



Ymddiriedolaeth
Genedlaethol
National Trust

Priorities for the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

Consultation response

Response submitted by National Trust Cymru to the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

10 September 2021

The National Trust is a charity founded in 1895 by three people who saw the importance of our nation's heritage and open spaces and wanted to preserve them for everyone to enjoy. More than 125 years later, these values are still at the heart of everything we do.

Introduction

National Trust Cymru is proud to care for 46,000 hectares of land, 157 miles of coastline and 18 of the nation's finest castles, houses, gardens and industrial sites. With the support of our staff and volunteers in Wales, more than 1.8 million visitors enjoy our places in Wales every year.

We place great importance on the conservation, management and enjoyment of the natural and historic environment both within and beyond our boundaries. We are committed to supporting the nation's green recovery, ensuring everyone feels welcome at our places and playing our part to tackle climate change, with the ambition to become carbon net zero in Wales by 2030 and restore 4,600 hectares of priority habitat by 2025 to reverse the decline in wildlife.

We recognise that the Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee covers a wide remit and will need to consider and balance a range of important work areas. We welcome the opportunity to share our views on Committee priorities and we look forward to working with you during this Senedd term. We would propose the below as areas that the Committee may wish to consider over the next term.

Statutory biodiversity targets for Wales

With 17% of species at risk of extinction, according to the State of Nature 2019 report¹, and Wales not yet meeting the four long-term aims of sustainable management of natural resources², bold action must be taken to halt the decline and restore biodiversity. As such, we support the declaration of a nature emergency and calls for the Welsh Government to introduce statutory targets to reverse biodiversity loss in Wales³. Restoring nature must be

¹ <https://nbn.org.uk/stateofnature2019/>

² <https://cdn.cyfoethnaturiol.cymru/media/693209/sonarr2020-executive-summary.pdf>

³ <https://record.senedd.wales/Motion/7725>

at the core of our nation's efforts to tackle climate change, grow resilience and support people's health and wellbeing.

With the Conference of the Parties (COP15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity on the horizon and a post-2020 global framework expected to be agreed with new international goals and targets to reverse the decline in biodiversity, this is a crucial opportunity for Wales to play its part.

We note the Climate Change Minister's intention to revise the Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales to take account of the new framework and acknowledgment that "we need to do more"⁴. Legislating a set of ambitious and enforceable domestic biodiversity targets for Wales should be a priority and we would suggest that this is a key work area for the Committee to keep under review.

National Trust Cymru agrees with the conclusion of the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee's Fifth Senedd Legacy Report, "we believe our successor Committee should ensure the Welsh Government prioritises this matter during the first year of the next Senedd term"⁵.

Environmental governance for Wales

It is on the record that the Climate Change Minister intends to bring forward an environmental governance and principles Bill within year 2⁶ and is committed to working with stakeholders to develop permanent arrangements. We support this, but in the meantime, we are conscious that the interim environmental governance arrangements focus on the functioning of environmental law rather than investigating breaches of the law.

Closing the environmental governance gap, created by our departure from the EU, and legislating to establish an independent environmental governance body for Wales is crucial, and scrutiny by the Committee to ensure that fit for purpose arrangements are put in place is essential.

A Sustainable Farming Scheme that delivers for people and nature

Scrutinising the proposed draft Agriculture (Wales) Bill must be a priority for the Committee for the first term, with the Government announcing its intention to lay the Bill before summer 2022. The transition away from the Common Agricultural Policy is a once in a generation opportunity to shape a more sustainable future for the farming sector in Wales that meets the needs of people, nature and the environment and contributes to the nation's ambition to be carbon net zero by 2050 – scrutiny by the Committee in conjunction with

4

<https://business.senedd.wales/documents/s116925/Letter%20from%20the%20Minister%20and%20Deputy%20Minister%20for%20Climate%20Change%20on%20the%20Welsh%20Governments%20priorities.pdf>

⁵ <https://senedd.wales/media/rzqeixsg/cr-ld14312-e.pdf>

⁶ <https://record.senedd.wales/Committee/12399>

the Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee will be essential to ensuring that this ambition is met.

We are encouraged by current proposals to pay farmers and land managers for the environmental benefits that they deliver, underpinned by a commitment to effective regulation, as set out in the recent Agriculture (Wales) White Paper. However, we do not underestimate the scale of change required to transition from one system to the next and would like to see a clear road map for the development of the new Sustainable Farming Scheme. A commitment from Welsh Government to engage with farmers and land managers in the trialling and testing is important for the success of the scheme and we would ask the Committee to support our ambition to ensure that the design and development work is an inclusive process.

With over 240 agricultural tenancies and 97% of our land classed as farmland in Wales, we recognise the part we play. We are currently running a Payment for Outcomes trial on three farms on the Llŷn Peninsula in collaboration with our tenants and partners to explore new ways of supporting farmers to help nature thrive on their farms, and to demonstrate the merits of sustainable farming, not just for the benefit of nature, but for the long-term future of farming. We hope that this approach will help unlock new sources of funding for sustainable land management and establish best practice, and would be pleased to share further information on the project or welcome the Committee for a site visit to learn more as part of the inquiry into the future of agriculture in Wales.

Sustainable tourism and recovery of the visitor economy in Wales

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a catastrophic impact on the tourism and hospitality sectors, including on charities and organisations that provide visitor attractions like National Trust Cymru. It is essential that the right choices are made now and the right plans put in place to enable a sustainable recovery in the medium and long-term – a recovery that balances economic, social and environmental needs.

The tourism sector relies on the balance between our special landscapes, historic environment and cultural heritage. Tourism can bring a range of benefits to people and local economies. However, if tourism is not properly managed, it can harm the natural and built environment and alienate host communities – during the pandemic we have seen unprecedented visitor numbers to Wales' beauty spots and more investigation is needed to understand how we balance growth and sustainability.

We welcome Visit Wales' 'Let's Shape the Future' plan and commitment to ongoing partnership working with the sector. The sector's approach must be managed in a coordinated way and the focus must shift from a volume-based economic model to a high-value model that seeks to better balance economic, social and environmental considerations.

As we look ahead, it is also critical that we build resilience into the tourism sector in response to the changing climate and put in place appropriate mitigations and adaptations. All those involved in tourism need to work together to understand how we can achieve a

successful, sustainable tourism offer, while also playing our part in moving towards a net zero carbon future.

We have recently undertaken research to analyse how climate change could affect domestic tourism, assessing data from more than 85million visits to 170 of our sites in the UK between 2015 and 2019 to understand visitor patterns plotted against weather conditions. We have also produced a climate change 'hazard map' which plots potential climate change threats to specific locations across the country. We would be happy to share more information about our climate change research with the Committee and explore how our findings may shape and benefit the tourism industry in Wales.

We would suggest that this is an area that the Committee may wish to explore in partnership with the Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee and we would welcome the opportunity to share further information to support this work.

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