

HRLN 24 - Evidence from: Marine Conservation Society

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).

Increasing the scale and pace of action to tackle biodiversity loss and meet global goals, by 2030, will require both increasing and diversifying the funding available. Wales Environment Link's Pathways to 2030 report indicated that at least £13 million is required in order to secure the recovery of Wales' coast and seas. There is a key role for private investment, with the MARINE Fund Cymru, being taken forward through the Wales Coast and Seas Partnership, is a good example of how new models of funding can work for nature recovery, restoration and enhancement. The interim arrangements around environmental governance in Wales are a key point of concern for us. Possibly due to capacity, the Interim Assessor has been unable to have a marine focus and is constrained to looking at the functioning of environmental law, without any formal investigatory powers. The Environmental Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets Bill must be prioritised in the legislative programme in order to address this gap.

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).

The Marine Conservation Zone designation process has faced significant delays. In an increasingly crowded sea, MCZs could offer refuge to rare species and help to protect essential blue carbon stores. The process must progress at pace, alongside work to better manage and reduce pressures on existing MPAs.

OECMs in the marine environment are a novel concept, and potential delivery needs further consideration. The recently created expert group on the matter is

discussing how OECMs may compliment and enhance the existing MPA network, and particular consideration should go to the largely undesignated Welsh offshore area.

We welcome the recently announced independent review of marine planning. We hope to support this work with recommendations from a report we are commissioning ourselves, looking at different ways in which marine planning can evolve in order to help Welsh Government meet its environmental responsibilities and commitments. The Crown Estate's Whole of the Seabed programme will also provide important evidence – although we believe that final decisions on use of marine space must be taken by Welsh Government.

Issues which we hope will be addressed are:

- The need to assess carrying capacity of the marine environment (not only where activity should occur, but also how much)
- The need to account for displacement of activities
- The need to prioritise space for marine recovery and enhancement - within and outside MPAs
- The need to set out a hierarchy of decision-making, allowing the Welsh Government to prioritise different policy drivers and potential uses of the sea
- The need to liaise closely with Westminster, given new legislation proposed by the new UK Government which will impact development in Welsh waters.

In relation to behaviour change, awareness raising and skills development, ocean literacy ('an understanding of your influence on the ocean, and its influence on you') is one of the Wales Coast and Seas Partnership's three key themes to address marine resilience. We are pleased to see the the Wales Ocean Literacy Strategy progressing – the first of its kind in the UK. We are also pleased to be delivering our Hiraeth Yn Y Môr (HYYM) project underneath this strategy - working with the coastal communities of Prestatyn, Rhyl, Kinmel Bay and Towyn to grow ocean literacy, improve the sustainable management of the local marine heritage, and promote the health and wellbeing benefits of connecting with our ocean.

Through community evidence collection, we are seeing some positive stories. For example, 71% of participants feel they learned something new as a result of participating in HYYM's community engagement activities (n=68), with 72% considering themselves either 'very knowledgeable' or 'somewhat knowledgeable' about their local coast and sea after attending an event (n=71). We have also found those who engage with our HYYM activities say they're likely to engage in other pro-environmental behaviours in the next 12 months including further

volunteering (85%, N=84), making changes to their lifestyle to help the environment (67%, N=66) and persuading people they know to do more to help the coast and sea (57%, N=56).

3. Your views on current arrangements for monitoring biodiversity.

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

NRW's State of Natural Resources Report 2020 states that 'In general, we have an incomplete understanding of some pressures due to the challenges in monitoring the marine environment and subsequently establishing a causal link between pressures and observed impacts. We need to better understand the temporal and spatial distribution and impact of activities and related pressures.' Filling this gap is crucial to delivering on the Biodiversity Deep Dive for the marine environment.

We look forward to NRW publishing full, updated, condition assessments for all SACs and SPAs in Wales, in November (the work will cover roughly 50% of the Welsh inshore area). Along with their work on mapping strategic opportunities to enhance marine resilience, we hope that this will give us a much clearer idea of actions which should be taken, where, and by whom, to improve the resilience of marine ecosystems.

In March, NRW delivered the latest batch of assessments as part of the Assessing Welsh Fishing Activities (AWFA) project. This work, which looks at the impacts from different types of fishing gears on the protected habitats and species, provides important evidence for marine management. However, it is important that the assessments are used, and the way in which this will happen has been uncertain. In February, Wales Environment Link Marine Group wrote to the then Minister on the issue, who advised that "the AWFA assessments will inform the approach taken to the development of measures arising from Fisheries Management Plans". In addition to this, and although outside the remit of this committee, the use of Remote Electronic Monitoring (REM) with cameras should be developed in conjunction with the development of the Fisheries Management Plans and should be widely incentivised, and where required subsidised, to support uptake across the sector. This should be required of all vessels operating in Welsh waters, and discussion is needed with the other UK nations to ensure they support its adoption to vessels fishing in Welsh waters, but anchoring elsewhere in the UK.

As virtually all of Wales' MPAs are inshore, however, there is a gap in knowledge and monitoring of offshore ecosystems. This is important, as even well-managed

MPAs are not enough to achieve Good Environmental Status, as set out in the Marine Strategy Regulations. At a UK level, the JNCC's Marine Biodiversity Monitoring Programme spans UK territorial and offshore waters, focusing on biodiversity in the wider environment as well as within MPAs. However it has never been adequately funded, and it is unclear if it ever will be or how the four nations would come together to do so.

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).

There is a widespread lack of understanding and connection to the sea and its value, at both community and decision-making levels.

We need to improve the connection between people and sea, to motivate them to protect it. Although embedded in our HYYM project, the concept of ocean literacy is still a new one. It encompasses not only knowledge, but also attitudes, access, behaviour and other attributes. Placing communities at the heart of nature recovery and restoration work, rather than as a poorly considered add-on, will help embed the Well-being of Future Generations Act's Ways of Working and better integrate communities in place-based recovery efforts. When looking at the Welsh sample of respondents to the Defra-led Survey on Ocean Literacy in the UK, although 80% of respondents said that protecting the marine environment is important to them, almost half of respondents said that their lifestyle had no impact on the marine environment. Other conservation work will not be fully effective so long as this disconnect persists.

At decision-making level, there needs to be a greater appreciation across government departments of the contributions and multiple benefits that the marine environment provides to society. We advocate the concept of a sustainable blue economy to help to do this. Not only would this prevent the loss of nature, but the creation of a sustainable blue economy would also stimulate economic growth, job creation and economic opportunities in local coastal communities. Case studies around the world show where this win-win has been successful, such as in the US where each \$1 million USD spent on coastal restoration projects created 15 – 30 new jobs, a job multiplier that outperforms the oil and gas sector.

As described above, MPAs and 30x30 will not be sufficient to achieve Good Environmental Status, as set out in the UK Marine Strategy. We must also focus

action on the 'other 70%'. Whilst more than half of Wales' inshore area is within designated sites, the Welsh offshore area lacks similar protection. Meanwhile, the scale of ambition for offshore wind development (8GW of offshore wind is already planned for Welsh seas and a further 40GW is being considered by developers over the next few years) means that the footprint of development in the Welsh offshore area will be significant. This could put sensitive marine habitats at risk. New approaches to nature conservation are needed within a marine planning context, and given the ecological carrying capacity of the marine environment (i.e. it can only sustain so much activity), there should be a focus on pressure management. For example, the fishing sector needs to have an equitable and just transition to move towards sustainable and climate smart fishing practices. Fisheries policies are needed to promote innovation, and improvements to infrastructure should be supported through marine funding. Engagement with industry is essential to ensure opportunities for a Just Transition are being fully explored and utilised. Similarly, Welsh Government should continue to work with the Crown Estate through its Whole of the Seabed programme to ensure that species and habitats, as well as blue carbon stores, are protected and enhanced.

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).

Wales is unique in the UK in committing, in legislation, to improving the Welsh environment, economy, society and culture. The ambition of the Wellbeing and Future Generations act also includes the aim for Wales to be globally responsible. The Welsh marine area makes up more than 50% of the Welsh territorial area, but to date its role in tackling the climate and biodiversity crises has been under-utilised. Wales has the opportunity to set a leading example to the rest of the UK, and beyond, in delivering sustainable management of the sea – unlocking economic growth, whilst also achieving increased resilience against pressures. But to realise these opportunities, we must leverage both policy and finance mechanisms effectively. The Wales Coast and Seas Partnership has created an effective platform for pan-Wales engagement, but we must see rapid and ambitious political leadership if we are to secure the wide-reaching benefits which healthy seas can provide.