

Cross Party Group for Biodiversity

Wednesday 21st October 2015, 12.15 - 1.15pm

Conference Room 24, Tŷ Hywel

Attendees	
Llyr Huws Gruffydd AM	CPG Chair
Alun Ffred Jones	Assembly Member
Nia Seaton	MRS
Andrew Minnis	MRS
Gareth Price	Enterprise and Business Committee Clerk
Rosanna Raison	Researcher, William Powell AM
Rachel Sharp	Wildlife Trusts Wales
Scott Fryer	Wales Environment Link / Wildlife Trusts Wales
Gill Bell	Wales Environment Link / Marine Conservation Society
Lorna Scurlock	Wales Environment Link / Marine Conservation Society
Gareth Cunningham	Wales Environment Link / RSPB
Karen Whitfield	Wales Environment Link
Russel Hobson	Butterfly Conservation Trust
Alison Palmer-Hargraves	European Marine Site Officer
Blaise Bullimore	European Marine Site Officer
Sue Burton	European Marine Site Officer

1. Welcome from the Chair

Llyr Gruffydd welcomed members to the meeting and explained the focus of the meeting was to be on marine issues.

2. Wales Environment Link – an introduction

Gill Bell introduced the members of Wales Environment Link's Marine Working Group, the invitation to Welsh Government to present to the group which was declined and introduced the speakers.

WEL highlighted the need to integrate and implement marine policy to ensure an ecosystem based approach to a well-managed marine environment.

WEL welcomed the opportunity for engagement through groups such as Wales Maritime Strategic Advisory Group but raised concerns over marine resourcing, despite the Environmental and Sustainability Committee recommendations to give greater priority to marine and look further as resourcing.

WEL recommended that Welsh Government look to the existing robust marine legislation, such as Common Fisheries Policy and Water Framework Directive when developing their new measures. In particular the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, which directs Welsh Government to meet Good Environment Status by 2020, however expressed disappointment as the proposed Programme of Measures, which will not address the descriptors.

3. Potential new Marine Protected Areas

Gareth Cunningham gave a presentation on the potential new European Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). These potential sites (that are due to be consulted on by the end of the year) would be designated to protect harbour porpoise and seabirds in Welsh seas.

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) would be designated under the EU Habitats Directive to protect harbour porpoise and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) would be designated under the EU Birds Directive to protect seabirds such as terns, puffins and manx shearwaters.

The designation of these areas would be beneficial in way such as; defined spatial areas will help inform the developing Wales National Marine Plan, aids towards an ecosystem based approach. They would also be a significant step towards delivery of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and Habitat regulations (Ecologically coherent network) and may also benefit the tourism industries in Wales.

These new sites, required under the relevant directives, need to be managed effectively to ensure that the site features achieve favourable conservation status. This would require adequate staffing and resourcing within the statutory bodies

4. Scottish MPA process

Scottish Environment Link provided an audio recording of the process Scotland has taken in the creation and management of their MPA network. Following the passing of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and Marine (Scotland) Act 2010 then extensive stakeholder and public consultation between 2011 and 2013, in July 2014 the Scottish Government designated 30 nature conservation MPAs under this domestic legislation to complement the existing suite of marine SACs and SPAs (already designated under European directives). 19 of these new sites are inshore MPAs. From the outputs of workshops the Scottish Government consulted around a series of measures for fisheries management (as other licensable activities would now already be subject to the requirements of the designations via planning process). For many of the sites, fisheries management was not controversial. Mobile forms of fishing – most likely to be damaging to protected features - rarely, if ever, took place. The proposed measures were a way to future proof this to safeguard and recover designated features. For other sites there has been ongoing stakeholder discussion about how to account for the socio-economic impacts and benefits of management with different sectors of the fishing industry. It is believed that alongside the vital intrinsic value of protecting and recovering our marine environment, that this will have significant secondary and socio-economic benefits that outweigh any short-term impacts of management.

5. Wales National Marine Plan

Lorna Scurlock gave a presentation on the Welsh Government's development of the Wales National Marine Plan. Marine Planning is required under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MCAA) and EU Directive for Maritime Spatial Planning 89/2014 (MSP Directive). The Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 also gives a statutory duty in relation to sustainable development and aims to improve the long-term social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales.

The Welsh Government is currently developing a draft marine plan that will be based on a set of High Level Marine Objectives (HLMOs) that were jointly signed off by all UK

administrations. WNMP will also align with the goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The vision for WNMP is that by 2036, Welsh seas are clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse. This would be achieved by the WNMP planning for all activities taking place in Welsh seas.

The WNMP would have to work alongside the Environment (Wales) Bill and it is currently unclear how the products of the Bill would integrate with marine policies. These are products such as the State of Natural Resources Report, National Natural Resources Policy and Area Statements and currently Area Statement would only extend to coastal areas and the WNMP wouldn't provide the same area specific detail past the coastal area.

There are questions over resourcing to deliver WNMP and other marine policy given that the timeline for WNMP has slipped from the end of 2015 to 2016 and the draft Wales Bill will devolve more marine powers to Wales but it is unclear what additional resources would be available.

6. Discussion

Alun Ffred Jones asked what is the priority next step for marine and what would change as a result of designating MPAs - essentially, what activities would have to stop?

Gareth explained that any new designations will not result in a ban on all fishing, however it will be essential, where an activity is identified as damaging, to work with the fishing community to identify less harmful methods of fishing. There may be immediate benefits to static gear operators, some mobile methods may be required to modify their operations. The main sectors that would be disadvantaged are larger foreign vessels, vessels not represented within the Welsh fleet.

Gill and Gareth explained the main issues are around lack of resources to enforce existing measures, poor management and the slowing down or halting of a suite of measures and marine plans that would allow progress to be made. There isn't one plan or policy that is a priority, but it is a priority to resource marine management properly so that all of these things can be delivered.

Blaise Bullimore raised the issue of not using the evidence we have properly, it being ignored if it appears to conflict with economic development.

Gill suggested splitting the terrestrial and marine biodiversity resources more equitably.

Llyr picked up on needing better integration with plans proposed in the Environment Bill and indicated he'd be open to laying marine amendments.