

HRLN 43 - Evidence from: Dr Richard Unsworth FRSB, FHEA

Senedd Cymru | Welsh Parliament

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

**Atal a gwrthdroi colli natur erbyn 2030 | Halting and reversing the loss of
nature by 2030**

Project Seagrass,
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03/09/24

Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

Dear Committee,

According to the marine & fisheries section of the Welsh Government our marine area is larger than our land area, and coastal and marine businesses contribute over £6.8bn to the economy of Wales. In addition, these areas support 92,600 jobs and over 60% of the population live and work on the coast. Our beautiful coastline is home to several major ports, harbours, and coastal communities. Ecosystems and their associated biodiversity are the life blood underpinning that coastal productivity and economy. From fisheries and bird watching, to shark diving and offshore renewables, Wales marine environment has it all and needs protection.

In 2024 our marine environment remains at the forefront of degradation, it is the end point of continued catchment degradation and poor water quality, the site of continued disturbance, the location of vast historic reclamation, and the sink for many pollutants. It is also bearing an increasingly heavy brunt of increasing climate change with the 2023 ocean heating event directly hitting Wales.

Within the biodiversity deep dive marine issues were poorly and underrepresented represented within only five of the forty-three recommendations. Wales marine environment needs more support and as has long been the case, remains the marginalised bit of Wales biodiversity. It is now almost 2 years since the initial biodiversity deep dive text was first released and we have seen limited action to follow through with key recommendations. Although I understand that discussions around Marine Protected Areas have commenced it is not clear what action has been taken in this area. A clear recommendation in the current programme for government and a recommendation of the deep was to create dedicated schemes for the conservation and restoration of seagrass meadows and salt marshes. Whilst we have worked closely with WG to ensure a dedicated seagrass scheme is supported, this appears to be unfunded and will only potentially now occur as an NGO action resulting from a competitive grant scheme rather than as an actual long-term vision for these habitats from WG. We are also aware that no action has been taken on a salt marsh scheme. The reason for the inclusion of the seagrass and salt marsh schemes in the Programme for Government was specifically at the request of the youth parliament as a means of investing in nature for future generations. Failure to meet these promises more than any others in the deep dive creates a terrible precedent for failing to meet the requests of our nation's youth.

With private and philanthropic funding, organisations in Wales are making positive steps in trying to improve the marine environment, but the backdrop of increasingly poor water quality and continued degradation of our marine natural assets paints a terrible picture of what lies ahead. Some recent analysis by our team of NRW data on water quality in the Milford Haven Waterway paints a terrible picture of recent degradation. Things are getting worse and not better.

We are nowhere near actually protecting 30% of our marine environment in an appropriate and effective manner by 2030 and the commitments made in the Kunming-Montreal framework appear a distant reality. Urgent is required to come good on the commitments made in the deep dive and to fast track measures within catchments to improve water quality for the benefits of the coastal environment.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Unsworth".

Dr Richard Unsworth FRSB, FHEA

Associate Professor at Swansea University

Chief Scientific Officer at Project Seagrass