

ROCP 31, Nature Friendly Farming Network

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, yr Amgylchedd a Seilwaith | Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

Adolygiad o flaenoriaethau'r Pwyllgor ar gyfer y Chweched Senedd | Review of the Committee's priorities for the Sixth Senedd

Ymateb gan Rhwydwaith Ffermio er Lles Natur | Evidence from Nature Friendly Farming Network

Your views

1. What are your views on the Committee's three strategic priorities: Climate Change; Sustainable Communities; and Protecting and enhancing the natural environment?

We agree with the three Strategic Priorities.

However we urge the Committee to work closely with the Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee to ensure that Welsh Government's Net Zero policies don't adversely affect other priorities, particularly rural economies and communities.

Government environmental policies can offer huge benefits to Welsh family farm businesses, rural economies and communities. However poorly conceived and/or implemented policies could potentially threaten rural communities, the Welsh language, the wider rural economy and could in fact lead to perverse outcomes for nature and climate.

For example, we are very concerned about the rise in large-scale corporations, investment companies and private businesses buying farms across the country to plant trees to offset their own carbon emissions, threatening local culture, language and heritage. For example, in 2021 the number of Glastir Woodland Creation applicants with addresses outside of Wales grew from 3% to 8%. Furthermore, the average planting area for Welsh applicants was 17.3ha, which is considerably less than the 96.3ha average for non-Welsh applicants. This does not keep money in the local economy and community, but rather shifts public money outside of Wales. Farmers and local communities need to be at the heart of tree

planting initiatives. Coed o Gymru, gan y Cymry.

Furthermore, Climate Change policies must not be developed and implemented at the expense of biodiversity. Biodiversity loss is arguably a bigger threat to the planet than climate change. If we save the climate but we lose nature we're still left with an unlivable planet. Sticking with trees, the Welsh Government's plans for woodland creation in Wales sets out the need to plant 43,000ha of new woodland by 2030 and 180,000ha by 2050. There is no doubt that trees play a vital role in addressing the nature and climate crisis - woodland makes us more resilient to climate change and can create a nature-rich landscape that is beneficial to both farmland and wildlife.

However, this is an ambitious stretch and a roll-out to this magnitude could have unintended consequences if not actioned cautiously, not least on our biodiversity and wider environment. Planting the wrong tree in the wrong place can also threaten farmland biodiversity and in fact lead to perverse negative outcomes for our climate. In some instances, the opposite of tree planting is more appropriate for contributing to the bigger picture of climate mitigation and nature restoration, where we should be felling trees on peatland or shelterbelts near areas used by ground-nesting birds.

Equal consideration should be given to other carbon-rich agricultural habitats such as hedgerows, heathlands, peatlands, species-rich grasslands, hay meadows and multispecies leys. As it stands, degraded UK peatlands emit more carbon than what even the most ambitious UK Climate Change Committee tree planting targets could capture and store.

2. To what extent are the Committee's three strategic priorities still relevant, reflecting on social, economic and environmental developments since they were set at the start of the Sixth Senedd?

The strategic priorities are still relevant - even more so considering that the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss are being felt more frequently and more severely.

3. What are your view on the Committee's detailed priorities/outline programme of work for Years 3 to 5 of the Sixth Senedd (set out in its report, Priorities for the Sixth Senedd?)

Scrutiny of the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS), which is likely to be the main vehicle for agricultural support following the phasing out of the Basic Payment Scheme and associated agri-environment schemes, should also feature

prominently within the Committee's work programme. A future agricultural support system must facilitate and reward farmers appropriately for delivering environmental benefits such as improved biodiversity, clean water and air, carbon sequestration and natural flood management. The SFS will be essential to help climate change mitigation and adaptation, but must do so in a way that ensures financial viability of Welsh family farms.

4. To what extent are the Committee's detailed priorities/outline programme of work still relevant, reflecting on social, economic and environmental developments since they were set at the start of the Sixth Senedd?

We believe that the priorities / outline programme of work are still relevant - even more so considering that the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss are being felt more frequently and more severely.

5. Are there any other matters related to the Committee's priorities/work programme/ways of working that you would like to comment on?

We reiterate, given the Committee's wide remit and the cross-sector nature of the its priorities, we believe that the above issues strongly lend themselves to joint working and collaboration with the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee. If not, there is a danger of siloed and incoherent policy making from Welsh Government as a whole.

6. Other information

No response.
