

HRLN 37 - Evidence from: Prof Steve Ormerod

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

1. Your views on the effectiveness of current policies / funds / statutory duties in halting and reversing the loss of nature by 2030.

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

Self-evidently, approaches *to date* have generally been ineffective in halting and reversing biodiversity loss in Wales – and more generally across the UK, Europe and a wider world characterised by accelerating resource exploitation more than resource conservation. In this respect, Wales is contributing to a wider global loss of biodiversity as recorded starkly by indicators such as the UK State of Nature Reports (<https://stateofnature.org.uk/>) or the ZSL/WWF Living Planet Index (<https://www.livingplanetindex.org/>).

Specific data for Wales (<https://stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP26053-SoN-Wales-summary-report-v10.pdf>) reveal, for example, that:

- Of almost 4,000 species in Wales assessed against IUCN Red List criteria, 18% are threatened
 - While some widespread eurytopic (=generalist) species are increasing in number and range, more specialised organisms typical of high quality ecosystems are declining in population rapidly on average by over third, and in some iconic cases (eg inland breeding waders, moths, Atlantic Salmon) population reductions since at least the 1990s are far more rapid
 - 11 % of Wales' land surface is notified specifically for nature conservation interest, but only a third of designated features (35%) in these locations are in favourable condition
-

- Only a very small fraction of Wales ~24,000 km of streams and rivers have some form of nature designation, and several of those rural rivers (eg Wye, Usk, Cleddau, Tywi, Dee) that are designated are characterised by significant pollution pressures – dominantly from agriculture but also in some cases underperforming wastewater treatment infrastructure
(<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969724045170>)
- Offshore, 50% of Wales' marine environment is in marine protected areas, but fewer than half of the features are in favourable condition
- As well as habitat modification, invasive non-native species and pollution, increasing evidence reveals how climate change is a growing pressure
- Various pieces of evidence illustrate how past actions have provided some benefits to nature conservation (eg Wildlife & Countryside Act, CROW Act, EU Habitats Directive, EU Birds Directive) and sometimes even reversal of adverse trends (eg EU Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive; EU Large Combustion Plants Directive) while new initiatives can bring local gains (eg Natur am Byth, National Peatlands Action Plan, various EU Life Projects see <https://senedd.wales/media/vdrd1zc5/23-23-biodiversity.pdf>)
- In aggregate, however, prevailing conditions reflect ongoing decline and require a step change approach as articulated in the Biodiversity Deep and other responses to the UN Global Biodiversity Framework

2. Your views on the progress towards implementing the Biodiversity Deep Dive recommendations.

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

It is important to stress that there are now two sets of recommendations. First were those from the initial Biodiversity Deep Dive from October 2022 (<https://www.gov.wales/biodiversity-deep-dive-recommendations>):

- Make the protected sites series better, bigger, and more connected
 - Create a framework to recognise Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs)
 - Unlock the potential of designated landscapes (National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) to deliver more for nature
 - Continue to reform land and marine management and planning
-

- Build capacity for awareness and skills
- Unlock public and private finance
- Develop and adapt monitoring and evidence
- Embed Nature Recovery in policy and strategy in public bodies

Second have been the recommendations from the Biodiversity Deep Dive sub-groups which follow and to some extent develop the above initial BDD recommendations. For example the OECM/NREA sub-group have suggested that:

- The OECM criteria form the fundamental basis of a Welsh framework for recognising OECMs.
- Existing protected areas (eg SSSIs) would be excluded from counting as OECMs
- A flexible framework should identify and recognise OECMs to complement existing biodiversity effort based on i) a top down approach and ii) a bottom up 'community' approach
- OECMs should be part of a wider transformative approach to support 30 by 30 and nature recovery in Wales.
- A series of NREAs should be established across Wales to pilot. (These differ from OECMs in that they could embrace existing protected sites in various permutations)

Although various steps have been taken or advocated in delivering these recommendations, the scale and pace remain slow; the incentives through legislation or government funding are limited and constrained by resource availability; and the development of private financing initiatives is characterised several risks that are not yet fully mitigated.

Significant questions remain over how Wales can progress its commitments to the CBD Global Biodiversity Framework at sufficient pace between now and 2030 – just 64 months away. Much emphasis is place on a #TeamWales approach - yet resourcing, prioritisation and incentivisation remain as challenges.

3. Your views on current arrangements for monitoring biodiversity.

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

There are long-standing arrangements for biodiversity monitoring in Wales, though these are squeezed in various ways. Moreover, the BDD sub-group report on Monitoring identified challenges with respect to:

blending traditional (field recording) and innovative (eg Earth observation, eDNA) approaches to monitoring in a cost-effective way

collating, sharing and maintaining robust evidence platforms – to which should also be added the importance of effective data analysis and use

capturing the effects of management of protected areas and OECMs to demonstrate outcomes

effective governance

resourcing and realignment of current programmes to support delivery without jeopardising existing monitoring needs in a diminishing resource context

4. Your views on new approaches needed to halt and reverse the loss of nature by 2030.

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).

In general, we have the vision, concepts and opportunities to deliver on our commitments under UN and domestic agreements - but resourcing, incentives and prioritisation remain barriers to progress at sufficient pace or scale

5. Do you have any other points you wish to raise within the scope of this inquiry?

(We would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words).
