

ROCP 39, Natural Resources Wales

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

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

Adolygiad o flaenoriaethau'r Pwyllgor ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd | Review of the Committee's priorities for the Sixth Senedd

Ymateb gan Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru | Evidence from Natural Resources Wales

Your views

1. What are your views on the Committee's three strategic priorities: Climate Change; Sustainable Communities; and Protecting and enhancing the natural environment?

Natural Resources Wales has recently published our new corporate plan to 2030 – Nature and People Thriving Together, which is the culmination of a detailed review of International and national evidence on the priorities for action. Our plan priorities focus on three wellbeing objectives:

By 2030 in Wales:

- nature is recovering
- communities are resilient to climate change
- pollution is minimised

The priorities outlined by the Committee align fairly closely with our well-being objectives. Recognising the pressures on the committee time to consider those themes where it can have the greatest impact, we support the broad themes identified, with some further recommendations outlined below.

2. To what extent are the Committee's three strategic priorities still relevant, reflecting on social, economic and environmental developments since they were set at the start of the Sixth Senedd?

Whilst the pandemic and subsequent cost of living crisis have underlined how much can change over a brief period, the nature and climate emergencies continue to be the main threat facing humanity and as such we believe they should remain the main strategic focus for policymakers.

3. What are your view on the Committee's detailed priorities/outline programme of work for Years 3 to 5 of the Sixth Senedd (set out in its report, Priorities for the Sixth Senedd?)

We understand the prioritisation of the issues included in the future programme of work, and agree that they are areas that need to be considered.

However, with high public interest in the state of our waters rightly intensifying, we would like to suggest that Water is also a topic of consideration for Committee – both water quality and quantity. Water is one of our most valuable natural commodities, creating and sustaining the ecosystems upon which all life depends. Yet a potent combination of ageing infrastructure, a growing population, climate change and the continued pollution of our waters from the farming sector, water companies, and the public at large means that our waters are nowhere near the condition we want them to be.

The introduction of the Water Framework Directive in the UK in 2003 provided the legislative foundation required to further strengthen the regulation and the evidence base needed to drive investment and improvements. While we know our waters are not where we'd like them to be, the overall status of our waters assessed as good or better under the Water Framework Directive has risen from 32% in 2009 to 40% in 2021. But for our nine most protected Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) rivers, only 39% passed new, more stringent targets for phosphates introduced by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee Common Standards.

While the issues affecting our watercourses are complex, the forthcoming Ofwat Price Review in 2024 will be critical to ensuring we see improvements in Water Company Environmental Performance. This price review will drive the water company investment programme to 2030, and will be central to driving the improvement we want to see to meet the COP15 ambitions.

As requested by the First Minister in Plenary in May, we would also welcome the Committee's undertaking a review of the Glas Cymru model and how it can deliver for water in Wales.

We believe it would be timely for the Committee to explore these broader issues in order to raise awareness and understanding of the challenges ahead.

4. To what extent are the Committee's detailed priorities/outline programme of work still relevant, reflecting on social, economic and environmental developments since they were set at the start of the Sixth Senedd?

With the publication of the UN's latest Climate Change Report, it is evident that the impact of climate change is now generally accepted as a critical threat, indeed, that we have Climate Change Minister and Committee with Climate Change in the title is testament to how seriously this is being taken in Wales.

However, what our work has identified is that while the need for climate change mitigation is largely recognised, the role of nature-based solutions in tackling the climate emergency is far less visible, and there is less of a focus on the nature emergency that runs in parallel to this. Nature-based solutions are key in addressing both crises and we would recommend that the committee consider this element as part of its work in scrutinising the statutory biodiversity targets.

5. Are there any other matters related to the Committee's priorities/work programme/ways of working that you would like to comment on?

We would like to thank and commend the Committee staff for their approachability and support – they have always been very helpful and engaging, and this is very much appreciated.

If possible we would be grateful if consideration could be given to the scheduling of other Senedd committees as the breadth of NRW's work means that we can have multiple requests for representation at committee sessions – sometimes on the same day, which can prove difficult for us in terms of resources and means that we cannot provide the level of support we would like.

Whilst we understand that the hybrid nature of proceedings means that sessions can be easily delivered online, we would also urge that the Committee undertake some in-person site visits so that members can see and experience tangible examples of some of the issues that they are scrutinising. We would be happy to facilitate any relevant meetings or visits if the Committee were amenable to this.

6. Other information

We will be submitting a Welsh language version of this response separately via email.
