

FWP 14

Ymateb gan : Awdurdodau'r tri Pharc Cenedlaethol yng Nghymru Evidence from : Three National Park authorities in Wales

- 1 Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the inquiry into forestry and woodland policy in Wales. These comments are submitted by officers of the three National Park authorities in Wales.
- 2 We comment on the delivery of the Woodlands for Wales Action Plan and on reporting relationships arising from the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

1. Comments on the Action Plan

1.1 Priority Action 3

- 3 The State of Natural Resources Report 2016 (SoNaRR) identifies 'increasing woodland cover, and bringing more of our existing woodlands into appropriate management' as one of seven key opportunities. SoNaRR (Chapter 3, Status and Trends, p.48) estimates that around 40% of Welsh woodlands have little or no management. In our opinion these are more likely to be the small and fragmented Ancient Woodlands or farm woodlands many of which are of very high importance for woodland biodiversity and landscape as well as a range of other benefits. It's these small woodlands that Coed Cymru targeted traditionally, and re-invigorating this would be beneficial going forwards.
- 4 Progress has been reported on increasing the area of woodland brought into management by community groups through the Llais y Goedwig initiative and this progress is very welcome (Priority Action 6). However, reversing the fortunes of woodland biodiversity and developing our native broadleaved woodlands to deliver their full range of potential benefits will require a step change in the rate of introduction of traditional woodland management into privately owned woodlands.
- 5 Currently there is no evidence to suggest that action is in place to deliver the step change required. We are not aware of any live incentive schemes available for to the private landowner either to maintain or introduce traditional woodland management practices and no indication of when such a scheme might be available. In addition, streams of partnership funding available to fund officer time for engaging private landowners in woodland management (for example the funding of county Coed Cymru Officers, delivered using a partnership funding

model) has become more difficult to secure and as a result there is a reduced capacity for engaging private landowners in woodland management and woodland creation activities. Under Priority Action 3 this action deserves at least equal, if not greater emphasis as the creation of new woodland and, both practically and conceptually it is likely to be the most achievable, cross-cutting habitat management measure to restore ecological connectivity and function (taking the ecosystem approach).

- 6 With such stretching targets for woodland creation it is inevitable that a significant proportion of this planting will be expected to take place within the agricultural landscape where there is a natural preference for targeting less agriculturally-productive land. It is essential that new woodland planting does not lead to the loss of priority habitats and biodiversity associated with important open habitats. Appropriate local consultation and access to the most up to date biological information through Local Environmental Records Centres will provide a minimum level of screening. Riparian corridor restoration to achieve multiple benefits (biodiversity, nutrient transfers, re-establishment of food webs, soil conservation and flood attenuation) might, conceptually, be a palatable approach to increasing woodland on more productive land.
- 7 To maximise the benefits from new woodland planting for biodiversity and the environment new planting schemes must be well placed within the landscape and buffer, protect and connect our existing fragmented native woodland resource. In addition greater consideration should be given to the value of wood pasture, open space within new plantings and new woodland from natural regeneration.
- 8 Despite roadside appearances to the contrary, Brecon Beacons National Park lacks sufficient woodland cover; an overall 5% increase would go largely unnoticed by the untrained eye. There is a case to be made for encouraging a public discussion about the benefits of tree planting and encouraging natural regeneration in the uplands.
- 9 The current approach under the current Single Farm Payment Scheme towards scrub (incipient woodland), in-field trees and low density wood pasture on farmland does not encourage either the retention or creation of such features. Recognising the value of trees and woodlands as an integral part of the productive landscape in any re-structured farm support post-Brexit could provide a further incentive for getting the right trees in the right place in particular for delivering a wider range of benefits such as flood management and water quality.
- 10 There is an estimated 106,000 km of hedgerows or 'linear woodlands' in Wales, with an estimate that around 78% of these are in unfavourable condition. Only around 5,800 km have been restored or are planned for restoration under agri-environment schemes (SoNaRR Chapter 3 p44). There is a huge opportunity to deliver under priority actions within the Wales Woodland Strategy through

improving the management of hedgerows and this would make a valuable contribution towards a landscape-led green growth agenda and well-being plans.

1.2 Priority Action 10

- 11 Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority has undertaken around 45 ha of Planted Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) restoration on its own woodland estate. It is now the case that much of the remaining unrestored PAWS within Pembrokeshire Coast National Park are in private ownership, generally managed as part of larger productive woodlands. We would therefore agree with the assessment that greater incentive is required to encourage restoration by private landowners. The Snowdonia National Park Authority annually assists land owners with various assistance packages, but is oversubscribed and under resourced.

1.3 Priority Action 11

- 12 More support for locally based partnership approaches to invasive non-native species management would help to increase the rate of progress in tackling some of the more widespread terrestrial plant species that impact heavily on woodlands. Snowdonia National Park Authority and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority have been trialling such an approach on three species (Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and *Rhododendron*) under the Sustainable Development Fund. Further information and a final project report <http://www.pembrokeshirecoast.org.uk/Default.asp?PID=743>
The BBNPA will shortly be launching a pilot project targeting Himalayan Balsam and Japanese knotweed in the Tawe and Usk catchments.

2. Further comments

- 13 We note that the Woodlands for Wales Action Plan is cross-referenced to the Well-being goals. This helps to assess the fit of Woodlands for Wales to the Well-being of Future Generations Wales Act 2015. It is suggested that the performance of Woodlands for Wales against climate change and environmental quality themes may be assessed using SoNaRR 2016 and subsequent SoNaRR reports. We suggest that it would be helpful to review the Action Plan against the principles of sustainable natural resources management listed in the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.
- 14 It is envisaged that Area Statements will set out the priorities for woodland and forestry for Nature Partnerships and other relevant partners in an area, in support of the National Natural Resources Policy and based on evidence from SoNaRR and strategic direction from Woodlands for Wales.
- 15 Thank you again for the opportunity to contribute to the inquiry. If any clarification is required please do not hesitate to contact me.