

BD04 Natural Resources Wales

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

**Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith | Climate Change,
Environment, and Infrastructure Committee**

Biodiversity and the nature emergency | Bioamrywiaeth a'r argyfwng natur

Ymateb gan Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru | Evidence from Natural Resources Wales

Briefing note:

COP15 Implementation

Context

1. The Senedd's Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee is examining how the outcome of COP15 is shaping the Welsh Government's response to the nature emergency and related matters. It is considering how Wales can best implement the [COP15 international agreement on biodiversity](#) at a domestic level.
2. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is the principal adviser to Welsh Government on issues relating to the Welsh natural environment and its resources. Our responsibilities include regulation, designation, land management, and statutory evidence gathering and monitoring in relation to biodiversity and nature conservation management. This evidence submission provides our response to the Committee inquiry into Global Biodiversity Framework implementation within Wales.

Background

3. The recently agreed Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) agreed at the 15th Conference of Parties (COP15) sets out its purpose, as
 - a. *'aiming to catalyse, enable and galvanize urgent and transformative action by Governments, and subnational and local authorities, with the involvement of all of society, to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, to achieve the outcomes it sets out in its Vision, Mission, Goals and Targets...'*
4. The Minister for Climate Change, Julie James MS, attended the COP15 GBF summit and was involved in subnational discussions and other conversations as part of the COP15 negotiations prior to the final Framework being agreed. Wales is also a partner in the Edinburgh Process and supports adopting a Plan of Action for sub-national and local governments in driving and delivering nature positive action.
5. The Minister has called a nature emergency and recently held a Biodiversity Deep Dive which focused on how Wales can implement GBF Target 3 ('30 by 30') to protect and effectively manage of 30% of terrestrial, freshwater, and marine environments for nature by 2030. A co-produced Action Plan is being developed to implement the recommendations and an [update on progress](#) has recently been published. The current Programme for Government commits to establishing statutory nature targets to protect and restore biodiversity and the Deep Dive recognised the need for these as part of focusing on achieving environmental outcomes and delivering Wales's GBF contribution.

6. Commitments to refreshing Wales' Natural Resources Policy (NRP) and the National Biodiversity Strategy (currently the Nature Recovery Action Plan) to reflect the GBF targets and Deep Dive recommendations and to drive action for Wales' contribution to the GBF agreement have also been made by the Minister.

Approaches to Implementing the Kunming-Montreal GBF in Wales

UK response to the GBF in relation to Wales

7. The Four Countries Biodiversity Group (4CBG) is the lead governance body for the UK Biodiversity Framework and comprises country administrations (including Welsh Government) and associated nature conservation agencies (including NRW). Each of the four countries of the UK are responsible for developing their own policy approaches towards meeting international biodiversity commitments together with their domestic priorities and these sit outside of the framework. In each case, protecting and recovering nature is considered as part of a wider set of interrelated policies covering, for example, climate change, health and wellbeing, green recovery, blue and green finance, sustainable resource management, land use and fisheries.
8. A UK Response to the GBF document will provide a summary of the UK's implementation of the GBF based on the individual strategies and delivery plans of the four governments of the UK, this [UK Biodiversity Framework](#) and other relevant strategies including the UK Marine Strategy. The work is co-ordinated by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) on behalf of the administrations. It includes developing a common interpretation of GBF targets in relation to each country, identifying more immediate UK level delivery opportunities, clarifying how to monitor achievements and how to conduct streamlined collective UK-level reporting. All these aspects will need to incorporate existing Wales specific legislation and policy approaches. As these domestic strategies and plans develop over the lifetime of the UKBF, the UK Clearing House Mechanism will act as a repository for up-to-date country strategies.
9. The governments are held accountable for delivery of their domestic plans and strategies, as well as the implementation of environmental law, by environmental governance structures which includes the Interim Environmental Protection Assessor for Wales.

Wales' Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP)

10. The Minister has made a commitment to revise the NRAP in light of the new GBF. It is essential the refreshed NRAP clearly outlines Wales' approach to delivering the new GBF targets and drives action. This includes clarifying governance arrangements and progress reporting requirements to ensure transparent and effective action plan delivery. NRW is currently working with Welsh Government and

the Wales Biodiversity Partnership (WBP) on an effectiveness survey to inform the NRAP refresh.

11. As well as addressing conservation, restoration, and the sustainable use of biodiversity, the new NRAP must incorporate approaches to mainstreaming biodiversity considerations across all sectors. Taking an adaptive management approach is essential to encompass regular review, evaluation and adjustment of strategies and actions based on new information, scientific findings and continuous learning from successes and challenges for improving delivery.

Wales' Legislative Framework

12. Wales has strong foundational legislation to enable nature's recovery in the context of the wider sustainable development agenda through the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. In particular the Section 6 duty from the Environment (Wales) Act is a key mechanism for driving public sector nature improvement delivery through all public authorities operating within Wales. In light of the new GBF, it offers the opportunity to provide the framework to seek stronger delivery and accountability for all public authorities through their roles, and to generate greater collective actions across the public sector.

Statutory Nature Targets

13. Legally binding targets are key in driving action and are critical for providing a clearly understood line of sight through to the GBF targets. The Deep Dive recommendations included the need to develop primary legislation for overarching nature recovery targets as early as possible in this Senedd term, and also a suite of more detailed statutory nature recovery targets focussed on achieving environmental outcomes and delivering Wales's GBF contribution.
14. Work on target development will need to happen at pace to help drive delivery by 2030. Establishing an expert group to develop an appropriate framework of interim and long-term nature recovery targets is essential to incorporate knowledge from across Wales and learning and experiences from other UK country approaches, including England's [species abundance target](#) that forms part of a suite of 'apex' type targets.
15. A crucial task is clarifying how GBF targets, and specifically 30 by 30, can be more precisely defined for Wales, to also align with the other UK countries, and use the best possible scientific evidence to support progress tracking and outcome monitoring. A robust evidence base to underpin legally binding nature targets is essential and established mechanisms like SoNaRR (see later) offer the opportunity to support this.

- 16.** Nature target development needs to involve those with a direct technical interest in nature recovery and also, equally as critically, consider input from a broader range of other stakeholders including institutional and private sector interests, especially for a potential capacity-building target to generate the collective capacity and resources that are needed to deliver the GBF aspirations. There are still limitations within the new GBF, for example, a specific target date for halting human-induced species extinction, which would help with assessing longer-term success and enhance support for delivering species recovery outcomes. For Wales, national indicators have been developed to support the delivery of the Resilient Wales and Globally Responsible Wales Goals embedded within the Well-being legislation including [Biodiversity Indicator 44](#) could be reviewed to accommodate this and inform target delivery.
- 17.** In defining 30 by 30 success, targets for this will need to correspond with ambitions across the four UK nations to ensure UK level reporting compatibility.

Integration With Other Policies

- 18.** Biodiversity considerations need fully integrating into all other relevant policies and sectors, such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, urban planning, and climate change mitigation and adaptation to ensure coherence and synergies between biodiversity conservation and other sustainable development goals.
- 19.** The proposed Planning Policy Wales (PPW) changes, primarily relating to biodiversity net benefit, ecosystems resilience and strengthening SSSI protection will be a significant step forward to put nature at the heart of decision making for both development plan preparation and development proposals.
- 20.** Welsh Government are developing proposals for the Sustainable Farming Scheme as part of the Agricultural (Wales) Bill for the post-Brexit Land Management support. We are working with Welsh Government to support the scheme design to maximise biodiversity recovery and support high nature value farming.
- 21.** The UK Marine Strategy (UK's response to EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive) provides a framework for achieving Good Environmental Status for UK seas, which includes developing indicators, monitoring programmes, and a programme of delivery measures. The Marine Strategy contains a specific descriptor on biodiversity.
- 22.** As part of translating nature recovery ambitions into practice and building associated partnerships with communities, Public Services Boards play a key role with their Well-being Plans along with the 7 [Area Statements](#) covering the whole of Wales. Area Statements were produced to support place-based delivery for the Natural Resources Policy by working collaboratively to deliver the priorities identified by each Statement. The pandemic and more recent cost of living crisis have considerably

changed the contexts of earlier partner conversations so during 2023/24 NRW will be reviewing all Area Statements to discuss achievements, what needs to change, and actions needed to inform next steps. We will also be looking to refresh Areas Statements to reflect our new Corporate Plan Well-being Objectives more fully alongside taking on board new priorities identified by the next NRP.

Direct Conservation and Restoration Action

- 23.** Developing and implementing targeted conservation and restoration is key to protecting and enhancing habitats, species, and ecosystems and enabling Wales to implement the new GBF. Establishing appropriately protected areas, habitat restoration projects, and promoting sustainable land and marine management practices all have a fundamental role to play. Collective actions developed under the Deep Dive will focus on better protection for, and effectively managing 30% of our land, freshwater, and sea for nature by 2030. Completing Wales' Marine Protected Area network will ensure marine protection shortfalls are addressed and contribute to an ecologically coherent UK level network.

- 24.** NRW is already leading or actively involved in several major direct action nature delivery programmes including:
 - a. One of several flagship nature programmes, Natur am Byth is a partnership of nine environmental charities for some of our most threatened species who have come together to inspire community action. This £8m 4-year programme is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, WG, NRW, Arts Council for Wales and a range of trusts, foundations, and corporate donors. A suite of projects across Wales are tackling the root causes of species decline, training landowners and communities in sustainable management, and trialling a new approach to species recovery reporting. Upskilling practitioners and inspiring people to care for wildlife is fundamental to Natur am Byth and includes an innovative arts engagement programme, a trainee and volunteer network, and a community support scheme for grassroots action. Restoring and improving habitats to increase populations of some of our most threatened species, includes work for curlew, salmon and sea trout, native oyster, marsh fritillary butterfly, shrill carder bee and red squirrel.
 - b. Welsh Government's funded Nature Networks programme is enabling us to design and deliver projects to improve protected sites condition and connectivity and creating resilient ecological networks that will allow our most endangered habitats and species to thrive. This work includes a suite of projects focussed on the Welsh Marine Protected Areas Network and we are also developing a Nature Networks map to outline key focus areas to support delivery decision-making.
 - c. The National Peatland Action Programme is scaling up efforts to keep carbon locked up in peat deposits and we have ambitious targets for restoring nature's most effective carbon sinks.

- d. Our five NRW led EU LIFE projects – DeeLIFE, Sands of Life, 4Rivers4Life, Life Quake and New Life for Welsh Raised Bogs – totals over £27m of direct conservation work and raising awareness of these crucial habitats.

Monitoring and Reporting

25. The GBF goals and targets require robust monitoring and reporting systems to track progress and assess the status & trends in Welsh biodiversity at a range of scales. Such evidence will be essential to inform intervention planning and evaluation of management effectiveness. The monitoring and evidence task group, established through the Deep Dive, will focus on establishing a framework for Wales which will enable evaluation of 30 by 30 and wider nature recovery targets, taking account of short, medium, and long-term ambitions. This framework will provide a rounded evaluation of outcomes in relation to a set of habitats, species, and ecosystem metrics at a range of appropriate scales.
26. [State of Natural Resources Report \(SoNaRR2020\)](#) produced by NRW, and the [State of Nature Report Wales, 2019](#) consistently underline how natural resources and biodiversity in Wales are in steep decline. They provide underpinning evidence for Wales' Natural Resources Policy which sets national priorities and forms the basis for Area Statements and their implementation actions. SoNaRR2020 assesses the extent to which the sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR) is being achieved and also the status of biodiversity in Wales. It highlights main trends and factors affecting, or likely to affect, the state of natural resources. The evidence shows just how urgent and necessary greater biodiversity action is required. The approach for both reports is broadly similar with assessing extent, condition and trends of natural resources and ecosystems. Each assess the drivers of change and the opportunities to make changes needed for a sustainable future and reversing biodiversity loss. Work has now started on developing the next full SoNaRR report which is due in 2025.

NRW Corporate Plan '*Nature and People Thriving Together*'

27. NRW's new Corporate Plan to 2030 – which will be publicly launched on 6 June - focuses on nature as one of our 3 core well-being objectives:

- i. **nature is recovering**
- ii. communities are resilient to climate change
- iii. pollution is minimised

28. We see nature recovery being achieved by:

- protecting it
- restoring it
- respecting and valuing it in decision-making
- reconnecting people and communities with nature
- and being an exemplar nature positive organisation

29. Our Corporate Plan outlines a large range of actions we will undertake in relation to nature recovery. To achieve these, and particularly for achieving biodiversity restoration more broadly across Wales, a strong delivery foundation is crucial that incorporates capacity building, behaviour change, awareness raising, skills development and responsible public and private finance to deliver for nature at a much-increased scale and pace.

Furthering #TeamWales co-production

30. Implementing the GBF targets in Wales requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach across Wales, the UK's four countries and beyond. The GBF offers a really important advocacy opportunity to explore biodiversity recovery in Wales with a much broader range of sectors and decision-makers. It is essential stakeholders across Wales are fully engaged - government departments, its agencies, public authorities with a remit in Wales, environmental organisations, communities, and businesses and all their key institutional decision-making systems are equally important. This means strengthening current and fostering new partnerships and collaborations to develop shared responsibility and ensure comprehensive participation in delivering biodiversity recovery.

31. *Natur a Ni – Nature and Us*, facilitated by NRW, is a national conversation about the future of Wales' natural environment to create a shared 2050 vision and consider the changes needed to 2030 and 2050. It encourages people to think about the environment for future generations, help understand how people feel about nature and how society's relationship with nature needs to change. The shared vision will be released in Summer 2023 and create a foundation on which to build new relationships to drive forward action, and to contribute to work through our networks to build collective approaches to implementation. NRW will be providing a formal response to the vision in Autumn 2023.

Funding and Resources - Mainstreaming Action

32. Biodiversity loss and its recovery is affected by a wide range of natural systems pressures and drivers including air and water quality, land use change and climate change. Adequate funding and resources are fundamental to supporting implementation of the GBF and also Wales' biodiversity conservation measures. Delivery through the public and voluntary sector is not the only major route to halting and reversing biodiversity loss. The private sector – businesses big and small and all the associated institutions and decision-making systems that support and influence them also have a major - and essential - role to play. It is essential to explore how best to seek financial support and also critically, build new capacity through other national and even international sources, including for example public-private initiatives or innovative financing mechanisms to secure sustained increased investment in biodiversity.

33. Working collectively with WG and others to engage private sector institutions is key. The Welsh Government's *Delivering a Sustainable Delivery Model for Nature Recovery* project being delivered by Finance Earth, Eunomia and the RSPB aims to develop a sustainable and broad-based approach to nature finance and delivery that is capable of being effectively scaled. A key aspect is assessing the potential for Wales' ecosystems and improvement delivery within the context of private sector investment markets. The Wales Coasts and Seas Partnership (CaSP Cymru) blue investment group have been discussing setting up a fund to leverage private sector funding to support marine and coastal delivery.

International Cooperation

34. Collaborating with international partners, organisations, or initiatives is also essential for sharing best practices, exchanging knowledge, and potentially leveraging resources. Participating in associated forums and networks dedicated to biodiversity conservation helps with staying updated on other country and even global advances within what is a rapidly developing area that will help contribute to collective efforts and also benefits for Wales.

Natural Resources Wales

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