HRLN 15 - Evidence from: Plymouth Marine Laboratory

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).

Evidence from: Andrew Edwards-Jones Social Scientist PML

DEFRA published its consultation on Marine Net Gain (MNG) setting the aims for net gain policy for the marine environment (June 2022), and a summary of responses in March 2023. Consultees generally supported the high-level principles. DEFRA committed to incorporating a wider environmental net gain (ENG) approach within MNG. With delays in implementing mandatory BNG, it is important this doesn't cause further delays to the introduction of MNG legislation. Delayed enforcement will threaten 2030 targets of halting and reversing the loss of nature.

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).

3. Your views on current arrangements for monitoring biodiversity.

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

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).

Evidence from: Andrew Edwards-Jones Social Scientist PML

Plymouth Marine Laboratory (PML) conducted a "first principles" Marine Net Gain (MNG) consultation in 2022 with offshore wind farm stakeholders, seeking views on its scope and application https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2667010023001373.

The following evidence-based recommendations arose from this research:

1. Understanding of MNG concepts: Focused stakeholder engagement should be undertaken to identify the most useful formats and data transfer mechanisms for the provision of specific information needs required for effective ENG assessments, such as adaptive policy guidelines, spatial habitat data, and biodiversity data. To maximize the success of NG solutions, enable greater awareness of development-specific risks of external pressures, and guides to the restoration potential for specific habitats likely to be impacted by proposals.

2. MNG to measure impacts on habitats and species: this study proposes including coastal and offsite impacts in MNG assessments, include taxonomic groups e.g. birds and invertebrates, more discussion is needed around small marine organisms (such as plankton) whose importance has been highlighted in this study, and irreplaceable habitats such as corals, deep sea sand and deep sea mud which were ranked with relatively low importance by OWF experts.

3. MNG to incorporate environmental benefits: MNG should expand on BNG to incorporate a wider ENG approach to include the social, environmental and economic value of natural assets where these extra benefits are underpinned by biodiversity.

4. Priority ecosystem services for ENG measures: Ecosystem services to focus on: fisheries, maintaining nursery habitats, and climate regulation. Cultural services are poorly understood by stakeholders, hence guidance on their definition, assessment, and valuation as part of NG is required.

5. Developing metrics for MNG: Stakeholders preferred a new metric that is nuanced for a marine context. Another option is to rely on an industry levy for a strategic fund.

6. Prioritizing pressure reduction actions for MNG: Pressure reductions are important for successful MNG strategies. Reducing impacts from some fishing methods and the disturbance effects of the physical structures (including cables) were of high priority within strategic NG assessments for OWFs.

7. MNG to incentivize active restoration measures: Actions to restore or enhance shellfish/mussel and mudflat/sandflat beds while also supporting plankton and zooplankton populations were of high importance. Intertidal invertebrates and offshore fish populations were also raised as important to consider within future MNG compensatory actions.

8. MNG preferences during decommissioning: The consultation supports complete removal of offshore wind structures for decommissioning, where possible, but encourages solutions that best fit site conditions and character, with abandonment of structures considered positively as an option for biodiversity and environmental benefits.

9. MNG to incentivize strategic interventions: Site-based interventions shouldn't be overlooked; when not appropriate, developers should have the flexibility to bring forward either site-based or strategic interventions. Stakeholders found that co-location of seaweed, mussel, and oyster farms with OWFs was feasible, as well as Hydrogen/Carbon Capture Storage devices. Collaborative explorations around co-

existence of fishing methods with floating wind technology should be encouraged.

10. MNG or improvements to designated and non-designated features of MPAs: NG interventions will be permitted within MPAs if opportunities outside these areas are not feasible. There was a degree of uncertainty (26 %) around the impacts of floating OWF, highlighting an area of priority research needs.

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).