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Welsh Parliament
Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee
Green Economy
GE33
Evidence from: RSPB Cymru



RSPB Cymru Response to Green Economy Consultation



February 2024

RSPB Cymru is part of the RSPB, the UK's largest nature conservation charity, inspiring everyone to give nature a home. Together with our partners, we work to protect threatened birds and wildlife so our towns, coast, seas and countryside will teem with life once again. We play a leading role in BirdLife International, a worldwide partnership of nature conservation organisations.

We have engaged extensively in Green Recovery work since 2020, and have [provided evidence](#) to the previous Economy Committee to this effect. We are keen to remain engaged in this space and welcome the opportunity to respond to this Green Economy Consultation.

Towards a Nature Positive Economy

More than half of the world's total GDP – \$44 trillion of economic value – is now exposed to risks from nature loss because of the dependence of business on nature.¹ In Wales, the State of Natural Resources Report has shown an overall trend of “serious decline”, “reflecting the global situation and internationally recognised nature emergency”.²

The State of Nature Wales 2023 reported that the abundance of land and freshwater species has, on average, fallen by 20% across Wales since 1994, and one in six species is at risk of being lost from Wales. Historic and continued pressures on wildlife mean that Wales is now one of the most nature depleted countries on earth. The last decade has seen dedicated action from both government and businesses to combat climate change, but we need equally dedicated and parallel action to halt ecosystem collapse and achieve a Nature Positive, as well as a Net Zero, economy.

The World Bank's 2021 Report, “The Economic Case for Nature,” argues that nature-smart policies not only mitigate the risk of ecosystem collapse but also offer dual benefits for both biodiversity and the economy.³ The report warns that the ongoing trend of environmental degradation heightens the risk of ecosystem collapse, which in turn poses systemic risks to economies worldwide. A collapse in even a limited range of ecosystem services would have profound negative impacts on the global economy.

Investing in nature, as emphasized by the Dasgupta Review, is not just an environmental imperative but an economic one. This review highlights a fundamental truth: economies are

¹ [World Economic Forum's New Nature Economy Report \(NNER\) series, Nature Risk Rising.](#)

² [State of Natural Resources Report](#)

³ [World Bank, The Economic Case for Nature: A Global Earth-Economy Model to Assess Development Policy Pathways](#)

deeply rooted in nature.⁴ Embracing a Nature Positive approach, where nature is at the heart of all economic, political, and lifestyle decisions, can significantly enhance the effectiveness of investments in other sectors.

Within its devolved powers, what should be the Welsh Government’s key priorities to maximise the potential economic opportunities from green economy sectors? To what extent does its current approach reflect these?

Developing a Skilled Workforce

The Welsh Government has committed to ambitious global targets to turn around the loss of nature, and has promised to bring forward legislation to introduce legally binding nature recovery targets for Wales. In October 2022, recommendations of the Biodiversity Deep Dive were published, following detailed work with a number of groups of experts and stakeholders on how Wales can deliver the ‘30 by 30 Target’ – the global target to protect and effectively manage 30% of land and freshwater, coasts and seas by 2030, through protected areas and other effective area based conservation measures. With ambitious government targets to address climate change and restore nature, there will be an increased need for people with skills in ecology and nature conservation, including habitat creation and management.

In order to meet government commitments, both in Wales and globally, we will adequate training to provide re- and up-skilling opportunities in order to provide nature-based jobs, to, for example, create new woodlands, restore peatbogs, reduce flooding with nature-based approaches, green our towns and cities, advise farmers, and study and monitor biodiversity. Given the shifts and corresponding skills required in land use and forestry over the coming decade, in addition to the growing need for large-scale habitat restoration to address the climate and nature crisis, with existing effort in peatland restoration already underway, it is clear that there will be a need to retrain and upskill the existing workforce to meet these needs.

Friends of the Earth has outlined that a shift towards more sustainable land use practices will require a reskilling in forestry and agroforestry, as well as environmental restoration and a reskilling in farming practices.⁵ Restoring natural carbon sinks such as peatlands, saltmarshes, or woodlands will also require skilled environmental, horticultural and conservation professionals. The TUC has estimated that almost 5,000 jobs could be created in Wales in land, forestry and agriculture.⁶ Focused on physical infrastructure upgrades that can be delivered through capital spending, within 2 years, that are additional to existing government spending

⁴ [The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review](#)

⁵ [Friends of the Earth and Transition Economics, An emergency plan on green jobs for young people](#)

⁶ [TUC Wales and Transition Economics, 2020, Job creation in Wales from a Covid recovery infrastructure stimulus](#)

plans. A RSPB Cymru report provided a separate model, estimating a job creation potential of almost 7,000 jobs over the next 10 years.⁷

What are the key barriers to Wales making the most of opportunities in the green economy, and what steps should be taken to overcome these?

Nature Skills Gap

Based on the above TUC job creation potential outline, the Future Generations Commissioner's office has outlined the existing skills and training gap to achieve this potential, concluding that there will likely be a very significant increase in jobs in environmental management required.⁸ There may be potential to scale up the contribution of the apprenticeship scheme in this area. Apprenticeships and traineeship levels are low meaning that the envisaged investment would require major influx of entrants into the forestry sector. Apprentice levels are currently very low at 50-120 per year. The number of people enrolled in relevant education courses has also almost halved in the last 6 years (4,500 compared to 8,065 previously). Likely a very significant increase in training for jobs in environmental management required.

CIEEM has published a report on a survey it conducted with LANTRA into the capacity crisis. This found that 'the ecology sector faces a significant capacity and skills challenge.'⁹ Most employers reported serious difficulties in filling vacancies and finding people with the right skills. They thought graduates and postgraduates were missing many of the most important skills ecologists need. In particular, species identification, land management, and practical field skills. Employers also want people with soft skills, who can communicate with non-ecologists'.

What actions should the Welsh Government take to support development of Wales-based supply chains in green economy sectors?

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⁷ [Matt Rayment, 2020, Developing a Green Workforce in Wales: Estimating the Scale of Need and Opportunity](#)

⁸ [FGC and New Economics Foundation, 2021, Skills Through Crisis](#)

⁹ [CIEEM, 'Opening up vocational pathways into nature-based green jobs'](#)

What skills challenges exist in relation to transitioning to a green economy? What actions should be taken, and by whom, to ensure the skills are there to meet the growing demands of a green economy?

Skills Challenges

The following outlines high-level recommendations made separately by RSPBCymru, CIEEM, and the Wales Centre for Public Policy. It should also be noted that, while all reports outline similar barriers of access, the RSPBCymru report includes findings from a workshop with young people (aged 16-15) which showed that there is a real interest from young people in engaging with nature-based green skills; the majority of participants were interested in opportunities in the environmental sector to learn and develop skills which may either lead to related career opportunities or would provide valuable transferable skills.¹⁰

Barrier 1: The Wales Centre for Public Policy found that “For nature-based jobs, there is a good supply of graduates with the required skills, but limited specific accreditation schemes, particularly for nature restoration and peatlands. Apprenticeships and training courses could help to increase numbers of skilled workers although businesses may be reluctant to invest in training if they think workers might change jobs on completing the programme.” There is currently no standardized system for upskilling, training, accreditation, job search or career development in the sector, immediately excluding those already interesting pursuing a nature-based job. For individuals, there is a general lack of awareness of already available opportunities, further undermining existing aspirations as a result. Similarly, businesses and individuals lack the certainty necessary to commit to training.

Barrier 2: CIEEM has found that while there are a number of university courses in ecology, there is a real skills gap in practical field skills. But vocational, non-academic, routes into the sector lack the clarity and certainty of established, and well-advertised, academic routes, excluding those who looking to start work at the age of 16 and pursue apprenticeships and other vocational opportunities.

Barrier 3: The environmental sector continues to rely heavily on work experience gained through unpaid work, excluding those who do not have the financial stability to volunteer for extensive periods of time. In agriculture, forestry, nature restoration and related trades, around 25% of the workforce is female and 0.76% of non-white ethnicity.

¹⁰ [RSPBCymru, A National Nature Service for Wales: what good looks like](#)

Addressing Skills Challenges¹¹

The framework for a Nature Service Wales is being developed to work through partnerships, by engaging people and organisations with a nature conservation mission to embed green skills across the workforce and ensure that nature is at the heart of Wales' green and just transition towards a nature positive economy.

A Nature Service Wales could build a strong foundation for delivering ecosystem restoration, through capacity building, generating behaviour change, raising awareness and skills development. It will create both a skilled, well-paid workforce with new jobs and livelihood opportunities in nature that are meaningful and responsive to the communities within which they sit. In this way, a Nature Service Wales can provide the much needed support, investment and recognition of these skills, and, when welcoming people of all career and education stages, begin to break down existing barriers of access to the conservation sector and harness the existing desire to help nature's recovery in Wales.

Coupled with the right investment in nature, a Nature Service Wales could become a Wales-wide skills development platform to co-ordinate and capitalise on existing efforts and promote innovation in nature recovery initiatives, and ultimately develop an in-country expertise in nature restoration for a greener, fairer Wales.

What will workers and employers need for a just transition to a Net Zero economy to be achieved, and what actions should the Welsh Government take to deliver the elements of this that lie within its devolved powers?

To correspond with Barriers identified above:

Action 1: Create a clear, adaptable and flexible skills pathway, developed through partnerships, that provides certainty to both businesses and individuals engaging in both academic and vocational routes through a standardised accreditation system

Action 2: Ensure a skills pathway that provides both academic, vocational, and non-academic routes into the sector.

¹¹ For more information, see: [Green Alliance, Closing the UK's green skills gap](#). Green Jobs for Nature have begun providing a database and information hub on the training and jobs available across the sector: [Discover Green Jobs for Nature - Get that Green Job](#)

Action 3: Support, through appropriate funding models and partnerships, skills pathways that do not rely on experience gained through unpaid work experience and extensive hours of volunteering

How will the Welsh Government need to work in partnership with others to realise the potential of the green economy and deliver a just transition? To what extent is the partnership working that is needed being undertaken?

Establishing a Nature Service Wales

In 2019, Natural Resources Wales identified a National Nature Service as a 'Priority One Action' for a Green Recovery. Since then, WCVA, the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, Valleys Regional Park, Natural Resources Wales, Groundwork Cymru, and RSPB Cymru, with the support of over 100 stakeholders across Wales, have developed a proposal for the delivery of a Nature Service Wales. A business proposal, including the potential role of the Valleys Regional Park, was put before the Welsh Government in Spring 2023

Across Wales, public, private and third sector organisations already strive to provide upskilling and reskilling through apprenticeships, work experience, and training opportunities. A Nature Service Wales will provide the organisational model to align these already ambitious, but disparate, delivery mechanisms and create a coordinated groundswell of workers fit for the future. This strategic approach will help prioritise the identified green jobs and skills gaps and scale up existing delivery models to serve these gaps first.

We are calling for Welsh Government support to enable this continued, collaborative approach to support the development of programmes of upskilling opportunities, clear career pathways and progression for those communities currently most removed from economic prosperity, while also providing the foundation for greener local economies.

The work of the Nature Service Wales partnership has found that existing schemes providing opportunities for upskilling to meet the needs of a future workforce exist across Wales at a small-scale, ground-up, isolated scale.

A coordinated Skills Pathway, created with input and support from partners, should aim to create qualifications and accreditation which are transferrable, widely recognised, and meet the needs of multiple employers. Additionally, a concerted effort will be needed to coordinate with partners such as Careers Wales, as well as all skills boards to ensure that the availability of opportunities is signposted. The integration of this into the work of the new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research will also be crucial going forward.

The Welsh Government says it will face considerable budgetary constraints in the short term. How should it prioritise investment to support development of the green economy over the shorter and longer-term? What innovative approaches to financing could be considered to maximise potential investment and benefits?

Finance Gap in Nature

The Green Finance Institute has estimated that the investment gap to secure key nature-related outcomes in Wales, including biodiversity protection and restoration, is between £5 billion and £7 billion.¹²

Nature's Recovery

A 2011 report for Defra estimated the annual value of SSSIs in Wales at £128m. Compared to the annual public spend on SSSIs of £10m in Wales at the time, this equated to every £1 in public spending returning a benefit of almost £13. The benefits of increasing funding to bring all SSSIs in Wales into favourable condition were estimated at £103m per annum. The economic benefits of investing in nature-based solutions to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change can be substantial. Conservative estimates suggest that for peatland restoration, £4.62 of economic and social benefits can be expected from each £1 invested; for woodland creation, the return would be £2.79; while for saltmarsh it is up to £1.312 .

Investing in Nature's Recovery

Wales Environment Link's 'Pathways to 2030' report, published in March 2023, sets out some of the key actions required to achieve nature's recovery and estimates the public investment needed to deliver on these. The report identifies additional spending needs to deliver the listed actions of £158 million per annum (however, this is likely to be an underestimate as it assumes the repurposing of £273 million per annum of rural payments to pay for the provision of environmental public goods under the Sustainable Farming Scheme, based on modelling done by Matt Rayment in 2019. As described below this work has been updated in the light of wider changes, and the funding required to deliver environmental land management commitments in Wales is now estimated at £496 million per annum).

Preventative Budgeting

The financial implications of inaction are stark. According to BloombergNEF, the cost of protecting the most vulnerable natural resources today will nearly triple by 2030 if no action is taken. This forecast illustrates that safeguarding Earth's biodiversity now is not only an ecological necessity but also a cost-effective strategy. Delaying action will only escalate costs and diminish the potential for sustainable economic growth. Preventative spending therefore offers significant long-term economic benefits. Such spending has the potential not only to

¹² [Green Finance Institute](#)

address the nature and climate crisis but also to strengthen economic resilience, enhance public health, and enrich educational outcomes.

RSPB Cymru welcomes the work currently being undertaken by the Welsh Government's Budget Improvement and Impact Advisory Group, in particular the focus of the work on integrating prevention into budget decisions, and we will continue to engage with this work over the coming year.

Private Finance

Given the extent of the nature funding gap, it is unlikely that the full range of government commitments to nature will be met solely through public funding. We therefore welcome the commitment under the Biodiversity Deep Dive, together with ongoing work commissioned by the Welsh Government, to consider barriers and solutions to help channel private investment into nature recovery. It is essential for the Welsh Government to play an active role in developing a regulatory framework for private investment in nature, in order to manage initial risks and support private investors while pre-empting unintended market consequences. Through a regulatory framework and the setting of clear standards, government can ensure that private investment in nature will deliver towards nature's recovery, support local communities and boost local economies.

We support the work undertaken by FinanceEarth in outlining the necessary steps for governments across the UK to finance nature's recovery in a responsible way, and we will continue to engage in this work as it develops in Wales.