

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith /
Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee
Blaenoriaethau ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd / Priorities for the Sixth Senedd

PR45

Ymateb gan RSPCA Cymru / Evidence from RSPCA Cymru



RSPCA Cymru welcomes the opportunity to respond to the new Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure (CCEI) Committee's consultation on its priorities for the sixth Senedd. The RSPCA is proud of its close working relationship with the Senedd's committees. Throughout the Fifth Senedd term, we worked closely with the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs (CCERA) Committee, in addition to others, such as the Petitions Committee. While animal welfare will primarily sit within the remit of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs (ETRA) Committee under the Senedd's new committee structure, we hope to work closely with the CCEI committee's members, clerking team and researchers in the years ahead on relevant issues.

Many of the responsibilities of the Welsh Government's new climate change ministry overlap into animal welfare - and, as such, are likely to be intertwined with the workstreams of the new Senedd Committee, too. These range from the protection of wildlife, to flooding, planning reform and even elements of transport policy. Indeed, RSPCA Cymru has already worked with the new climate change ministry since its formation on securing display messages warning motorists about the danger of leaving dogs in hot cars during spells of warmer weather. Following the success of this initiative, we are confident that more opportunities for cross-ministry work will present themselves in the future, benefitting both people and animals in Wales.

In their letter to the Committee, the Welsh Government makes clear that nature and biodiversity will be a key priority for the new administration. This is welcome, especially considering the challenging situation wild animals are currently facing due to habitat loss, climate change and other factors. To this end, the RSPCA's new Strategy highlights how "climate change and the destruction of natural habitats are an existential threat to both animals and people". Wales' wildlife is rich and varied, attracting millions of visitors from across the globe each year. Rescuing and rehabilitating wildlife is a key, yet often underestimated, part of the RSPCA's work, but the will to maintain and improve the welfare of wild animals will be a major challenge for the new Welsh Government; and one we hope the new Committee will scrutinise as part of its focus on how the Welsh Government is protecting nature and furthering biodiversity.

In the run up to May's Senedd election, the RSPCA published a manifesto which features a dedicated section on our work on wildlife. Within this we called on the Welsh Government to consolidate Wales' current legislation relating to this area into a new Wildlife Act for Wales. As it stands, there is a plethora of wildlife legislation relevant to Wales, much of which is fractured and outdated, causing ongoing issues associated with its understanding and enforcement and hindering the public's understanding of their responsibilities concerning wildlife. Because of this, we urge the new Committee to consider scrutiny of the role a Wildlife Act for Wales could help contribute towards nature's recovery and halt biodiversity loss, while demonstrating the ambition needed to tackle the 'nature emergency', the Senedd recently voted to declare .

With regards to the new Committee's potential scrutiny of wildlife matters some clarification regarding the intended remit and extent of this focus would be much appreciated - given that many animal welfare matters cover a range of species beyond wildlife, and may fall under the remit of the ETRA Committee. In addition to the consolidation of wildlife law, a number of practices in Wales are having a significant impact on wildlife management and welfare and - if within the scope of the Committee's scrutiny - would be pertinent topics to explore.

The use of snares is an excellent example. A ban on the use of snares is anticipated in a future Agriculture (Wales) Bill - and, as such, has largely been the purview of the Minister for Rural Affairs and, likely, the ETRA Committee. Nevertheless, the impact specifically on wildlife is still vast - and estimates suggest that more than 51,000 fox snares can be active in Wales at one time¹, with their use being both commonplace and legal. While the [Welsh Government introduced a Code of Practice](#) on their use in 2015, our inspectors regularly deal with incidents where snares are set in breach of both this voluntary code and the law more generally. Snares are cruel and indiscriminate in what they catch. RSPCA Cymru remains opposed to the manufacture, sale and use of all snares and any trap that causes suffering and an enquiry from CCERA in the previous Senedd term, entitled [The Use of Snares in Wales](#), helped draw attention to the need for future legislative action; and it may be prudent for a committee to return to the issue in the future.

As a consequence of the risk they pose to wildlife, among other animals, as well as the environment, we firmly believe that the Welsh Government should ban the use of sky lanterns on all land in Wales. While all 22 of Wales' local authorities have banned their use on council land², we believe that Wales-wide action is needed to tackle the use of sky lanterns on private property. As well as potentially harming wild and domesticated animals, sky lanterns also pose a fire hazard to habitats of importance to nature and biodiversity. Taking this into consideration, we hope to see the new Committee scrutinising the value of an outright ban on them in Wales. Fireworks also pose wildlife welfare risks and we have long campaigned for tighter regulations around their sale and use and for them to be restricted to certain celebrations. While the Fireworks Act 2003 is a non-devolved piece of legislation, the Welsh Government has shown a willingness to act to ensure fireworks in

¹ PoliticalAnimal - The Use of Snares in Wales, accessed 9 September 2021

² Keep Wales Tidy - Sky lantern bans now in place across Wales, 8 February 2018

Wales are less frightening for animals. The Minister has recently said that the Welsh Government would be seeking a trilateral meeting with the UK Government and Scottish Government to determine what more can be done to tackle this issue at a Great Britain level³; though the Scottish Government's has announced it is bringing in a new law on the sale of fireworks in the 2021-2 Government programme, which could be a model to explore. We hope these issues will potentially be considered as part of the Committee's scrutiny on the development of a Clean Air Act for Wales, further to the recent Welsh Government White Paper consultation.

The littering of single-use plastics poses a significant risk to wildlife and natural habitats, with the potential for animals to become trapped by them or ingest them by mistaking them for food, a very real possibility. On average, we receive 11 calls a day about animals affected by litter, with wildlife, particularly birds, being most commonly affected. As many injured wild animals are never found, it is estimated that the actual figure of animals injured by litter is much higher than we currently know. We hope that the new Committee will prioritise scrutinising the need to tackle single-use plastics in Wales, in order to benefit animal welfare and our wider environment, particularly in light of Welsh Government plans to bring forward legislation to ban more single-use plastics.

Gene editing is another issue which could potentially straddle the responsibilities of this Committee, and the ETRA Committee. In England, the UK has consulted on allowing gene editing of farm animals - something the RSPCA has serious animal welfare and ethical concerns about. To date, the Welsh Government has not made any move to permit this practice - instead acknowledging "considerable debate in the scientific community"⁴ and favouring a precautionary approach based on science. However, even if the Welsh Government did not allow the production of gene edited foods, they would be unable to stop them appearing in shops in Wales due to new rules under the UK Internal Market Act. RSPCA Cymru hopes these issues will be considered as part of any committee scrutiny into gene editing techniques or genetic modification.

Devolved planning policy is earmarked by the Welsh Government to the Committee as one of the "greatest levers in driving changes across Wales"⁵. Reform to planning law also has huge potential to improve the welfare of animals and their associated environment. Animal welfare is not currently a legal consideration within the planning process - yet reforming planning laws could ensure a more consistent approach across Wales to developments, while ensuring developments that impacted animal welfare most negatively can be challenged. As such, we hope the potential for making animal welfare a material matter in the process will be a focus of any consideration the Committee makes into the effectiveness of Welsh planning law.

³ Senedd Cymru / the Welsh Parliament, Record of Proceedings, 18 November 2020

⁴ Welsh Government Press Release - Genetic editing in agriculture, 7 January 2021

⁵ Julie James MS and Lee Waters MS Letter to Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee, 30

July 2021

Evidently, there are various issues covered by the new Committee which could well be considered relevant to wildlife and the environment, in addition to animal welfare, with flooding, waste and infrastructure being prime examples. Because of this, we urge the new CCEI Committee to work closely with the new ETRA Committee and NGOs such as ourselves, to ensure that the welfare of all animals remains central to the Senedd's scrutiny process. Indeed, given the Senedd's new committee structure, and the potential for animal welfare issues to be prominent in the deliberations of at least two committees, we hope the exposure of these important topics will not be limited by competing with new issues, and instead potentially enhanced by a dual-committee approach. RSPCA Cymru looks forward to working with the new Committee in the years ahead and would be happy to provide any further information which may be helpful as its work programme is formulated.