

HRLN 08 - Evidence from: Celtic Rainforest LIFE project

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

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

Atal a gwrthdroi colli natur erbyn 2030 | Halting and reversing the loss of nature by 2030

1. Your views on the effectiveness of current policies / funds / statutory duties in halting and reversing the loss of nature by 2030.

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

The lack of resources /joined up thinking/will within NRW to act on their own estate, issue S16 agreements, or to implement their statutory duties (or allow others to do so on their behalf) is causing delay and hampering progress. More resources and emphasis are needed to monitor the condition of protected sites and a commitment to enforcement for non-compliance. NRW forestry teams need training in balancing forestry and nature conservation and to move away from one size/approach fits all. More flexibility and innovation are needed to be able to deal with issues on a site-by-site basis to benefit nature. Lack of consistency across the different NRW teams in Wales in application of policy and legislation and unwillingness to respond to up-to-date scientific evidence by some is reducing effectiveness. Loss of access to large funding pots e.g. EU LIFE. There does not appear to be anything proposed in Wales which will fill that void. There are currently 6 LIFE projects running, or about to finish, in Wales (Raised Bogs, Sand of LIFE, Celtic Rainforests LIFE, 4 Rivers, Dee River, Quaking Bogs) and others partly in Wales (Curlew), total value of circa Euro 50m. There is a very real risk of losing progress and skills developed through those projects without long-term sustainable funding. The uncertainty of SFS, particularly the uncertainty of available budget, the current lack of detail on actions and layers and now the delay in commencement makes forward planning very difficult. We are concerned that the delay may lead to nature's recovery no longer being the focus of the scheme.

2. Your views on the progress towards implementing the Biodiversity Deep Dive recommendations.

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

We welcome the positive progress made on site protection set out in PPW and the proposals for Net Benefit for Biodiversity, although more detail is needed on implementation, monitoring and enforcement.

Whilst we agree it has been necessary to reflect on understanding of the Deep Dive recommendations over the last 18 months it is disappointing that the sites elements have not been progressed. Given that protected sites are generally not in favourable condition in Wales and NRW do not have up to date condition surveys or management plans in place, we are concerned that the proposed cuts to NRW will hit implementation of this recommendation and further hinder protected sites improvements.

We query how reporting is to be undertaken against the 8 recommendations and 42 sub-actions in the Deep Dive recommendations to track progress? We recommend a standardised method be developed and shared amongst ALL relevant Authorities, organisations, projects etc. There is a need to clearly define the roles and leads for each of the 42 sub-actions to create accountability and drive progress.

3. Your views on current arrangements for monitoring biodiversity.

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

We consider the current arrangements are generally poor and piecemeal. There is no standardised methodology or central database for submitting data. As an example, CR LIFE has a duty to undertake a number of ecological surveys as part of the project (bird data, lower plant surveys, CSM of SAC sites), but other than sharing the information with Local Records Centres, and making the information available to partners to use as needed, the data is likely to remain un-used long-term. There is a plethora of good information and data being held by different organisations but much of it sitting on shelves /hard drives, and not being adequately analysed or shared. A central database/resource would help to ensure that learning from valuable projects like CR LIFE is available and accessible to benefit future work.

4. Your views on new approaches needed to halt and reverse the loss of nature by 2030.

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

We would urge not overcomplicating approaches or reinventing the wheel. The issues are well known. Energy and resources should now be directed at delivery rather than more discussion.

NRW need to be more ambitious and open to utilising alternative methods / models for delivering works on their own / WG estate – to be exemplars of demonstrating managing their land in harmony with and benefitting nature. We consider that the organisations work is too siloed with not enough integration and balance between all the statutory responsibilities. Too much weight is given to work areas such as traditional forest management and creation at the expense of nature conservation. Examples which hinder the work of CR LIFE, is a) the very slow rate of restoration of plantations on ancient woodlands (PAWS), despite NRW stating this is a priority and b) the lack of work tackling Invasive Alien Species (IAS) by NRW on the Welsh Government Estate. We understand resources are an issue but urge ambition and new ways of working to achieve multiple benefits. For example, consider giving other organisations more or temporary statutory powers in relation to IAS control and woodland management and to seek new forms of funding through the private sector, to compliment public money/ spend.

5. Do you have any other points you wish to raise within the scope of this inquiry?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

There is a lot of good work being done in Wales in terms of nature conservation, a great deal of good will and enthusiasm amongst organisations and individuals to take urgent action on halting the decline in biodiversity. However, the funding crisis, the likely cuts to NRW, the lack of progress on delivering the Deep Dive recommendations and now the potential for the Welsh Government to back away from including nature recovery as a headline target in the Environmental Principles and Biodiversity Bill is very concerning. Nature is already in crisis. If goals are to be met, then the resources and commitment given towards reaching them has to match the ambition within the Deep Dive recommendations.

We urge Welsh Government to continue to embrace the ambition of the Deep Dive recommendations, to remain with the headline target in the above Bill and publish legally binding biodiversity targets as soon as possible.

Seeking alternative long-term and sustainable funding and delivery resources is

also essential. Simplifying and assigning leads on the Deep Dive actions to enable scrutiny and accountability would be beneficial and ensuring NRW is delivering on its statutory functions in a joined-up way, with organisational buy-in at all levels to an overall vision and set of objectives, would also assist.