

Letter to Llyr Gruffydd MS, Chair of the Climate Change Committee

22/05/23

Dear Llyr,

Climate Cymru priorities for the Committee to consider for forward work programme

Climate Cymru is a coalition of over 300 organisations and 14,000 individuals who work together to stop climate change. We launched a successful campaign with a call to bring 13,000 voices to COP26 in Glasgow, and continue to work with others to help make long-lasting, sustainable change in Wales. We do this through campaigns such as our Warm this Winter action which focuses on interlinking the cost of living, energy crisis and climate emergency, through to our work on Nature Positive and transition to Net Zero, to our Green Tour of Wales every year, outlining the amazing work that people do in their communities in running renewable energy projects and energy efficiency schemes.

As the Committee with Climate Change and Infrastructure at the heart of everything you do, we appreciate that you have sought to prioritise your work programme and adapt to change as and when Government legislation reaches you. We welcome the opportunity to co-work with you, and would be more than willing to come and give evidence, invite you to visit some of our partners' projects across Wales, or assist you with ongoing policy work.

Warm this Winter campaign

We are in the grips of multiple crises – the cost-of-living crisis, energy crisis, and the climate and nature emergencies. These crises are connected and intertwined. They have shared causes and solutions. Emergency support is needed for the most vulnerable. Beyond that, the best solutions for a genuine pathway out of the cost-of-living crisis are also key steps to addressing energy security and the climate crisis – like a rapid scale up of energy efficiency and rolling out community energy all over Wales. The financial case for these programs is also compelling.

Unless we take urgent and informed action now, short term or false solutions risk locking us into the worsening impacts of climate change and future energy crises.

We are calling on the Welsh Government and other institutions to act urgently to ensure that solutions to address the cost-of-living emergency also address the climate and nature emergencies. Levers that are within devolved control need to be used to support vulnerable households, and to prioritise renewables and energy efficiency schemes.

The Warm this Winter campaign in Wales would like Welsh Government to deliver the following, and we have an open petition at the moment on this matter:

1. Emergency support for vulnerable households
2. An ambitious energy efficiency programme
3. A rapid scale-up of low-cost renewables
4. Free us from fossil fuels

We would appreciate it if the Committee could focus some of its work on the themes above. We have sent a detailed briefing to all MS's on it, and we have a drop in for MSs to sign the Warm this Winter pledge on the 6th of June. We are awaiting a new and updated Warm Homes programme to shape future work on energy efficiency and would appreciate your continued scrutiny on this.

We also wish for the committee to consider carrying out a piece of work on the announcement by the Welsh Government in October 2022 to launch a publicly owned renewable energy developer. The Climate Change Minister has said energy profits created in Wales will deliver greater benefits for people in Wales, and that surplus funds generated through the new developer will go back into the public purse to be reinvested in improving energy efficiency in homes in Wales and creating good quality, home grown, clean energy jobs. However, since its announcement, we have seen very little public detail on its development. Alongside the organisation Cwmpas we have written to the Climate Change Minister to discuss how it can be shaped, and while we have had positive engagement from civil servants, we wish for this committee to look into the matter in more detail in relation to taking evidence from civil society to understand what the people of Wales want to see happen in this regard, and comparing it to International examples where Government's run their own such energy system. How does it benefit the economy in their respective countries? How can we ensure that we implement it in Wales having learnt from best practice elsewhere?

Nature Positive

We need the Welsh Government to take urgent action to ensure that we pass on a Nature Positive Wales to future generations. Nature is our life-support system and essential to the well-being of everyone in Wales. Yet currently Wales is one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world, and our wildlife is in serious decline with one in six of our species at risk of extinction from Wales.

COP15 set a new mission to halt and reverse the loss of nature by 2030 and achieve recovery so that nature is thriving once more by 2050. This is what Nature Positive means, and Wales must play its own part in achieving the Nature Positive goal. Global targets in the past have failed because Governments did not take them seriously enough at home; with nature in crisis, we have run out of time for delays and we cannot afford to fail again. Leaving the EU has left a significant environmental governance gap, and we are the last home nation to address this gap meaningfully - we are lagging far behind. A new Environmental Protection Bill has been promised "at earliest opportunity" and pushed back year after year.

To uphold Wales's reputation as an environmental leader Welsh Government must bring forward a new Bill in the next (2023-24) legislative programme, to set in law a duty to achieve a Nature Positive Wales, underpinned by legally binding nature recovery targets and robust, independent environmental governance.

We would welcome any work that the Committee sees fit to take on this important issue.

Just transition to Net Zero

As a network we wish to support the work being carried out on transitioning to green jobs for the future in Wales, and we are keen that we do this while understanding the challenges that face those in jobs within industries that must transition. The ideas and thoughts of industry regarding skills is key, as well as the work being carried out by Qualifications Wales on the matter at the moment.

Many of our partners work in this area already, and have a wealth of experience and expertise to share. To this aim, we hosted a roundtable titled 'Good Green jobs for All. Getting there together' in February to seek to tackle some of the challenges, and address our common aims. Over 70 people attended from varying sectors, and we sent in a joint consultation response to the Welsh Government's Net Zero consultation process that was created from this event.

We wish to ensure that we consider the global justice picture, especially when looking at industries which have global presence or supply chains. We need to assess what more Wales can do as a globally responsible Nation to stand in solidarity with communities most impacted by climate change. The climate change impacts we see here in Wales are intimately connected with the impacts around the world. We need to better understand our global impact and tackle the systemic issues that are at the root of climate injustice – resulting in the worst effects of climate change being felt by people living in the poorest communities here in Wales and globally, especially women and girls and those from Black and Ethnic Minority communities.

Race to Zero

Climate Cymru has been encouraging Welsh Councils to join Race to Zero by COP28. We have consulted over 300 Climate Cymru Partners, and with their approval we will deliver a pan-Wales Race to Zero Campaign building solidarity between councils and the general public. Welsh local authorities are working very hard to cut emissions in their own operations to meet the Public Sector Net Zero commitment - this is important work. But they also have a crucial bigger role to play in decarbonisation. Only local councils are in the position to lead the development of systematic emissions reduction plans tailored to local needs, and to coordinate the efforts needed to deliver action.

Now we need them to lead Paris Agreement-aligned decarbonisation across their local areas. Ten of the 22 unitary authorities are in the process of joining via Cardiff Capital Region. In April last year, over 100 council climate officers joined a two-hour meeting hosted by the Welsh Local Government Association to introduce them to Race to Zero.

Race to Zero is important to civil society in Wales because it is a clear framework for climate action that introduces clarity, rigour, consistency and transparency, and because it is designed to facilitate community involvement in shaping the future of our low-carbon communities. There is a wealth of untapped energy, ideas and effort from communities across Wales because of the inconsistent and opaque approach to area-based decarbonisation by councils.

Other areas of interest

Biodiversity

As aforementioned, Wales has many planned commitments on nature, environmental protection and targets that work in parallel with pre-existing carbon and climate frameworks. We think it is of great importance that this is carried out at a pace, and as a higher priority within Welsh Government legislative timetables; it's been disappointing to see the Environmental Protection Bill pushed down the road, year after year. We would urge the Committee to keep pushing on Ministerial scrutiny in terms of implementation and monitoring of these targets and promises. We would urge the Committee to keep pushing WG on Ministerial scrutiny of implementation and monitoring of these targets and promises, remembering that this is a cross-departmental responsibility (not the Climate Change Department alone). We would also wish to say that all members of the Senedd need to ensure nature and climate run through all their work.

We are facing species extinction; we have seen wildfires, floods and dramatic impacts on crops, pollinators and natural ecosystems' functioning. Alongside Wales Environment Link, we want to see nature at the heart of all land management, especially when it comes to spending public money on subsidising land management.

The National Nature Service is another overlooked and overdue policy, set within the Green Recovery Taskforce, which we urge the Committee to follow up urgently with Ministers. This could be a huge job creation project in the specialist and future-proof skills we need for the next generation, as well as being an appropriate response to a nature crisis. Proper funding for nature-based solutions and a robust governance framework are all vital to nature thriving. Too often, we see plans and targets with no resource put behind them.

Non-devolved issues of concern

We wrote to the Senedd's Economy Committee to carry out work on the following as we believe that this has strong economic benefits for Wales, but we were informed in a response on the 22nd of May that it would be sensible to approach your committee to carry out this work. To that end, we wish for you to carry out an inquiry on the possibility of devolving the Crown Estate to Wales. The Estate recently confirmed six new offshore wind energy lease agreements, worth an estimated £1 billion. The Keeper of the Privy Purse has written to the Prime Minister and Chancellor to share the King's wish that this windfall be directed for wider public good, rather than to the Sovereign Grant, through an appropriate reduction in the proportion of Crown Estate surplus that funds the Grant. One of the 6 projects will be located off the North Wales coast, and is an opportunity for offshore wind to support and help grow the Welsh economy. Management of the Crown Estate in Wales is reserved, yet in Scotland, the management has been devolved to the Scottish Government since 2017. There is growing support for the Welsh Government to receive the same powers as Scotland

so that we can benefit directly from the economic opportunities presented by the potential renewable energy production in question. We believe that the Committee should explore this matter, with a view to understanding how devolution in this area could better aid our economy.

Profits of Oil and gas companies

Profits for these companies were released a few months ago now, with media reports stating that Oil giants are making a profit of £5,000 a second while millions continue to struggle with rising energy bills. Analysts predict the annual profit will have doubled. US company Chevron has announced record annual profits of £28.6 billion, a big rise on the £12.6 billion it made in 2021. The huge tax breaks for oil and gas that the Prime Minister introduced in the windfall tax will see the Exchequer forgo in the region of £11 billion - that's enough to give an inflation-matching pay rise to every NHS worker and teacher for a year. The UK Government needs to stand up for ordinary people and fix our energy system that, at the moment, forces us to rely on these companies. The Prime Minister needs to close the loophole in the windfall tax, invest in homegrown renewables and free us from oil and gas.

We would welcome any public statement or communication from the Committee to the UK Government, and possible consideration of a scrutiny session with companies in this field in the near future.

We would request that the Committee show support for the community energy sector's (CEW and CEE) calls to be able to sell power locally to their community as proposed in the [Local Electricity Bill](#). As they are asset based, they can operate if the regulations allow, but in the UK, they do not. It happens in Europe, as you can see from this [article](#).

Summary of key asks from this letter

- a) Action from the committee on the key themes of Warm this Winter-
 - Emergency support for vulnerable households
 - An ambitious energy efficiency programme
 - A rapid scale-up of low-cost renewables
 - Free us from fossil fuels

- b) We would urge the Committee to affirm with us that the Welsh Government must:
 - Set in legislation a duty to achieve a Nature Positive Wales by mainstreaming action for biodiversity across all Welsh Government portfolios.
 - Bring forward an Environmental Protection Bill to set out a framework for legally binding nature recovery targets and create a strong independent environmental governance body for Wales at the earliest opportunity.
 - Increase public investment in nature's recovery, ensuring that all government departments' spending reflects the Nature Positive goal, as well as harnessing private investment in nature while supporting communities, via well managed and regulated markets.

- c) carry out work on what a just transition to Net Zero looks like and create a report as a Committee on the findings.

d) We would urge the Committee to keep pushing Welsh Government on Ministerial scrutiny of implementation and monitoring of Biodiversity targets and promises, remembering that this is a cross-departmental responsibility (not the Climate Change Department alone)

e) We would welcome any public statement or communication from the Committee to the UK Government on a genuine windfall tax from oil and gas companies, and possible consideration of a scrutiny session with companies in this field.

f) We request that the Committee show support for the community energy sector's (CEW and CEE) calls to be able to sell power locally to their community as proposed in the [Local Electricity Bill](#).

g) work on the devolution of the Crown Estate.

Kind Regards

Bethan Sayed on behalf of the Climate Cymru Team