

**National Assembly for Wales  
Cross Party Group on Biodiversity  
Tuesday, 9th June 2015  
12.15 – 13.15  
Conference Room 24 in Ty Hywel**

Chair: Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM

WEL Secretariat: Russel Hobson, Chair WEL Landuse and Biodiversity Group

***Biodiversity and the Scottish Parliament***

**Presentation from Andy Myles, Scottish Environment Link, on their approach to engaging MSPs in Biodiversity Issues, followed by discussion of future legislation for Biodiversity in Wales after the Environment Bill.**

Attendees:

William Powell AM and Rosanna Raison, Researcher

Andy Fraser - WG

Dai Harris - WG

Katy Orford – NAW Members Research Service

Iwan Ball - World Wildlife Fund

Annie Smith - RSPB Cymru

Llinos Price - RSPB Cymru

Peter Jones - RSPB Cymru

Steve Lucas - Bat Conservation Trust

Natalie Buttriss - Vincent Wildlife Trust

Lorna Scurlock - Marine Conservation Society/WEL

Damian Assinder - Llais y Goedwig

Scott Fryer – Wildlife Trust Wales

James Byrne – Wildlife Trust Wales

Introduction by Llyr Gruffydd AM

Presentation: Andy Myles

I bring greetings from Scotland and am pleased to visit Senedd after last visit to Cardiff 20 years ago.

When Scottish Parliament was formed there was a lot of interest from civic society in how best to engage. Initially followed Westminster model but looked at other models. The aim of policy community was to develop an open, accessible, consultative approach; a participatory model but based on Scotland's long established institutions.

The NGO sector quickly rejected the Cross Party Group model, as easy in Westminster with 1200+ MP's and Lords but too few MSPs: size does matter. Understanding that MSPs are expert in something but need help in other areas, especially biodiversity and that is what Scottish Environment Link (SEL) can do; provide that help, bring expertise to explain things.

Initial attempts in first ten years, when Scottish Parliament was focusing on legislation, were not a total success in real engagement. SEL's focus was on a Scottish Environment Week held at Holyrood and getting MSPs out on site visits.

SEL had a re-think. Scotland has lots of wildlife, MSPs have constituencies or regions so why not get them interested in just one species. Hence Species Champions was born. To be a Species Champion, an MSP is given briefing on where that species fits, provided with a link to a relevant organisation and asked to raise that species in appropriate places in the Parliament. 76 out of 129 MSP's are now Species Champions. Andy gave examples of MSP and how they championed their species.

Next aim is to take it further, working with Scottish Enterprise to develop Business Champions, with Youth Link on Youth Champions and looking at Art/Craft Champions. These may or may not work.

### Discussion

Annie Smith: What do Llyr and Bill feel about this sort of approach?

Llyr/Bill: Outside party spokespeople, AMs are very time pressured to attend events like today. Having bite-sized goals is a good thing and we would support a Species Champions approach.

Andy: We have tried to select species that do face some sort of threat but have allowed MSPs to choose a species if they wanted too.

Steve Lucas: What resource is needed to run this when we are worrying about becoming extinct ourselves?

Andy: 5 bats have Species Champions in Scotland and 1 part time member of staff fits that in. It's done on a shoestring with info on the website.

<http://www.scotlink.org/work-areas/species-champions/>

It is designed not to be onerous, as it is about information not projects or policy.

Peter Jones: The Environment Bill has lots about ecosystems but not much about species

Andy: First 10 years of Scottish Parliament was focussed on legislation. Since then SEL has focussed on delivery of that legislation, hence place for Species Champions. As part of constitution discussions, it has enabled us to shift focus from 'people' to what 'of Scotland' means – the land, air, sea and species that live in it as well as the people. Changes view of 'who' and 'what' a constitution is for e.g. land reform needs to consider what lives on land not just social or economic.

Further discussion around Sustainable Development and meaning of 'Sustainable Economic Growth' that is part of Scotland's Regulatory Reform Bill and attitude of Scottish Natural Heritage and SEPA..

Natalie Buttriss: Are you using the Species Champion approach collectively and are you still recruiting new MSPs?

Andy: Yes, we are still recruiting new MSPs but have not brought them together except on 'treats' such as site visits.

Katy Orford: Was the focus on the charismatic species and were links made to wider ecosystems?

Andy: We mainly focused on red list species and specifically picked ugly, unpopular ones as these are things that need champions. Links were made to wider issues such as rusty bog moss highlighting Scotland's important peatlands. But happy if some MSPs wanted commoner things.

Action:

Wales Environment Link will develop a Species Champions approach for next Assembly.

Next meeting of Cross Party Group on Biodiversity:

Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> October 12.15-13.15 with focus on Marine and existing legislation that is not fully delivered.