

HRLN 10 - Evidence from: Coed Cadw | Woodland Trust

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).

1.1. Current policies / funds / statutory duties have not halted, let alone reversed the current on-going loss of nature. This is confirmed in the statutory State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) provided by NRW, and the same concerns apply to woodland (ref 1) .

1.2. Current threats and drivers of decline, as described in SoNaRR (ref 2) , are not being adequately addressed. Programs must identify and respond to threats and drivers of decline. Most of these cannot be addressed by on-site management. Targets are needed for threat reduction outcomes, for example, reduced pollution.

1.3. Halting biodiversity loss needs to become a responsibility and priority throughout the public sector, as is the case for addressing climate change. Particularly the need for change in behaviour and priorities in those sectors driving biodiversity loss, including farming, forestry, planning, infrastructure and economic development. It is essential that Welsh Ministers and public authorities, especially those operating in these sectors, are subject to a strong duty to apply principles and meet targets. It is in this context that we think it important that the new environmental governance body has the power to levy financial penalties.

1.4. NRW resourcing has been inadequate for them to address biodiversity decline or establish biodiversity targets. The current round of proposed cutbacks suggests to us a decision by NRW to focus limited resources on regulation rather than advice or improvement. Does this mean that the proposed new environmental governance body will become the principle statutory adviser to government? Will its resources and expertise be adequate for this role?

1.5. The ambition should be to “restore and expand”, not just to “maintain and enhance”. The limitation of “maintenance”, as is proposed for the Universal layer of the Sustainable Farming scheme, is that it continues the long-term decline of farmland wildlife.

References

1 Woodland Trust (2021) State of the UK’s Woods and Trees.

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/state-of-uk-woods-and-trees/>

2 NRW (2020) State of Natural Resources Report 2020 Key Pressures. On-line infographic <https://naturalresources.wales/evidence-and-data/research-and-reports/state-of-natural-resources-report-sonarr-for-wales-2020/power-bi-full-screens/sonarr2020-key-pressures/?lang=en>

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).

2.1. The breadth of the Deep Dive recommendations is welcome, but it is unclear to what extent they are being implemented, or to what extent they will halt biodiversity loss.

2.2. The proposals made in the White Paper consultation on reporting to the Senedd must be strengthened to require that Ministers set out the necessary (rather than reasonable) steps they will take to ensure target delivery, set out funding and resources, and to report on progress on a regular basis (rather than ‘as soon as reasonably practicable’).

3. Your views on current arrangements for monitoring biodiversity.

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

3.1. We look forward to seeing the recommendations of the monitoring and evidence task group recommended by the Deep Dive.

3.2. We think there is a need for in-depth academic support to address challenges including the impact of threats, tracking long term outcomes, the significance of habitat mosaics and networks, and the “shifting baseline.” (Meaning that species distributions, abundances and communities of the future cannot return to those of the past.)

3.3. We think it vital that “nature equity” and public engagement with nature is also at the forefront of monitoring the halting and reverse of nature loss. Trees and nature should be accessible to everyone, and robust methodologies are now available for measuring the clear well-being benefits from access to nature (refs 3 & 4) , .

3.4. There should be a nature experiences “bucket-list” for young people including the following, classic activities which feature strongly in children’s literature: -

- Every child should be able to hear the dawn chorus near where they live.
- Every child should have the opportunity to hug an ancient tree and plant a daughter tree.
- Every child should be able to go dipping in clean inter-tidal rock pools.
- Every child should see butterflies and ladybirds every summer.
- Every child should have the opportunity to pick and eat blackberries.
- Every child should have a clean stream to play in.

And one that is now probably permanently lost to the children of Wales...

- Every child should experience the land blanketed in snow and criss-crossed by animal tracks

References

3. Irvine et al (2023) BIO-WELL: The development and validation of a human wellbeing scale that measures responses to biodiversity. Journal of Environmental Psychology Volume 85, February 2023, 101921.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0272494422001669>

4. Centre for Sustainable Health Care (2024). New Tree Equity Score tool shows the connection between trees and health inequalities.

<https://sustainablehealthcare.org.uk/news/2023/12/new-tree-equity-score-tool-shows-connection-between-trees-and-health-inequalities>

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).

4.1. Our overarching concern is the need for urgency to start effective action and then sustain it over the long periods of time needed for ecological restoration. We think this is missing from the current legislative proposals.

4.2. We agree with concerns about the suggested removal of a headline target that spells out what needs to be achieved by 2030, 2040 and 2050.

4.3. For the halting tree and woodland of nature loss we think success requires there to be, by 2030, a cross-sector program of activity, supported by a multi-source funding framework including....

- More comprehensive protection and active management of tree and hedge networks and woodland across landscapes and including urban areas. Metric – extent and scale of areas protected and managed for nature.
- Native tree cover expanding, ensuring the diversity and resilience of core woodland networks. Metric - native tree cover as % of total land area.
- Degraded priority habitats such as ancient woodland in a process of restoration, with resources and landowner commitment. Metric – area under restoration.
- Measures in place to reduce the main external threats to biodiversity, for woodland this includes inappropriate exploitation, direct loss, pest and disease, pollution, climate change. Threat specific metrics. Overall outcome metric - diversity of tree canopy species composition.

4.4. Essential to this is the valuing and protection of the widely distributed wildlife of farmland and urban areas and not covered by protected sites, habitats and species.

4.5. We understand that the Welsh Government is proposing to place a duty on public authorities to contribute to the delivery of biodiversity targets (para 131) and will consider providing detailed statutory guidance and targeted support to ensure the development and delivery of detailed action plans to deliver targets at local level. (para 130).

We support this focus on delivery rather than planning but suggest that the “nature recovery framework” proposed (para 23) needs to also include : -

a) principles, criteria and standards that will ensure actions for biodiversity are appropriate and effective and

b) that private finance meets high integrity criteria that ensure sustainability and prevent greenwashing. The Woodland Carbon Code illustrates how universal standards have been developed for one particular activity - new woodland creation for carbon sequestration.

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).

5.1. Anyone under the age of 30 has grown up in a Wales significantly depleted of wildlife. The outlook for the next generation is even worse.

5.2. In the foreword to our report, “Trees and Woodland: At the Heart of Nature Recovery in Wales” (ref 5), launched by the Minister Julie James MS at the Senedd on 7th November 2023, Tammie Esslemont, from Blackwood, and a member of the Woodland Trust Youth Council, made this plea on for more acknowledgement of the perspective from young people.

“Please use inclusive ways to involve all of us in solving this too, because our differences lead to innovative and unique ideas. We need your help in ensuring that the generation after us won’t have to continue to watch our beautiful trees and wildlife wither away.

Don’t let our future generations' connection with nature be severed and replaced by Tiktoks or Youtube videos of long-lost extinct wildlife.”

5.3 In Summary, the changes of approach that we think necessary include: -

- There is an over-arching need for more urgency.
- Action is needed to reduce the threats that drive of decline.
- An ambition to “restore and expand”, not only “maintain and enhance
- Emulation of the comprehensive cross-government approach to net zero, resulting in changed spending priorities especially in those sectors contributing to decline, including farming, forestry, planning and infrastructure, flood and coastal erosion risk management, management of the public estate, water supply and wastewater treatment.
- Reporting to and scrutiny by the Senedd need to be strengthened.

- “Nature equity” and public engagement with nature should be part of reversing nature loss.
- Every child should have a bucket list of opportunities to engage with nature, continuing activities long enshrined in children’s literature
- Extending the scope of biodiversity beyond protected sites, habitats and species to include common and widely distributed biodiversity in urban areas and on farmland.
- A critical need for the Sustainable Farming Scheme to halt nature loss on farmland and deliver recovery.
- The proposed Nature Recovery Framework should include cross sector programs and principles and standards for effective action and private finance.

Reference

5. Woodland Trust (2023) Trees and Woodland: at the Heart of Nature Recovery in Wales. Policy report 32 pp.
<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/publications/2023/11/trees-and-woods-for-nature-recovery-in-wales/>
