



**Sent Via Email**  
26 October 2010

Dear Kirsty,

**Re: Sustainability Committee inquiry into biodiversity in Wales 2010**

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee both for undertaking this important inquiry and for giving RSPB Cymru the opportunity to provide evidence to support its completion.

During our evidence session, you asked us to provide some more detail on some of the issues raised, particularly around Protected Areas– including designated sites and protected landscapes. The two examples we highlighted in our evidence session, (a designated site on the Ceredigion coast and designated sites within the Brecon Beacons National Park) are examples of how existing delivery mechanisms could be improved to deliver biodiversity conservation and to restore the integrity of ecosystem processes.

The majority of the Brecon Beacons SAC is upland common land, which exacerbates one of the key issues - inappropriate grazing limiting the extent and diversity of the important vegetation features of the site. This is not an isolated issue. 36% of common land in Wales is SSSI, 45% lies within National Parks and more than 1,500 hectares of common land is within key areas for lapwing, curlew and ring ouzel - three of Wales' Principal Biodiversity Species. These species all rely on appropriate management– including appropriate levels of grazing - to provide the habitat they need.

**RSPB Cymru believe the Welsh Assembly Government has been far too slow implementing the regulations associated with Part 2 and Part 4 of the Commons Act 2006, which could facilitate the better management of common land. This situation must be improved.**

A large proportion of National Parks and AONBs are under agricultural management. The control of a significant number of activities that are potentially detrimental to biodiversity therefore sits with the Welsh Assembly Government - through ensuring Standards of Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC ; cross compliance) are met. The logical response therefore, based on the poor performance of cross compliance to date<sup>1</sup>, should be to improve and strengthen the system to ensure the requirements placed on farmers are straightforward and workable, yet deliver real environmental benefits (including biodiversity conservation, water management and carbon management).

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<sup>1</sup> See: Silcock and Swales (2007) Cross compliance: a policy options paper. Prepared for Land Use Policy Group, June 2007, and; Farmer and Swales (2004), The development and implementation of cross compliance in the EU15: an analysis, IEEP report for RSPB

Furthermore, the Welsh Assembly Government and appropriate statutory bodies must be more proactive and effective in implementing and enforcing compliance with the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations and the Heather and Grass Burning Code (Burning Regulations). Issues relating to the effectiveness and consistency of these measures are well known but there is no sign yet of any improvements being implemented.

**RSPB Cymru believes it should be a matter of urgency for the Welsh Government to strengthen and improve implementation of these basic environmental protection and accountability measures.**

Though these measures are vitally important they will not deliver any more than basic legal standards, good land management practice and what should be considered minimum environmental protection standards. Protected landscapes must be managed much more positively for biodiversity if they are to meet our aspirations of them as iconic landscapes for wildlife and people. As one of the tiers in the protected area/ecological network they are vital and must be able to use their influence and legislative tools for more active management for biodiversity.

Protected sites, such as the site we highlighted on the Ceredigion coast, are and should remain, the cornerstone of our nature conservation policy and delivery. Our existing suite of protected sites, in favourable condition, must be at the heart of the resilient and coherent ecological network we need to help the natural environment face future challenges.

RSPB Cymru believes our National Parks and AONBs have succeeded in protecting much-loved and valued landscapes since their establishment. However, these protected areas must progress to become paradigms of improved biodiversity delivery.

**The Welsh Assembly Government must mobilise sufficient and appropriate resources to ensure the proper management of protected areas (designated sites and protected landscapes) to allow them to take a central role in a coherent and resilient ecological network for Wales.**

SSSI legislation underpins and helps us meet our legal obligations under the Birds and Habitats Directives. Whilst the protected area components of these two core Directives have been successfully implemented, the remaining measures have been viewed as discretionary, not mandatory as they should be. If the Natural Environment Framework is implemented effectively (including full consideration of the "Making Space for Nature" review) these additional measures, which are critical for the conservation of biodiversity in the wider Welsh countryside, should be properly addressed. We will provide more information in this regard in a further letter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sean Christian". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr Sean Christian

Head of Conservation, RSPB Cymru