

CPG for Biodiversity: Nature Targets
Friday 28th March 2025, 10am - 11:30am
On Zoom, and live streamed to YouTube

This meeting is available to watch back on YouTube here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2Nco3i9e2U&ab_channel=WalesEnvironmentLink

All the presentations can be viewed online here:

- Annie Smith, RSPB Cymru: [Introduction to the Global Biodiversity Framework, and high level targets](#)
- Cath Lehane, WWF Cymru: [how a strong target 7 could address the challenges facing our freshwater habitats/rivers](#)
- Rachel Hoffmann, Plantlife International: [overview of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation \(GSPC\) and its alignment to the Biodiversity Framework](#)
- Meg Griffiths, Plantlife Cymru: [applying global targets for nature in Wales](#)

Attendees

John Griffiths MS – Chair of the CPG

Delyth Jewell – Vice Chair of CPG

Huw Irranca-Davies – Deputy First Minister / Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change & Rural Affairs

Liz Smith – Wales Environment Link, secretariat

Tessa Marshall – Wales Environment Link

Annie Smith – RSPB Cymru

Rachel Hoffman – Plantlife International

Meg Griffiths – Plantlife Cymru

Erin Shott – Plantlife

Aimee Seager – Plantlife

Alex Phillips – WWF Cymru

Alice Teague – Welsh Government

Alwyn Edwards – Glastir Woodland Creation agent

Andrew Bettridge – Labour Senedd staffer

Chiara Cooper – JNCC

Chris Mills – Afonydd Cymru

Claire Rumsey – Plantlife

Dan Rose – Labour Senedd staffer

Dan Ward – Tir Natur

Fergus O'Brien – Dŵr Cymru

Fiona Thomas – Marine Conservation Society

Frances Winder – Butterfly Conservation

Gareth Clubb – WWF Cymru

Gwyn Jones – European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism

Ioan Bellin – Plaid Cymru staffer

James Hitchcock – Rewilding Britain
Karen Stothard – Welsh Government
Katy Orford – Senedd Research
Lauri MacLean – National Trust
Leigh-Anne Bullough – JNCC
Liz Wilkinson – Senedd Research
Lizzie Wilberforce – Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales
Luke Romaine – Welsh Government
Rachel Bedwin – RSPB
Rebecca Walley – British Ecological Society
Rhiannon Hardiman – Future Generations Office
Ruth Chambers – Green Alliance
Sarah MacCarty – Welsh Government
Steve Jennings – Environmental Consultant
Sue Evans – GWCT / Independent consultant
Tim Birch – Wildlife Trusts Wales

Minutes

1. Welcome and Opening Remarks

John Griffiths MS welcomed attendees to the meeting of the Senedd Cross-Party Group on Biodiversity. He reiterated the group's focus on biodiversity and nature recovery targets, following the Senedd's declaration of a nature emergency. He highlighted that the Welsh Government had committed to introducing a Nature Positive Bill that would include legally binding nature recovery targets and an independent environmental governance body. He emphasised the urgency, with only a year remaining in the current Senedd term.

2. Overview of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the need for high level targets – Annie Smith, Head of Nature Policy and Casework, RSPB Cymru

Annie opened the session by providing background and outlining key biodiversity target priorities.

She set out the global context, focusing on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (agreed at COP15 in 2022) which sets out:

- A mission to halt biodiversity loss by 2030
- A vision to restore nature by 2050
- Four 2050 goals supported by 23 global targets

Setting out the need for legislation in Wales, she described how, despite Welsh Ministers' commitments, that biodiversity remains insufficiently prioritized, as shown in the [recent Audit Wales report](#). Annie also pointed to [RSPB's A Lost Decade for Nature \(2020\)](#) report and the [State of Nature Report](#), as demonstrating continued biodiversity loss. She emphasised that WEL thinks legally binding targets are essential, citing the positive impact of climate legislation in Wales.

In recommended target areas for Wales, she said they should be aligned with the global framework, especially:

- **Target 2:** Restoration of 30% of degraded ecosystems
- **Target 3:** Effective protection of 30% of land and sea
- **Target 4:** Recovery of species populations and prevention of extinctions
- **Target 7:** Reducing pollution harmful to biodiversity

In terms of measures of progress, we ought to see:

- An emphasis on measuring 'Habitat extent and condition' and 'Species abundance and extinction risk'
- A national Species Abundance Indicator is already available and highlighted in the 2023 State of Nature report, showing a 20% decline over three decades.
- On data gaps and enabling conditions:
 - NRW's baseline assessment of SSSI conditions revealed significant knowledge gaps.
 - Targets should also include steps to improve data collection and monitoring capacity.
- Cross-Sectoral Responsibilities:
 - Recovery requires systemic change, especially in land management. That includes recognising that the Sustainable Farming Scheme is essential for enabling change, as well as integrating with planning and marine systems.

Annie gave more detail on how a species abundance indicator would work, highlighting how it's already been established via the partnership that inputs into the State of Nature report, and is based of 300 terrestrial and freshwater species (showing a 20% decline since the mid-1990s).

She was disappointed that despite recommendations from the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee, the Welsh Government has opted not to include a headline species abundance target in the upcoming Nature Positive, citing reporting challenges.

2. Making a strong Target 7 to help our rivers – Cath Lehane, Agriculture and Freshwater Senior Advisor, WWF Cymru

Cath focused on how to fulfil Target 7 of the (GBF), which aims to reduce pollution to levels not harmful to biodiversity by 2030. This covers a range of pollution sources, but she would focus on excess nutrient reduction, particularly phosphorus and nitrates from agricultural sources.

She outlined that freshwater biodiversity has declined by 85% since 1970, and recent NRW data indicates deterioration in water quality, with seven out of nine river SACs failing for phosphorus—an increase from five in 2021. 62% of phosphorus pollution stems from rural land management, with some areas (e.g. Eastern Cleddau) seeing contributions as high as 84%. All these declines lead to species impacts, with salmon populations in Wales having declined by 70% in the past 10 years (which the Minister would appreciate as Salmon Species Champion).

Cath described how WWF Cymru has commissioned Steve Jennings to assess whether current Welsh policy is sufficient to meet GBF Target 7 and create a comprehensive record of relevant targets, responsible bodies, indicators, and monitoring systems. Their findings concluded that:

- Current Welsh policies will not achieve the GBF Target 7 ambitions.
- Key regulations (e.g. Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations), in their current form, are not enough. They're estimated to reduce phosphorus pollution by only 6.8%, and nitrate by 4.8%. Too many targets lack timeframes, clear responsibilities, and accountability

mechanisms, delivery progress is 'glacial' and a lack of explicit consequences on failing to deliver.

WWF were recommending that:

- Freshwater targets should be included in the Bill, and explicitly linked to GBF Target 7, with the aim to halve nutrient pollution by 2030.
- Require 100% of water bodies to be under active annual monitoring by 2030, supported by a transparent monitoring plan.
- Mandate catchment-specific action plans by 2028, including delivery plans, annual progress reporting, and clear consequences for non-delivery.

In additional policy suggestions, they recommend that Welsh Government:

- Develop a catchment-level national action plan that includes delivery schedules, assigned responsibilities, and funding—moving beyond reliance on voluntary measures.
- Significantly enhance enforcement of existing pollution regulations.
- Reform the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) to emphasize soil health, nutrient management, and riparian buffers (with any water quality improvements only being in the Optional rather than the Universal layer of the SFS)
- Bring all high-output livestock farming under Environmental Permitting Regulations (EPR), reduce thresholds for poultry farms and address cumulative impacts through planning systems.

It was emphasised that Target 7 must not be treated as a “paper exercise”; all targets should require credible, deliverable plans. This includes mainstreaming efforts across sectors, applying appropriate incentives, and ensuring robust enforcement.

John Griffiths thanks Cath for her presentation and also paid tribute to Angela Jones, i.e. '[Angela of the Usk](#)', who is a strong campaigner for citizen science, who he'd met with recently, highlighting her advocacy for water quality too via her wild swimming activities.

3. Remarks from the Deputy First Minister – Huw Irranca-Davies, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change & Rural Affairs

The Minister expressed appreciation for the group's contributions and underscored the Welsh Government's commitment to nature restoration and biodiversity, noting that while current efforts are considerable, a “step change” in ambition and urgency is required.

Key points included:

- **Integrated Benefits:** Actions for nature also offers social, cultural, and economic benefits, especially through green jobs and sustainable sectors such as agriculture and tourism.
- **Incoming Legislative Framework:** The forthcoming Nature Positive Wales Bill aims to provide a legal framework to halt and reverse biodiversity loss; establish clear, long-term biodiversity targets; mandate monitoring, reporting, and Ministerial accountability; embed environmental principles in Welsh law; and create a permanent governance body.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Ongoing engagement with experts and stakeholders, including the Biodiversity Targets Advisory Panel, is informing target development. These will address extinction risk, species abundance, genetic diversity, and ecosystem resilience.
- **Transparency and Data:** Success will require improved access to biodiversity data and transparency in reporting.

Huw Irranca-Davies highlighted some Welsh Government programmes that are having a positive impact, like Natur am Byth and the Nature Networks Fund's (NNF) role in improving habitat condition and connectivity. Since 2021, over 90 projects have been funded with £54 million awarded in collaboration with Natural Resources Wales and the Heritage Lottery Fund. He had [announced](#) that day a further 13 projects awarded over £10 million in the latest round of funding.

Inn other interventions:

- **National Peatland Action Programme:** This has surpassed its targets a year ahead of schedule, restoring over 3,000 rugby pitches' worth of peatland. This equates to safeguarding approximately 6 million tonnes of carbon and reducing annual carbon emissions have been reduced by about 8,000 tonnes—equivalent to removing 6,000 cars from the road. These efforts contribute to improved water quality and natural flood management, representing a “win-win-win” outcome.
- **Pollution and Biodiversity Loss:** Pollution is acknowledged as a major contributor to biodiversity loss, with the public expressing justified concern. In response, Natural Resources Wales has received an additional £40 million to address these challenges.

Turning to case studies, the Minister spoke on a project where a tributary of the River Dee was "re-wiggled" through complex, high-cost engineering to enhance biodiversity, tackle pollution, and improve migratory pathways for species. He also welcomed an initiative from Marine Conservation Society, where an "end-of-life gear" fishing project have led to the collection of 12 tonnes of marine debris from Welsh waters, with further action planned.

Mentioning the existing Environment (Wales) Act 2016, he said they would draw upon the Section 6 duties for biodiversity in it to make sure its aligned / leveraged to ensure public bodies can deliver against targets.

The Minister called for a collaborative “Team Wales” approach to delivering biodiversity targets and emphasised their multiple benefits of restoring nature leading to enhanced climate resilience, sustainable land and sea management, and creating green jobs. He encouraged all stakeholders to support the upcoming Nature Positive Bill as it moves through the Senedd.

4. Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) and its Role in Supporting the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) – Rachel Hoffmann, Head of Global for Plantlife International

Rachel spoke on Plantlife's role in global plant conservation, highlighting the alignment between the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) and the GBF. Plantlife attended the COP15 conference to advocate for a third phase of the GSPC as a key tool to support the GBF.

Key Points:

- The GSPC has been under development since 1999 and plays a pivotal role in directing global and national plant conservation actions.
- It provides a clear, accessible framework with 21 voluntary plant conservation actions that align with GBF targets.
- The strategy emphasizes a "whole-of-society" approach and includes a strong focus on engagement with Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs).
- A new [toolkit](#) developed by Plantlife aims to support GSPC implementation through case studies and guidance aligned with GBF branding and priorities.

She highlighted case studies, including:

- **South Africa:** Implementation led by SANBI, with clear national targets integrated into broader biodiversity planning and strong focus on public engagement and capacity building.
- **Scotland:** A robust environmental framework supported by government and stakeholder collaboration. The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy has been refined to align with the GSPC, condensing plant actions to 10 key points for manageable delivery.

For Wales, she said that challenges exist in the UK and ‘subnational’ context, due to reporting channels being centralised through DEFRA and JNCC, which may result in underrepresentation of Welsh and Scottish efforts.

In terms of indicators and monitoring, she pointed to Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI) is developing a reporting framework incorporating headline indicators from the GBF to ease reporting burdens and support non-state actor contributions. Rachel concluded by emphasising the necessity of structured reporting to demonstrate progress and inspire further plant conservation action. She handed over to Meg Griffiths to provide the Welsh perspective.

5. Translating the GBF targets to local actioning Wales – Meg Griffiths, Species Officer, Plantlife Cymru

Meg Griffiths discussed the critical importance of establishing a clear delivery chain between high-level global biodiversity targets and local action in Wales, suggesting ‘social dissonance’ where these targets may seem abstract or disconnected from everyday relevance. However, Meg stressed that all nature recovery ultimately takes place at the local level.

She introduced a metaphorical ‘chain’ to explain this process, highlighting that each link—from global goals to local implementation—must be strong and connected.

Giving the Welsh legislative context, she pointed to the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (a progressive tool for long-term thinking); the Environment Act, with its duties on public authorities to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem resilience; and the Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP), serving as Wales’ primary strategic plan for biodiversity. Meg also pointed to other ongoing work, like the Biodiversity Deep Dive groups; Natur a Ni Citizens Assembly; Local Nature Partnerships, as well as funding already spoken on by the Minister.

This sits underneath the UK context; the UK Government has published a revised National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), which includes actions for Wales of revising the NRAP (last revised in 2021) and to progress the Environmental Principles and Nature Targets and Governance Bill.

Challenges at the Local Level

Meg highlighted challenges in achieving our ambitions, such as Audit Wales finding that their biodiversity duties are not complying fully, due to limited resource and lack of clear guidance and support. She said there is a pressing need to address these barriers to participation, as local authorities sit at the critical junction between ambition and action.

Role of the GSPC actions

- The Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) provides actionable, clearly aligned steps under the GBF.

- These plant-focused actions can empower local governments, organisations, and communities to contribute meaningfully to nature recovery.
- The new monitoring and reporting framework developed by BGCI (Botanic Gardens Conservation International) will enable more accessible, independent reporting—critical for under-resourced stakeholders.

Meg concluded by stressing the importance of aligning terminology and language across plans to streamline and integrate reporting efforts. She noted that many of the GBF targets are already reflected in Wales' current NRAP objectives, and that better coordination and tools (like those offered by the GSPC) can help unlock this potential.

6. Discussion

Turning to discussion and thoughts from the rest of the meeting's attendees:

Section 6 and local authorities' management

Dan Ward (Tir Natur) commented on the lack of progress from local authorities on their Section 6 duty, suggesting that biodiversity should really be their 'default management', unless its purpose conflicts. For example, you wouldn't expect a sports field to become nature led, but the onus should be on proving why not to manage for nature, rather than vice versa. Meg commented that some Plantlife work actually found it would be a huge contribution to biodiversity if all sports fields in the UK were simply bordered by a 5-10 metre strip of grassland / meadow habitat, so it was worth considering this 'nature first' method of management.

Rivers and water quality progress

John highlighted the various river campaigns, noting that Angela Jones had suggested a Water Bill in the Senedd might be helpful. John had explained it's a very congested legislative timetable, and with only a year off now, but he hoped that the Nature Positive Bill would help with some water quality issues. Delyth added that she would be happy to work with others on amendments to the Bill, even if just probing ones, to ensure issues are kept on the agenda.

Cath Lehane said WWF did try to work with such campaigns, and noted the recent River Pollution summits have tried to focus action, but she did regret that agricultural was often overlooked. She wanted to see timelines, funding and requirements for action for that sector, at a catchment level.

Private gardens and fields as opportunity for nature

Sue Evans (GWCT) raised the societal expectation of 'tidiness' of gardens not being helpful, and actually a wilder, untidy area usually is a sign of nature thriving. Delyth Jewell agreed and emphasised her support for earlier points about the need for broader awareness-raising, particularly around private gardens and their opportunity for biodiversity. She noted societal pressure to maintain overly manicured lawns, which often deters nature. She advocated for public education to normalise and promote "messier" garden styles that are more nature-friendly. She also strongly opposed the use of plastic grass, calling for its ban.

Sue replied that this affects farmers too; the local community can 'judge' a farmer, who feel community pressure to top their fields in September, which removes grass seed resources for birds over the winter. She highlighted that this issue is more significant than often recognised and extends beyond aesthetic preferences to tangible ecological impacts.

Responding from Plantlife, Meg Griffiths reflected on the cultural history of lawns, explaining that manicured lawns only became fashionable during the Victorian era as a symbol of affluence. Before that, species-rich meadows were common. She argued for gradual cultural shifts toward appreciating less tidy green spaces and pointed to Welsh Government campaigns like [“It's for Them”](#) as positive efforts to shift perceptions.

Learning lessons from England on targets

Katy Orford (Senedd Research) asked what lessons could be learned from the passage of the Environment Bill in England and how these might inform the forthcoming Welsh Nature Bill, especially regarding biodiversity targets. Cath responded that a key lesson from the English Bill is the failure to model how targets would actually be achieved, particularly in agriculture. She stressed that modelling is essential for bridging the gap between ambition and delivery.

Annie added raised concerns about foreseen delays in setting targets after Bill's passage, potentially plotting targets in 2029 to achieve by 2030. She noted that in England, the Environment Act 2021 timeframe was one year to set them, while Scotland also set for one-year post-commencement. She encouraged the Welsh Government to be more ambitious and not delay implementation, especially with 2030 targets fast approaching.

In terms of actions on targets, Dan Ward highlighted the importance of defining what scaled-up, incremental improvements should look like. He suggested using peatland restoration as a benchmark, emphasizing that all projects should aim for similar scale and urgency to make meaningful progress toward 2030 targets.

Prioritisation amongst limited resources

Chris Mills asked about how prioritisation is approached, given limited resources and the fact that some biodiversity is more at risk than others. Annie responded that prioritisation is crucial, balancing broad actions for habitat improvement with targeted species recovery. She reiterated that achieving species abundance often requires both system-wide policy changes and specific interventions.

Meg agreed and stressed the importance of viewing prioritisation through multiple lenses—national and local. National strategies should address internationally significant species, while local actors can focus on regionally declining species, which might otherwise be overlooked.

Dan added that prioritisation can be more efficient when actions are taken at a large enough scale. Not all interventions are resource-intensive; some, like protected areas or policy updates, can be high-impact with minimal cost. These broader actions can then free up resources for more intensive, species-specific work.

Fergus O'Brien (Dŵr Cymru/Welsh Water) shared that a £1.5 billion investment programme is underway, primarily targeting water quality. He emphasised that with appropriate regulatory frameworks, this investment could deliver more nature-based and habitat-focused solutions, rather than traditional infrastructure-heavy methods. He called for support for overstretched regulators and local authorities to enable more holistic environmental outcomes.

7. AGM Proceedings

The meeting briefly transitioned to the Annual General Meeting of the Cross-Party Group.

- **Chair:** John Griffiths MS was re-nominated by Janet Finch-Saunders MS – who had given apologies for not being able to attend, but nominated him in writing beforehand – and unanimously approved.
- **Vice Chair:** Delyth Jewell MS was nominated by John Griffiths MS and seconded by several members.
- **Secretariat:** Continued appointment of Wales Environment Link was unanimously supported.