Nature Positive by 2030 is about ensuring the current trend of biodiversity loss is reversed while also making significant contributions to achieving climate change commitments to reduce carbon emissions to 'Net Zero' and building resilience to the inevitable impacts of climate change and other pressures. The twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss are inextricably linked and achieving a 'nature-positive' outcome requires urgent and ambitious action by all stakeholders to address the pressures causing nature loss (which would otherwise continue to grow) and restore and regenerate the integrity of ecosystems so they are resilient to disturbance and pressures placed on them.
10. Global experience tells us that targets are often more effective in driving the right level of action if they have a legal underpinning. For example, global and country commitments to 'Net Zero' have led to the adoption of equivalent (or even more ambitious) targets by diverse stakeholders from businesses to churches to cities, stimulating much-needed action at different scales across all sectors.
11. In England, the government has committed to adopting legally-binding targets to underpin the 25 Year Environment Plan, including a legal commitment that includes quantitative targets for habitat expansion, improvements in protected areas and water quality and reversing the decline of species (i.e. become Nature Positive) by 2030. Other UK governments are also considering options to set statutory targets.
12. The letter to this Committee dated 31 July 2021 about [the Minister and Deputy Minister's priorities for the next 12-18 months](#) the following biodiversity priorities:
  - building resilient ecological networks to safeguard species and habitats and the benefits they provide, and reducing impact outside of Wales
  - making protected site connectivity central to that approach with the Nature Networks scheme to focus on improving condition and resilience and active community involvement
  - stepping up investment in resilient ecological networks and transformative change to tackle the nature and climate emergencies alongside the Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP)
  - addressing the root causes of biodiversity loss and targeting interventions to help species recover where necessary
  - revising the NRAP to account of the new post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework
  - developing indicators to ensure progress towards international objectives and targets
  - updating the Natural Resources Policy to fulfil Environment (Wales) Act duties.
  - looking for our seas to be clean, healthy, safe, productive, and biologically diverse through assessment, protection and management, and restoration with effective marine planning for, and regulation of new development...[including]...marine energy projects.
13. We are aware that Wales Environment Link (WEL) has been engaging Assembly Members about statutory nature targets. In June WEL issued a Wales specific report based on a UK report - [Putting Wales on a Path to Nature Recovery](#) to make the case for the following:
  - An overarching new duty on the Welsh Government to embed and integrate nature recovery and environmental protection across Government, expressing the key objectives to be achieved by 2050.
  - A duty to halt and begin to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030 and achieve recovery by 2050.
  - A duty to set long term and interim targets via a framework informed by independent expertise and scientific advice, aligned with those set in post-2020 Convention of Biological Diversity

framework to 2030 (to be negotiated). The targets would ideally be set in five year cycles, to match the climate plan or Senedd term. If the expert scientific advice is not followed the Minister must explain why to Senedd.

- Secondary legislation establishing a comprehensive plan with appropriate targets, subject to regular review and reporting, with scrutiny at a high level, to ensure progress towards targets is maintained.
- A legal requirement on Ministers to ensure the targets are met. This should help break out of the cycle of 'too little too late' that has dogged biodiversity delivery to date.

14. WEL held a supporting [on-line Senedd event](#) in June entitled "Why Wales Needs Nature Targets". At this meeting WEL presented the Senedd members present (Llyr Gruffydd, Huw Iranca Davies, Joyce Watson, Carolyn Thomas, Delyth Jewell and Janet Finch Saunders) with the [Putting Wales on a Path to Nature Recovery](#) report. Presentations were given by Melissa Lewis Bird Life South Africa, Sorcha Lewis Nature Friendly Farming Poppy Stowell-Evans Youth Ambassador for Climate Change.

15. We note Assembly Members' interest in statutory biodiversity targets so that the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework is set on a legislative footing within Wales to enable a positive impact as part of tackling the mutually linked climate and nature emergencies.

## Key Messages

16. **Statutory nature targets will require clear timelines to ensure delivery completion** e.g. the UK's Habitats Regulations don't have a date for achieving favourable condition which has affected resource allocation for securing delivery because of competing timebound priorities. Having clear timelines will help support the urgency for taking action to fit with the 2030 ambitions and to channel resources to support target delivery within this nine-year timeframe. The longer-term aspects of nature recovery also need to be recognised within the more urgent timescale for securing nature action. For example, restoration for some habitats such as woodland or saltmarsh is a long-term process but developing and using appropriate indicator metrics alongside long-term outcomes can ensure that progress is being made.

17. **There is a need to consider how nature targets will be derived** – they could either be based on the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework once agreed or be more specifically based on the Environment (Wales) Act as Wales' legislative response to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Nature targets also to be considered within the context of the drivers affecting biodiversity loss from pressures associated with land or sea use changes, climate change, invasive species for example alongside the state of nature in terms of species, ecosystems and nature's contribution to people.

18. **Targets need to consider how they can best support behaviour change as well as driving specific quantitative outcomes.** The recent [Dasgupta Review](#) and other reports including the [Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services \(IPBES\) & Intergovernmental Panel On Climate Change \(IPCC\) joint report](#) make it increasingly clear that biodiversity is everyone's responsibility and that significant transformative change is needed to halt further biodiversity loss and restore nature so it supports the benefits we all receive and rely on into the future.

19. **Targets will need clear accountability mechanisms across management systems and sectors to ensure they are incorporated into all the key decision-making processes.** Nature targets need ownership within all sectors as well as all government departments and public authorities. As with carbon reduction targets, ownership must be wider than the historic responsibility of conservation or environmental interests or the risk is that targets will remain marginalised and unachievable without direct involvement and support from all associated with the drivers of biodiversity loss.

20. **We would strongly encourage that nature target development is linked to establishing [Resilient Ecological Networks](#).** The proposed **30 by 30 targets** emanating from the [UN Leader's Pledge for Nature](#) are part of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework considerations under the forthcoming 15<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Parties (COP15). This spatially based target focuses on protecting at least 30% of land and seas for nature by 2030. **As part of the 30 x30 ambition, we are keen for that ambition to also consider how to improve the *quality* of designated areas for biodiversity.** Also under consideration within the 30x30 context are other effective area based conservation measures (OECMs) which are an additional mechanism through which to accelerate progress towards achieving wider biodiversity and ecosystem function and service outcomes. Potential OECMs could include National Parks for example and are areas which are managed for many different objectives that also offer a significant opportunity for long-term biodiversity improvements outside currently designated protected areas. OECMs can contribute via their range of governance and management regimes supported by diverse set of actors including local communities, the private sector and government agencies to generate a range of positive outcomes, such as:

- Conserving important ecosystems, habitats and wildlife corridors;
- Supporting the recovery of threatened species;
- Maintaining ecosystem functions and securing ecosystem services;
- Enhancing resilience against threats; and
- Retaining and connecting remnants of fragmented ecosystems within developed landscapes.

England's Environment Bill is looking to set a target to halt the decline in species abundance by 2030 and in June England's Environment Audit Committee highlighted the need for a mechanism for statutory interim targets to ensure the proposed species abundance target is met. The Committee also recommended the scope encompasses legally binding outcome measures on species distribution, extinction risk, habitat extent and condition. This broadly reflects Wales' ecosystem approach and intention to establish resilient ecological networks through appropriate actions which strengthen the protected sites network as encompassed by the 30x30 target and support the other 70% of Wales' land and sea areas.

21. **Target development needs to consider the [Nature Positive 2030 report](#) published this month (September 2021).** The report is an information resource to support UK and wider thinking about biodiversity and climate change interventions that can be delivered through the next decade to 2030. The report's key headline message are:

- *Nature loss matters, harming human health and well-being and undermining our economy.*
- *Recovering nature is everyone's business.*
- *We need to go high nature and low carbon, tackling the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change together.*
- *It is not too late to become Nature Positive by 2030 in the UK, provided we act now.*

The report emphasises that robust targets associated with the 30x30 discussions are important to guide action and resource allocation as part of developing country-level legally binding nature targets. It notes that adopting targets to become Nature Positive are needed so that nature goals are put on an equal footing with climate change ambitions. It also highlights eight particularly high impact actions on reversing biodiversity loss this decade:

1. *Ensure wildlife thrives within SSSIs/ASSIs and Marine Protected Areas through improving their management and tackling sources of harm. Protected areas need to be the beating hearts of nature networks on land and at sea, supporting thriving populations of species that spill out across the rest of the network.*
2. *Better conserve remaining wildlife habitats outside SSSIs/ASSIs, in particular those areas identified as parts of nature networks or as important blue/green infrastructure.*
3. *Invest in habitat restoration and creation to strengthen nature networks that deliver for biodiversity and climate change. In particular, we need to create large areas of wildlife habitat with restored ecosystem functions.*
4. *Integrate outcomes for nature into developments on land and at sea, ensuring access to nature is improved, and delivering a wide range of health and other benefits.*
5. *Tackle atmospheric and diffuse water pollution, especially from nitrogen and ammonia.*
6. *Develop the market for green finance, putting in place the frameworks necessary to facilitate private investment in nature recovery, and ensuring there is a supply of investable on-the-ground projects.*
7. *Deploy Nature-based Solutions by default. Decision makers need to ask themselves ‘can nature provide a solution?’*
8. *Develop the UK’s evidence base so that it is ready to support the larger, transformative changes underway.*

**22. Nature Targets will need to establish a clear baseline together with accompanying appropriate monitoring mechanisms and resources for developing these** to support progress delivery and measurement. Without these key aspects it will be extremely difficult to plan delivery and track progress effectively or objectively. This ‘target readiness’ is already possible for some pressures affecting nature – in particular for climate change where baselines have been established and metrics clarified to enable targets to be set - and this will need to be similarly done for other nature target aspects.

**23. Nature target development and implementation will need dedicated resource to support this work.** Establishing nature targets is a highly complex, multi-aspect issue. Targets need appropriate monitoring and reporting mechanisms and developing these needs to go hand-in-hand with target setting otherwise there is a big risk of resource disconnect between target setting and monitoring/ reporting on them. For example, designated harbour porpoise sites have been established but still need monitoring resources to understand what progress is being made. A focus on ecosystem-based monitoring incorporating a discrete number of carefully selected species to address gaps could be an effective approach.

**24. Target setting will need to consider how best to evaluate progress and outcomes** e.g. The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (the 'OSPAR Convention') effective management 2 year assessment mechanism is looking at how we know that we've achieved the outcomes we want. Lessons learned from previous target approaches associated for example with the UK Biodiversity Action Plan process and Aichi commitments could provide helpful pointers. Considering what monitoring, reporting and verification requirements are needed is crucial to setting effective

targets. At the moment England & Scotland report against Aichi Targets but Wales doesn't formally report on these.

25. **Nature targets will need to be managed adaptively as new evidence becomes available so they can remain relevant.** NRW's State of Natural Resources Report process is a key evidence mechanism that provides an assessment of the state on natural resources and biodiversity, runs on a 5-yearly cycle of assimilating the latest evidence and information to inform policy decisions and actions.
26. **Statutory nature targets will need to consider how they will be overlaid with existing statutory post-EU obligations** e.g. achieving Water Framework Directive good status; achieving good environmental status through the UK Marine Strategy (which already includes a number of targets on marine biodiversity and ecosystem components).
27. **Developing statutory nature targets for Wales' marine area should consider existing work programmes and the long-term resource and time commitments already invested.** The current Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Completion Project, MPA Management programmes and initiatives to improve the condition of MPA features should be recognised to ensure they can complement new targets, rather than be superseded. Existing Welsh Government work programmes on Marine Protected Areas should be prioritised and not superseded by additional statutory targets. Existing commitments include: the long-running work to complete the Welsh contribution to the UK's ecologically coherent network of MPAs; our work to secure the effective and consistent management of MPAs; and efforts to improve the condition of MPA features.

## Anticipated Committee questions

- *Whether the Welsh Government should proactively develop domestic biodiversity targets ahead of COP15.*

We are awaiting further information from Welsh Government about their plans for Welsh Nature Targets and in parallel are looking at how Natural England's nature target proposals are developing.

- *The best legislative vehicle to introduce Welsh biodiversity targets.*

We note the Ministers intention to introduce the Environmental Governance Bill - this could provide a mechanism to introduce legally binding biodiversity targets and will require further discussion with Welsh Government.

- *Whether the approach to environmental targets in the UK Environment Bill is suitable for Wales.*

We note the Ministers intention to introduce the Environmental Governance Bill - this could provide a mechanism to introduce legally binding biodiversity targets - but will require further discussions with Welsh Government. We would be keen to see a Wales approach focus on establishing resilient ecological networks and wider areas of Wales supporting ecosystem resilience based on the main aspects of diversity,

condition, connectivity and extent as set out in the Environment (Wales) Act. At a high level, the approach in the UK Environment Bill is to set long-term, legally-binding environmental targets in respect of at least one matter within each of five priority areas: air quality; water; biodiversity; resource efficiency and waste reduction; soil health and quality.

- There are separate requirements to introduce targets for particulate matter and species abundance, in addition to those for the five priority areas.
- For the biodiversity priority area, targets under consideration include improving the quality of terrestrial and marine habitat by focusing on the condition of SSSIs and Marine Protected Area features.
- From a marine perspective, the proposed objective based on Marine PA feature condition would be consistent with multiple existing work programmes in Wales which NRW make substantial contributions to. These include the MPA Network Management Framework and Action Plan; the MPA Condition Improvement Programme; the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) Improving Marine-Site Level Condition Reporting Project; and the MPA Network Completion Project.
- Targets under consideration for the water priority area would also be relevant for marine due to several of the pressures and impacts exerted on freshwater systems also impacting on marine ecosystems.
  - reduce pollution from agriculture, in particular phosphorus and nitrate
  - reduce pollution from wastewater, in particular phosphorus and nitrate
- *The Prime Minister's commitment to **protect 30% of UK land by 2030** and the fact that Welsh Government has not put this on record.*

We are aware that Welsh Government are currently considering how this commitment should be delivered in Wales and we are looking to work closely with them on this. We are especially keen to see how the quality of protected sites can be improved as part of this commitment. Other effective area based conservation measures (OECMs) - see point 20 above - may have some value as an additional mechanism for delivering biodiversity improvements across Wales.

A **Wales Environment Link [position statement](#)** (endorsed by RSPB and the Marine Conservation Society) on 30 by 30 targets published in May 2021 outlined their position for marine and terrestrial areas. M For the marine area, Wales Environment Link suggest an appropriate target is:

- *By 2030, at least 30% of Wales' seas are within fully or highly protected MPAs, within the context of wider ecologically coherent networks. Furthermore, at least 10% of Wales' seas should be within areas fully protected by 2030. We refer to the terms fully and highly protected using the following definitions:*
  - *Fully protected: no extractive or destructive activities are allowed, and all impacts are minimised.*
  - *Highly protected: only light extractive activities are allowed, and other impacts are minimised to the extent possible*

- *At sea, there are currently no fully or highly protected MPAs in Wales. As such, this would require a change in management of some existing sites or designation of further MPAs. This expectation by far exceeds current UK and international ambitions for marine 30% by 2030 targets. Information on a highly protected spatial component to biodiversity targets is provided [here](#).*

For the terrestrial area, the Wales Environment Link ask is simply that the 30% by 2030 target meets two conditions:

- *Protected for nature in the long-term:*
- *Well managed and in good or recovering condition.*

- *The action required to ensure the new ‘**national site network**’ better protects Welsh biodiversity.*

We are working with Welsh Government to develop a multi-year Nature Networks programme with an anticipated £45-60million of funding for actions to improve the condition of our protected sites (including Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas) across Wales and to enhance the resilience of the ecological networks in which they sit.

- *Whether the Welsh Government’s **Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP)** is fit for purpose.*

The NRAP was refreshed for 2020-21 to provide focus and prioritisation within a changing policy context associated with the nature emergency. We understand it will be realigned in light of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. To help drive action, the current plan would benefit from having clear timescales and delivery milestones and greater accountability across all sectors. We look forward to working closely with Welsh Government and other key stakeholders on these aspects in light of the new post-2020 Framework. We also look forward to working with all other sectors to explore how alternative resources can be used to support delivery.

- ***Gaps in the implementation of Welsh legislation** such as the *Environment (Wales) Act and Future Generations Act* in terms of biodiversity restoration.*

Recognising the current nature targets discussions and associated discussions emanating from the Leader’s Pledge for Nature and post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, consideration of how other sectors and organisations could also embed the sustainable management of natural resources into their decision-making processes would be welcome. The Environment (Wales) Act does not extend to the offshore marine area beyond 12 nautical miles to the median line. The definition of Wales in the Environment (Wales) Act is taken from the Government of Wales Act 2006, which only includes the inshore marine area to 12 nautical miles. Aside from spatial consistency with the Welsh National Marine Plan area, there is no major discernible benefit to extending the jurisdiction of the Environment (Wales) Act and it would likely involve a complex amendment at a time when Welsh Government have an extensive legal backlog.

## Annex: Biodiversity Strategies & Delivery Mechanisms in Wales

### Context

Welsh Ministers have declared a nature emergency alongside the existing climate change emergency. **It is vital that these emergencies are tackled together as the two are inextricably linked.** Welsh Government is supported by NRW in actively engaging with Defra and the other Devolved Administrations in developing the UK contribution to the international [Convention on Biological Diversity \(CBD\)](#) and the post-2020 [Global Biodiversity Framework](#) that will be negotiated and agreed through COP15 starting in October 2021 and in more depth in the spring of 2022.

**Welsh Legislation:** Two major pieces of new legislation are now in place to help halt and reverse biodiversity loss in Wales with specific elements to enable nature's recovery in the context of the wider sustainable development agenda.

[Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) **seeks to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.** It requires public authorities listed in the Act to think more long-term, work better with people, communities and each other, to prevent problems and take a more joined-up approach. The Act provides a framework for Wales to be globally responsible and make a positive contribution to the global goals. It puts in place **well-being goals**, addressing many of the global challenges affecting people and communities across Wales. These seven well-being goals are monitored through 46 national indicators. This includes greenhouse gas emissions within Wales and those attributed to consuming global goods and services in Wales; healthy ecosystems areas; biological diversity status; percentage of surface water bodies, and groundwater bodies, achieving good or high overall status etc.

[Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#) Part 1 sets out **the legislative framework to ensure natural resources and ecosystems are resilient** and able to provide benefits for social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being, through the sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR). The Act is based on international best practice and takes an ecosystem approach which draws on the 12 core principles set out in the current Convention of Biological Diversity. In addition to giving Natural Resources Wales (NRW) a statutory purpose to deliver the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR), the legislation defines the adaptive delivery framework for embedding the ecosystem approach through SMNR across Wales. Recognising the essential contribution biodiversity makes to the sustainable management of natural resources and to our well-being, **the Act includes an enhanced S6 biodiversity and ecosystems resilience duty.** This duty requires public authorities to seek to maintain and [more crucially] **enhance biodiversity** in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems

[State of Natural Resources Report \(SoNaRR\)](#) - produced by NRW, sets out the **national evidence base for the sustainable management of natural resources.** SoNaRR2020 includes information within eight broad ecosystems and also looks at key pressures impacting on these alongside highlighting more specific opportunities for improvement action. It also emphasises the need for a transformative approach using the ecosystem, economic and social spheres as levers to redesign our society and economy through their associated decision-making systems. It identifies three areas for transformative change: the food, energy and transport systems. It provides evidence about -

- the state of our natural resources (renewable, and non-renewable) in relation to current, and anticipated future demand
- the resilience of Wales' ecosystems and a biodiversity assessment
- the range of services we are getting from ecosystems
- the distribution of ecosystem benefits across the needs of society now and in the future
- the contribution of Wales' stocks of natural resources and ecosystem services across the Well-being goals.

**[Welsh Minister's Natural Resources Policy](#)** (NRP) **sets out the national priorities for the sustainable management of natural resources** drawing from the national SoNARR evidence base. The **NRP is a crucial mechanism to help align all WG policies** to deliver the national priorities identified in it and sets out how to do this in key policy areas. The national priorities are the key ways in which Wales' natural resources contribute across all the well-being goals. They have been developed to address the challenges to our natural resources and realise the opportunities from them.

The current national priorities are:

- o Delivering nature-based solutions.
- o Increasing resource efficiency and renewable energy.
- o Taking a place-based approach.

This process is ongoing and can be illustrated for example by the approach to land use planning policy through Planning Policy Wales and land use framework 'Future Wales' and the work to develop Wales' future sustainable land management scheme which will provide an income stream for land managers and make a significant contribution to addressing some of our most pressing challenges such as climate change, biodiversity decline, adverse air quality and poor water quality. Welsh Government has introduced an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) for the development of all of its policies. This seeks to integrate social, economic, cultural and environmental aspects into policy development from the start. This is organised around the well-being goals and includes biodiversity and natural resources, alongside economic, equalities and Welsh language issues for example.

**[Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales \(NRAP\)](#)** sits within **Welsh Government's Natural Resources Policy as Wales' biodiversity strategy** to support the delivery against international CBD commitments and Aichi targets. Wales' NRAP was refreshed at the end of 2020 to account for the growing evidence around the scale of biodiversity loss and changing policy context. It reflects the need for action to tackle the nature and climate emergencies, build resilient ecological networks across our whole land and seascape to safeguard species and habitats and the benefits they provide, addressing the root causes of biodiversity loss, and targeting interventions to help species recover where necessary. It will be revised to take account of the new global biodiversity framework once it has been agreed as part of COP15 next year. WG is implementing NRAP priorities through their Nature Networks Fund, creating a National Forest and the National Peatland Action Programme. **At the heart of the Natural Resources Policy and Nature Recovery Actions Plan is the need to build resilience into ecosystems** by proactively developing **[Resilient Ecological Networks](#)** (RENs) which will build on the existing protected sites network in Wales and using tools including the **[RENs Field guide](#)** to aid discussions and decision-making processes. Alongside REN development, specific action to safeguard threatened species is also being tackled through the co-funded **[Natur am Byth](#)** project led by NRW.

**[Area Statements](#)** developed by NRW contribute to implementing the NRP in a local context, taking a place-based approach. The seven Area Statements (6 terrestrial, 1 marine) can be seen as a collaborative response to the NRP and key challenges and opportunities for sustainably managing Wales' natural resources into the future. The delivery of programmes should be facilitated using Area Statements evidence and NRW is working on and mapping resilient ecological networks to help support the Area Statements process and develop associated landscape scale delivery initiatives. Using a place-based approach through collaborative working delivers better results at a local level. Communities are best placed to shape local priorities and opportunities linked to the national priorities and to find practical solutions that bring the widest possible benefits, ensuring local people benefit fully from the natural resources in their locality. **Area Statements outline the key challenges facing a particular locality, what we can all do to meet those challenges, and how to better manage our natural resources for the benefit of future generations.** They will be updated regularly and improved year-on-year as we engage more people, gather new evidence, put forward ideas and work across boundaries to create improvement opportunities.

**Environment & Rural Affairs Monitoring and Modelling Programme** Working with the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and NRW, Welsh Government has established a state-of-the-art monitoring and modelling platform to:

- Make better use of resources (financial and social) across the monitoring community;
- inform wider Welsh Government policy
- Enable more adaptive, responsive and targeted natural resources management
- Be a key evidence source for National Natural Resource Policy, including SoNaRR and a wider range of legislative requirements including international commitments;
- improve provision of more accurate and timely data, evidence and information;
- Explore the application of new technologies and environmental modelling;
- Deliver integration and sharing of expertise, data and technologies;

### **Marine Supporting Information - The Welsh MPA Network**

The Welsh Marine Protected Area (MPA) network can be considered as a best available proxy for overall marine ecosystem resilience at a broad scale. The MPA network in Wales is extensive, with 139 sites covering 50% of the marine area, meaning we have already met the draft Convention on Biological Diversity Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and Leader's Pledge targets for 30% of seas protected by 2030. The Welsh MPA network is well established, having been assessed and developed based on principles of ecological coherence (including resilience and connectivity) for over 10 years. As a result, the current priorities for MPAs in Wales are competing the network by identifying a small number of new MPAs; securing the effective management of sites; and improving the condition of MPA features.

### **Possible implications of statutory nature targets for marine work programmes**

We understand that the type of statutory targets to be developed for Wales has not been pre-determined and we would support discussions around the possible options, such as those based on management, restoration of habitats, species or area-based targets.

The Welsh MPA network covers 50% of Welsh waters. Similarly, the wider UK MPA network covers 35% of seas, meaning the UK as a whole has met the various targets for 30by30 for the marine environment. As a result, there is a growing interest elsewhere in the UK and beyond in additional spatial measures to complement the existing MPA network.

The direction of policy travel elsewhere in the UK and Europe suggests that neighbouring administrations and EU Member States could soon designate highly or strictly protected MPAs. This is likely to increase scrutiny on the approach in Wales, both from stakeholders and the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure committee. Policy developments elsewhere include:

- In 2020, Defra commissioned an [independent review](#) into Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) in Secretary of State (SoS) waters, which concluded that "HPMAs are an essential component of the MPA network, and [UK] government should introduce them into SoS waters". Work is underway to identify, consult upon and designate HPMAs in SoS waters in 2022.
- The [draft shared policy programme](#) between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Green Party includes a commitment to designate a suite of HPMAs covering at least 10% of inshore and offshore waters by 2026.
- The European Commission will put forward a proposal for legally binding nature restoration targets in 2021 as part of their contribution to COP15, based on the targets in the [EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030](#). These include an expanded Natura 2000 network to include 30% of the marine and terrestrial areas in protected sites, with 10% under strict protection.