

National Assembly for Wales
Environment and Sustainability Committee
NRW 2015 – 88
Natural Resources Wales – Annual Scrutiny 2015
Response from Sorrel Jones

Dear Committee Members,

1. Thank you for opening your scrutiny of Natural Resources Wales to the public and seeking their views.
2. I work as a Conservation Officer for Gwent Wildlife Trust, and we will be submitting a formal response through Wildlife Trusts Wales, but I wanted to respond as an individual. Our official response will be factual and evidence based, and will probably use words like 'disappointed' and 'serious concerns' – but these do not convey the depth of my feelings about NRW.
3. I am heartbroken.
4. I had foolishly thought that because I was still seeing and talking to the same faces, only the letterhead had changed. But I could not have been more wrong.
5. I have worked to oppose the development of the Circuit of Wales motor racing facility for over two years, coinciding with the period of transition from CCW to NRW. I can tell you that officers from CCW were deeply concerned about the development, and made considerable efforts to place their initial objection prior to being absorbed by NRW – they knew what was coming.
6. Once NRW came into being, they engaged in talks with the developer, and (subsequent to correspondence with the then Minister for Natural Resources and Food) submitted a second response to the application, stating how their objections could be overcome. It is of note that the Minister's correspondence stated that *'I felt that NRW would be taking an entirely different approach to planning matters'*.
7. Equally, at the recent Public Inquiry regarding the deregistration of common land for the Circuit of Wales development, I found myself in the strange situation of being in opposition to NRW, who had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the developer. It meant that individual NRW officers, who still expressed serious concerns, were undermined by their own organisation's position of non-objection.
8. When I challenged a senior officer subsequent to the inquiry, he simply stated, *'We're a different organisation now.'* And for me, that just about sums it up. Anything that I would have expected as a matter of course from CCW – protection of wildlife, and promotion of biodiversity, is no longer valid. It is, as the minister said, entirely different,

and NRW values and objectives no longer place the conservation of biodiversity as a priority.

9. So while I am sorry for myself – I have lost an ally, in my role of standing up for wildlife - my grief is far greater for officers within NRW. Firstly, that there is the ongoing chaos of not knowing what your new role is, not knowing where you are going to be based, not knowing who is doing what, or how to contact them (one of the local officers didn't even have a phone for quite a while). After two years, I still speak to officers who don't know where they're going, or don't understand the new structure.
10. But more fundamentally, there is this: very few people work in nature conservation for the money, and it's never 'just a job'. I cannot imagine working for an organisation where the whole ethos has changed, and where the motivation to do the job has been eroded. For the NRW officers who congratulated us at the inquiry for standing up for wildlife, when they are no longer able to, my heart breaks.
11. Thank you again for conducting this scrutiny session.

Yours sincerely

Sorrel Jones (*personal capacity*)
Conservation Officer
Gwent Wildlife Trust.