

Senedd Cymru
Pwyllgor yr Economi, Masnach a Materion
Gwledig
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd
ETRA - 12
Ymateb gan: RSPB Cymru

Welsh Parliament
Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs
Committee
Priorities for the Sixth Senedd.

Evidence from: RSPB Wales

26th August 2021

RSPB Cymru Consultation Response

Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee: Priorities for the Sixth Senedd

The RSPB is the UK's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. Together with our partners, we protect threatened birds and wildlife so our towns, coast and countryside will teem with life once again. We play a leading role in BirdLife International, a worldwide partnership of nature conservation organisations. We manage 160,358 hectares of land across the UK, much of which is farmed, including Lake Vyrnwy, the largest organic farm in England and Wales.

Key points:

- Committee scrutiny should ensure that an investment in our natural environment, including an investment in a National Nature Service, remains at the heart of a green and just recovery from Covid-19 in order to ensure the transformations shift needed in our economy in order to address the nature and climate crisis.
- We recommend the Committee scrutinises the new Agriculture Bill to ensure its subsequent implementation delivers value for taxpayers' money and enables the transition to sustainable farming and land management that restores nature, tackles climate change and provides society with a wide range of essential public goods.
- The upcoming Joint Fisheries Statement will set out the fisheries management policies for Wales for the foreseeable future. Committee scrutiny will be of upmost importance when this is laid before the Senedd in early 2022.

Towards a Nature Positive Economy for Wales

The [Dasgupta Review](#) into "The Economics of Biodiversity" describes nature as our most precious asset, and calls for [transformative change in how we recognise and value nature](#). A recent RSPB Report shows the **significant return that can be gained from investing in our natural assets**: [for every £1 invested in peatland, salt marsh and woodland respectively can secure £4.62, £1.31 and £2.79 in return](#). Moreover, RSPB Cymru has estimated that an investment in nature restoration could support almost [7,000 direct FTE jobs in Wales](#).

The Welsh Government's Programme for Government falls short of the transformative shift necessary to address the nature and climate crisis. We would encourage the Committee to revisit the recommendations made by previous committee in November 2020, including the recommendations to "**invest in a transformation green recovery**" through:

- **Investment in and acceleration of 'shovel-ready' green infrastructure.** This refers to **nature-based solutions** such as peatland, salt marsh or woodland.

- Skills funding to support green jobs and “take robust action to analyse and address the disparities between current and future needs and existing skills provision”. This could, in part, be fulfilled by an **investment in a National Nature Service** as proposed to Welsh Government by the NRW Green Recovery Delivery Group.

Agriculture Bill and the Sustainable Farming Scheme

The introduction of a new Agriculture Act for Wales provides a unique opportunity to transition to and reward sustainable farming and land management that restores nature, tackles climate change and provides society with a wide range of essential public goods. This piece of legislation will play a critical role in determining the state of Welsh ecosystems on which we and future generations depend. As such we strongly recommend the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee scrutinises the Bill and secondary legislation, which will establish the detail of Sustainable Farming Scheme and underpinning regulation. We consider the following areas as priorities for scrutiny:

- The Act maintains the core principle of ‘public money for public goods’.** This is essential to secure value for public money and the reforms required for agriculture to meet a range of environmental and animal welfare commitments.
- New legal safeguards (National Minimum Standards) on environmental, food safety and animal welfare standards** are (at least) as high as those currently in place. Regulation that prevents the further loss of semi-natural habitats should be introduced if we are to meet environmental commitments.
- The Sustainable Farm Scheme is designed to deliver genuine benefits for nature,** which make a significant contribution to the legal commitments to restore biodiversity in Wales.

We also recommend that the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee consider joint scrutiny of the Agriculture Bill (and subsequent legislation) with the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee.

Marine Fisheries

Post-Brexit fisheries management is being designed in Wales. This provides a **unique opportunity to secure sustainable fisheries policies** that deliver for nature and support long-lasting Welsh fisheries. The UK Fisheries Act 2020 (“the Act”) provided the framework and tools for fisheries management but it did little to set out how fisheries management will be delivered. The **upcoming Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) and Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs)** are where this will be given substance.

The former Committee on Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs held several fisheries inquiries in the last Senedd. During these, Lesley Griffiths (MS) (now Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd) made [numerous commitments](#) (PDF 424KB) to the Senedd regarding the JFS and FMPs (as well as a future Welsh Bill).

There is a requirement, within the Act to lay a consultation draft of the JFS before the appropriate legislature. This is expected in early 2022. Given the significance of the JFS for determining long-term fisheries management policies, Committee scrutiny will be of upmost importance. Given the remits of this and the Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee, joint working on this may be advantageous.

Additional areas that would merit consideration, as part of JFS scrutiny or general Ministerial scrutiny:

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- **Fisheries management measures within marine protected areas** (the Assessing Welsh Fisheries Activities project) are long-overdue. The following are links to written questions by MSs on the project dated back to 2017: [75360](#); [75358](#); [75359](#); [80970](#).
- The [State of Natural Resources Report](#) (2020) stated that “for the most part, we **don’t have a good enough understanding**...to be able to determine the sustainability of fisheries resources in Welsh inshore waters.” Monitoring urgently needs to be addressed. [Remote Electronic Monitoring \(REM\)](#) (PDF 10 MB) provides an opportunity to deliver environmentally sustainable and fully documented fisheries.

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