



Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru **The National Assembly for Wales**

Y Pwyllgor Amgylchedd a Chynaliadwyedd **The Environment and Sustainability Committee**

Dydd Mercher, 19 Mehefin 2013
Wednesday, 19 June 2013

Cynnwys **Contents**

Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru
Natural Resources Wales

Yn y golofn chwith, cofnodwyd y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynndi. Yn y golofn dde, cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

In the left-hand column, the proceedings are recorded in the language in which they were spoken. The right-hand column contains a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol **Committee members in attendance**

Mick Antoniw

Yr Arglwydd/Lord Elis-
Thomas

Russell George

Llafur

Labour

Plaid Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor)
The Party of Wales (Committee Chair)

Ceidwadwyr Cymreig
Welsh Conservatives

Vaughan Gething	Llafur Labour
Llyr Huws Gruffydd	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Julie James	Llafur Labour
Julie Morgan	Llafur Labour
William Powell	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru Welsh Liberal Democrats
Antoinette Sandbach	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Joyce Watson	Llafur Labour

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Yr Athro/Professor Peter Matthews	Cadeirydd, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru Chair, Natural Resources Wales
Dr Emyr Roberts	Prif Weithredwr, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru Chief Executive, Natural Resources Wales

Swyddogion Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru yn bresennol
National Assembly for Wales officials in attendance

Alun Davidson	Clerc Clerk
Catherine Hunt	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Nia Seaton	Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 11.02 a.m.
The meeting began at 11.02 a.m.

Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru
Natural Resources Wales

[1] **Yr Arglwydd Elis-Thomas:** Bore da i gadeirydd Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru a'r prif weithredwr. Croeso i chi am y trydydd tro i'r pwyllgor hwn dros y cyfnod cyn ac ar ôl sefydlu'r corff newydd. Mae'n bleser gennyf eich croesawu chi unwaith eto ac yr ydym yn gwerthfawrogi eich amser chi a'ch parodrwydd fel y prif gorff cyhoeddus newydd, o safbwynt gwaith y pwyllgor hwn, i fod, os caf ddweud fel hyn, yn atebol i ni yn ogystal ag i'r Gweinidog, ac felly i bobl Cymru drwy'r Cynulliad Cenedlaethol.

Lord Elis-Thomas: Good morning to the chair of Natural Resources Wales and the chief executive. I welcome you for the third time to this committee in the period before and after the establishment of the new body. It is my pleasure to welcome you once again and we appreciate you giving your time and your willingness as the newly formed main public body, in terms of the work of this committee, to be, if I may put it like this, accountable to us as well as to the Minister, and therefore to the people of Wales through the National Assembly.

[2] **Carwn i gychwyn drwy ofyn un peth** I would like to start by asking one particular

yn arbennig, sef—[*Torri ar draws.*]

thing, namely—[*Interruption.*]

[3] Is there a problem?

[4] **Joyce Watson:** The headset is not working.

[5] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** Right; if there is any problem, we will hold off until the interpretation works. Excuse us for a minute.

[6] Are you all right now?

[7] **Joyce Watson:** Yes.

[8] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** I apologise for that.

[9] Fel yr oeddwn yn ei ddweud, rwyf am gychwyn ag un cwestiwn penodol ynglŷn â chorff sydd o ddiddordeb mawr i mi, oherwydd yr oeddwn yn Aelod Seneddol pan y'i sefydlwyd, sef y cydbwyllgor a elwir fel arfer wrth ei acronym Saesneg, y JNCC. Carwn wybod beth yw'r trafodaethau presennol am ddyfodol y corff hwnnw. Rwy'n credu ei bod yn bwysig bod cysylltiad uniongyrchol rhwng gwaith Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru a'r sefyllfa Ewropeaidd a rhyngwladol, ac wrth gwrs partneriaeth gyfartal â'r cyrff eraill yn y Deyrnas Unedig, yn enwedig yn y sefyllfa honno. A hoffech ymateb ynglŷn â hynny i ddechrau? Diolch yn fawr.

As I was saying, I want to start with a specific question regarding a body that is of great interest to me, as I was a Member of Parliament when it was established, and that is the joint committee that is usually referred to by its English acronym, the JNCC. I would like to know what the current discussions are on the future of that body. I think that it is important that there should be a direct link between the work of Natural Resources Wales and the European and international context, and of course an equal partnership with other bodies in UK, especially in that context. Would you like to respond to that to start? Thank you very much.

[10] **Professor Matthews:** Thank you, Chairman. I am very happy to respond to that, insofar that as soon as this meeting has finished, I shall be catching a train to go to Peterborough to go to my first meeting of the JNCC.

[11] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** Honestly, I did not know that. Other Members must think that we are in collusion.

[12] **Professor Matthews:** Of course, it is extremely important that bodies involved in nature conservation work together; this was the whole purpose of establishing the committee under your leadership. The triennial review is moving in the direction of maintaining the status quo. There are some changes being proposed around the relationships, but, in essence, the recommendations are that we should carry on as we are at the moment.

[13] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** It is no secret to members of this committee or to you, I am sure, that I am a bit of a federalist, with regard to the UK and Europe. The JNCC represents, to me, one of the few bodies that treats the nations of the UK equally, and has done since the beginning. It also provides an international, European connection. Therefore, that is very important.

[14] **Professor Matthews:** In addition to that, something that I have been contemplating is that we need to take forward the relationships between all of the regulatory bodies that have an impact on the natural environment, and we are contemplating taking initiative on that basis. There are various groupings. One has the environmental regulators, and there are

conservation bodies and marine bodies. Given that we are now the body that has ecosystems management at its very heart, we can take the national—in the sense of the UK—initiative and bring together those bodies. So, there are a number of ways in which we can ensure that there is coherence across the United Kingdom.

[15] **Yr Arglwydd Elis-Thomas:** A Lord Elis-Thomas: Would you like to add hoffet ti ychwanegu unrhyw beth, Emyr? anything, Emyr?

[16] **Dr Roberts:** Na. Mae perthynas gyda'r JNCC. Mae'r cadeirydd ar y bwrdd, ac mae gennym un o'r cyfarwyddwyr ar y bwrdd hefyd. Felly, mae cysylltiad clòs. Fel y mae'r cadeirydd wedi dweud, mae cyfarfod pwysig yn cael ei gynnal yn ddiweddarach heddiw ac yfory i drafod y dyfodol. **Dr Roberts:** No. There is a relationship with the JNCC. The chair is on the board, and we have a director who is also on the board. Therefore, there is a strong link. As the chair has said, an important meeting is being held later today and tomorrow to discuss the future.

[17] **Llyr Huws Gruffydd:** Roeddwn am holi cwestiwn neu ddau i gychwyn ynglŷn â strwythurau mewnol wrth i'r corff esblygu. A fedrwch chi gadarnhau a yw'r staff yn dal i weithio yn y timau yr oeddent yn arfer gweithredu ynddynt neu a ydynt wedi dechrau gweithio yn y timau integredig newydd? **Llyr Huws Gruffydd:** I wanted to begin with a question or two about the internal structures as the body evolves. Can you confirm whether the staff are continuing to work in the teams in which they used to operate or have they started to work in the new integrated teams?

[18] **Dr Roberts:** Diolch am y cwestiwn. Mae'n gymysgedd ar hyn o bryd. Mae rhai timau wedi cael eu tynnu at ei gilydd mewn fframwaith integredig. Mae'r rhan fwyaf o'r timau yn y canol, o ran y pethau corfforaethol yr ydym yn ei wneud. Fodd bynnag, rydym yn gweithio ar y strwythurau eraill, yn arbennig yn y grwpiau sydd yn fwy allanol. Felly, mae cymysgedd ar hyn o bryd. Rydym yn bwrw ymlaen gyda'r gwaith hwnnw, ac rwy'n gobeithio y bydd y rhan helaeth wedi cael ei chwblhau erbyn diwedd mis Medi. Felly, dyna'r sefyllfa ar hyn o bryd. Wrth gwrs, hyd yn oed os nad yw'r timau wedi'u llwyr integreiddio, mae cydweithrediad yn digwydd yn barod. Mae'n ofynnol inni ymateb â phethau drwy ddefnyddio un llais, ac rydym yn gwneud hynny'n barod. **Dr Roberts:** Thank you for that question. It is a mix at present. Some teams have been pulled together in an integrated framework. Most of the teams are in the middle, with regard to the corporate side of what we do. However, we are working on the other structures, particularly with regard to the more external groups. Therefore, it is a mixture at the moment. We are continuing with that work, and I hope that the vast majority of that work will be completed by the end of September. Therefore, that is the situation at present. Of course, even if the teams have not been fully integrated, collaboration is already ongoing. We are required to respond to things with one voice, and we are already achieving that.

[19] **Llyr Huws Gruffydd:** Rydych wedi rhagweld fy ail gwestiwn, oherwydd roeddwn yn mynd i ofyn a yw'r staff yn glir ynglŷn â'u rôl a, hyd yn oed os ydynt yn dal i weithio yn yr hen dimau a strwythurau, a ydynt yn glir ynglŷn â sut maent yn perthnasu i weddill strwythur y corff. **Llyr Huws Gruffydd:** You have anticipated my second question, because I was going to ask whether the staff are clear about their role and, even if they are still working in the same teams and under the same structures, whether they are clear about how they relate to the rest of the body's structure.

[20] **Dr Roberts:** Ydyn, yn hollol. Defnyddiaf gynllunio fel enghraifft, gan ein bod yn ymateb i gynigion cynllunio ar hyn o **Dr Roberts:** Yes, absolutely. I will use the example of planning, as we are responding to planning applications at the moment. The

bryd. Mae'r cynnig yn dod i mewn i'r ganolfan sydd gennym, a rydym wedyn yn enwebu rhywun i arwain yr ymateb i'r cynllun hwnnw. Eu gwaith nhw bydd cydlynu'r farn ar draws Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru. Felly, rydym yn gwireddu hynny'n barod.

[21] **Llyr Huws Gruffydd:** Bu i mi nodi hefyd yn un o'r papurau a aeth i fwrdd Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru ym mis Mai eich bod wedi bod yn edrych ar niferoedd—yr *head count*, os liciwch chi—o safbwynt y staff a'r angen i leihau hynny dros y ddwy neu dair blynedd nesaf, yn bennaf oherwydd ystyriaethau cyllidebol. O ystyried bod hynny'n cael ei ystyried o ddifrif, a ydych yn hyderus bod gennych yr adnoddau dynol angenrheidiol i gyflawni'r gwaith yr ydych chi fod i'w gyflawni yn drylwyr ac yn ei gyfanrwydd?

[22] **Dr Roberts:** Ar y cyfan, rwy'n meddwl bod gennym yr adnoddau hynny. Fodd bynnag, mae rhai meysydd sy'n arbenigol iawn ac efallai nad oes gennym y sgiliau sydd eu hangen o fewn y corff ar hyn o bryd. Felly, mae gwaith yn mynd yn ei flaen i wneud yn siŵr bod gennym y sgiliau hynny, naill ai drwy dyfu'r sgiliau ymysg y staff, drwy gcontractio i fewn neu drwy gael rhywun parhaol yn y swyddi hynny. Mae'r gwaith hwnnw yn mynd yn ei flaen, ond, ar y cyfan, mae'r adnodd yno. Wrth fynd ymlaen, byddwn yn edrych ar ein blaenoriaethau, felly efallai y byddwn yn newid yr adnodd ac yn gofyn i bobl wneud rhywbeth ychydig yn wahanol. Byddwn yn trafod hynny efo staff. Rwy'n eithaf cyfforddus bod gennym ni y rhan helaeth o'r sgiliau o fewn y corff.

[23] **Llyr Huws Gruffydd:** Rydym hefyd yn gweld y Gweinidog yn edrych i gyfeiriad Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru am waith pellach ar gynffon y datganiadau y mae'n ei wneud. Bu sôn am fioamrywiaeth yng nghyd-destun yr adroddiad am sefyllfa natur. Roedd datganiad reit arwyddocaol ddoe, yn fy marn i a nifer o bobl eraill, ynglŷn â pholisi morol a physgodfeydd. Mae'n ymddangos bod mwy a mwy o ofynion arnoch chi fel corff yn barod mor gynnar â hyn, ond efallai nad yw'r adnoddau angenrheidiol i fedru cwrdd â'r gofynion hynny ddim yno.

proposal is submitted to our centre, and we then nominate someone to lead on that proposal and respond to that plan. It is their job to co-ordinate the opinion across Natural Resources Wales. Therefore, we are already achieving that.

Llyr Huws Gruffydd: I also noted from one of the papers that went to the board of Natural Resources Wales in May that you had been looking at the numbers—the head count, if you like—in terms of staff and the need to reduce that over the next two or three years, mainly because of budgetary considerations. Given that that is being considered seriously, are you confident that you have the necessary human resources to achieve the work that you need to achieve in a thorough and complete manner?

Dr Roberts: On the whole, I think that we have those resources. However, there are certain areas that are very specialised and perhaps we do not have the skills that are required within the organisation at present. Therefore, work is ongoing to ensure that we have those skills, through increasing skills within our own staff, through contracting in or by appointing someone to those posts on a permanent basis. That work is ongoing, but, in general, the resource is there. As we move forward, we will look at what our priorities are, so we may change the resource and ask people to do something a little different. We will discuss that with staff. I am fairly comfortable that we have most of those skills within the organisation.

Llyr Huws Gruffydd: We are seeing the Minister looking to Natural Resources Wales to undertake further work on the back of statements he has made. There was mention of biodiversity in the context of the 'State of Nature' report. There was quite a significant statement yesterday, in my and others' opinion, regarding maritime and fisheries policy. It seems that there are, at this early stage, more and more demands on you as a body, but perhaps you do not have the necessary resources to meet those demands.

[24] **Dr Roberts:** Pe bai achos yn codi lle nad ydym yn teimlo bod digon o adnoddau gennym, buasem yn cael sgwrs efo'r Gweinidog a'r adran ynglŷn â'r sefyllfa honno. O ran pethau fel gofynion trwyddedu o safbwynt bywyd gwyllt, cafodd adnodd ychwanegol ei roi i ni i wneud y gwaith hwnnw. Felly, os ydym yn cyrraedd sefyllfa lle rydym yn teimlo nad oes gennym ddigon o adnodd, rydym yn barod i gael sgwrs, fel y dywedais.

Dr Roberts: Should a matter arise where we feel that we do not have sufficient resources, we would have a conversation with the Minister and the department about that situation. In terms of aspects such as licensing requirements in relation to wildlife, an additional resource was given to us to undertake that work. So, if we reach a situation where we feel that we have insufficient resource, we would be ready to have a conversation about that, as I mentioned.

[25] **Llyr Huws Gruffydd:** Dyma fy nghwestiwn olaf am y tro. O safbwynt y gwaith y buoch yn ei wneud fel bwrdd i edrych ar nifer y staff a'r posibilrwydd y bydd gostyngiad, a oedd hynny yn rhywbeth y gwnaethoch ei ragweld o'r cychwyn fel rhan naturiol o'r broses uno, neu a yw hynny wedi dod yn sgîl y setliad cyllideb a gawsoch?

Llyr Huws Gruffydd: This is my last question for the time being. In terms of the work that you undertook as a board in looking at staff numbers and the possibility that there will be a reduction, did you predict that from the outset as a natural part of the merger process, or is it a consequence of the budget settlement that you received?

[26] **Dr Roberts:** Na. Mae cryn dipyn o waith wedi cael ei wneud gan y rhaglen Cymru Fyw er mwyn inni fedru gweld lle oedd diffyg adnodd. Roedd tipyn go lew o waith wedi ei wneud ar hynny. Un o'r rhesymau mae'r niferoedd wedi cynyddu y tu hwnt i'r nifer yn yr achos busnes yw oherwydd ein bod yn fwriadol wedi dod â staff i mewn oherwydd bod diffyg sgiliau. Felly, roeddem yn rhagweld hynny i gyd. Wrth inni fynd ymlaen, bydd penderfyniadau yn cael eu cymryd, ac rydym yn teimlo bod yr adnodd yn y lle iawn. Mae'r sefyllfa yn newid drwy'r amser.

Dr Roberts: No. A considerable amount of work has been undertaken by the Living Wales programme so that we could see areas of resource shortage. A considerable amount of work had already been done on that. One of the reasons why the numbers have increased over and above the number in the business case is because we have deliberately brought staff in because there was a lack of skills. So, we had anticipated all of that. As we move forward, decisions will be made, and we feel that the resource is in the right place. The situation changes all the time.

[27] **Professor Mathews:** This is a classic case of quality and quantity. Manpower numbers is a different issue to our skills asset. What Emyr has been talking about is very much the development of our skills asset. If you remember, at previous meetings we have talked about our model for management, which is about the environment, the economy, community and knowledge. It is about not just adding to the knowledge of Wales, but developing our own knowledge.

[28] **Julie Morgan:** Good morning. I want to ask about the consistency of the advice that you are able to give, because when you came to the previous committee, Emyr, you said that there were some situations where NRW's view would be different from the legacy organisations' views, and that there were some high-profile cases. What further work have you done on that, and could you possibly give us some illustrations?

[29] **Dr Roberts:** We have a remit to provide a single voice on that. To refer to the planning example again, what we are doing with regard to the high-profile developments is establishing teams to ensure that we are considering all the factors across the wide remit of Natural Resources Wales. So, we are bringing together the teams and making sure that we

understand what everyone's position is, and then synthesising that into a one-organisation view on those types of developments. That is ongoing in relation to a range of issues, as it is part of our remit to bring those teams together to bring those views and evidence together into a single view at the end of the day.

11.15 a.m.

[30] **Julie Morgan:** Are there situations where you take a different view to those of the legacy organisations, where you have to work that out? Does that happen?

[31] **Dr Roberts:** Yes, in general, I think. Obviously, the legacy organisations took a position on things. When any new evidence comes to light or where there are further developments, it is clearly an obligation on us to look at those issues afresh, as it were. The planning process is often quite an extended one, but that is happening. If there are circumstances where we need to relook at things, we will do that. We will make sure that all of the views are taken into account.

[32] **Julie Morgan:** So, this is a sort of ongoing process.

[33] **Dr Roberts:** Yes, very much so. Obviously, there are issues that are already in the pipeline, which we are considering, but there are also new issues and we are responding to those with a fully one-voice response.

[34] **Russell George:** Good morning, both. In your paper you confirm that all relevant service agreements with the Environment Agency in England and the Forestry Commission have been signed off. In a way, I was quite surprised by that, because it would just seem to be quite complicated in terms of some of the divorce proceedings that would have to go on between EA England and Natural Resources Wales. Certainly, as was raised in some discussions that I had last week in my constituency regarding the Clywedog dam, the provider is Severn Trent Water, and then there is EA England, which has its office in England and which has serviced large parts of my constituency. Are there any loose ends that still need to be tidied up? In a way, I am surprised—and perhaps you could expand on that—because you have moved so far forward. Some arrangements, indeed, needed to take longer to resolve.

[35] **Dr Roberts:** No. Again, I pay compliment to the Living Wales programme, where an enormous amount of work was put in by all parties, really, to make sure that there was no ambiguity in terms of who was responsible. The environment is a complicated area, so we needed to be very clear from the outset as to who exactly was responsible, and to put those kinds of service level agreements in place. The goodwill has been maintained since 1 April. I recently met, for instance, colleagues from the Environment Agency in the midlands region—to which I think you are referring, and there are specific service agreements for that. I do not believe that any loose ends remain. Certainly, if there were, we would seek to clarify matters. It might have been complicated, but I think that it is an important part of the process here, which has been carried out very well.

[36] **Russell George:** Okay; thank you. In your evidence in March, you mentioned that, initially, separation of the functions would be ensured by allowing staff to carry on working as though they still belonged to the three separate organisations. Certainly, from my dealings with officers from day one, they very much saw themselves as Natural Resources Wales staff. I almost had to prise out of them which organisation they came from to understand their background. Do any conflicts exist within the organisations, with staff still anchoring onto a previous organisation? It was not a contradiction but I think that you referred to the separation of functions initially, so could you expand on that? My impression is that the staff all very much feel that they are part of one organisation already.

[37] **Professor Matthews:** Excellent.

[38] **Dr Roberts:** I am also very pleased to hear those comments. That is exactly what we have been trying to achieve. I honestly do not believe that there are conflicts between staff. I think that people realise the importance of the new organisation and of working together. In fact, coincidentally, we have today launched a big exercise internally called 'the Conversation', which is all about engaging with all members of staff within Natural Resources Wales so that they bring forward their views on how we actually make the organisation work best, what their contributions will be and what the potential is. We are calling it The Conversation: Unlocking the Potential. It is an exciting time for us. My sense, going around the offices, is that there are lots of ideas about how we can work together well, bringing the different skills together, and it is a matter, as we said, of unlocking all of those. So, the Conversation is about every member of staff having that conversation—we are rolling it out throughout the organisation, and people will be invited to workshops to respond to that, just to build on the kind of feelings that you mentioned. For a new organisation, that is a very important part of the process. What we will then be doing is distilling all the views that come forward, taking those opportunities, and moving forward as a single organisation.

[39] **Russell George:** My last question is also unrelated. You obviously meet on a regular basis with the Minister, Alun Davies. How do you link into other departments of the Welsh Government, outside of Alun Davies's department?

[40] **Dr Roberts:** We have a series of ongoing relations here. As you know, I was previously with the Welsh Government, so I know my way around, and I know many of the individuals. Where we need to, we liaise with the other departments as well. For instance, I have already had a meeting with the chief executive of Visit Wales, Cadw, and the economy department, which are all important to us. At a more working level, there are ongoing discussions the whole time. For instance, I know that one of my directors has been talking to the Milford Haven enterprise zone, and, on a whole range of issues, there are ongoing relations, so that is a very positive thing. There has been no resistance whatever to that.

[41] **Russell George:** Do you link directly with those departments or go through Alun Davies's department?

[42] **Dr Roberts:** It varies according to the issue. I feel that there is a very open culture within the Welsh Government, so it is a matter of picking up the phone and talking to someone. If there were a need for the chairman to be involved, he would probably do that more formally, I think. It works at a variety of levels.

[43] **Professor Matthews:** To give you an example, we are working directly with the Department of Education and Skills to deal with the green education issues.

[44] **Russell George:** So, for formal meetings, do you work through Alun Davies's department, or do you work directly with the others, and perhaps not involve Alun Davies's department?

[45] **Dr Roberts:** Out of courtesy, we would tell the Minister's office what was happening, but if the chair wanted to meet a Minister, or one of the Ministers wanted to meet the chair or myself, there is no issue with that. For example, we have met Mrs Hart fairly recently at her request. Everyone knows what is going on there.

[46] **Antoinette Sandbach:** I want to go back to an issue that we expressed concern on in one of our earlier reports on NRW, which was about the self-permitting functions, where there are conflicts in the procedure within NRW. Has your self-permitting procedure and policy been put in place?

[47] **Dr Roberts:** Yes, it has. I refer the committee to the document on the website. There was a discussion at the board, which confirmed this approach. I hope that the document explains how we go about the permitting and what the arrangements are. We also publish—I am sure that you have seen this on the website—every month the applications that we have received and the decisions that we have taken, including our own self-permitting ones.

[48] **Antoinette Sandbach:** Does that include the instances where one arm of NRW is required to take action against another? Is your enforcement, or self-prosecution procedure, or however you want to describe it, in there as well?

[49] **Dr Roberts:** It is, essentially, a separate procedure, which is also on the website. Yes, it is there. We have standing instructions in terms of what would happen if one part of the organisation needed to take enforcement action against another.

[50] **Antoinette Sandbach:** Going back to the remit letter that the Minister gave to you, he indicated that your performance, in effect, will be judged against a baseline figure for 2013-14, but no baseline information was provided in the remit letter, and we have not had sight of the baseline information from any other sources. Where is that baseline information? Are you publishing that? How can we assess you against those targets?

[51] **Dr Roberts:** We had a discussion at the last board meeting on our performance framework and we will be confirming it at our July meeting, where we will be populating the dashboard, which is what the board signed up to at the last meeting, with the baseline information, as you said. There are number of indicators—46, I think—that we have selected for that. That will be our baseline for measuring our performance against the business plan. That is well in hand and will be published.

[52] **Professor Matthews:** Just to add to that, there is also the additional point that, because the baseline figures had not been agreed at the time that we were vested, if you look at the remit letter, you can see that it does say that a further letter will be sent. Those figures will be available in the very near future. We are expecting the follow-up letter from the Minister and it will be in the public domain, of course.

[53] **Antoinette Sandbach:** Will those figures correspond to the seven outcomes that were listed in the letter?

[54] **Dr Roberts:** I just need to clarify that I think that the chairman is referring to the benefits and costs figures, and the financial side of things. We are expecting a letter from the Welsh Government imminently. On the dashboard, yes, it does correlate to the seven outcomes.

[55] **Antoinette Sandbach:** So, for example, where there are metrics about NRW's existing local presence and capacity, will that information be available to us, so that we can see whether resources locally are increasing or declining? Will there be that level of detail?

[56] **Dr Roberts:** There are a range of performance measures, including our performance as an organisation internally. There are measures of that. If you look at the papers for the last board meeting, which I believe are on the website, you will see what the framework is. I would be very happy to respond on any of that. They are a mixture of internally-facing and outwardly-facing performance measures.

[57] **Antoinette Sandbach:** Okay. Chairman, I know that in the meeting on 19 March, you stated that you had concerns about a lack of an audit trail on the business case figures to the vesting date targets. Are those the figures that you are expecting from the Minister?

[58] **Professor Matthews:** Yes. That is why I immediately jumped in when you referred to the remit letter. For me, understanding absolutely what the baseline was on 1 April is absolutely crucial for everything else, because everything that we deliver has to be against that baseline, and the monitoring and performance framework has to be against that baseline. As I said earlier, because those figures were not ready on 1 April, we agreed with the Minister that there would be a follow-up letter. We understand that the figures have been agreed, and it is just a case of the letter needing to come to us. It will, of course, be in the public domain.

[59] **Antoinette Sandbach:** I understand that some of the concerns that have been expressed are around the cash-realizable benefits not being achievable in the way that they were outlined in the business case for the first two years. Can you explain to us why that is the case?

[60] **Dr Roberts:** May I just refer to the comment that was made in the notes that we prepared on the cash-realizable benefits? There has been an ongoing dialogue between us and the Welsh Government on that. As we say in the note, we believe that the overall cash-realizable benefits are achievable, but the phasing of that has changed.

[61] **Antoinette Sandbach:** Yes, but I think that my question was ‘why?’

[62] **Dr Roberts:** It is for exactly the same reasons as we explained at previous committee meetings: partly because the detachment from the Environment Agency and the Forestry Commission will take two years to achieve. So, we have service agreements in place for that. In particular, on the ICT side, which is an element of this, we need to invest in our ICT in order to enable that detachment. So, as I say, the overall benefits are achievable, but the phasing has changed.

11.30 a.m.

[63] **Antoinette Sandbach:** Chair, if I may, I have one final question. Another concern that we had was around plant health and the spread of plant disease. There is a lot of concern in the forestry sector that, during the handover process, about 1,600 ha of Chalara-infected woodland that was due to be felled was not felled towards the vesting date. Are you satisfied? I understand that, roughly, a further 2,300 ha of Forestry Commission estate has been identified as being infected—sorry, it is infected with phytophthora, not Chalara. So, a further 2,300 ha of forest estate on Welsh Government land, as it were, has been identified as infected with phytophthora. So, this is clearly quite a large and extensive problem. Can you explain why, leading up to the vesting date, that problem has not been tackled, and what steps you have taken as a board afterwards to look at how you are dealing with plant health, in particular the spread of disease among the forest estate?

[64] **Dr Roberts:** There has certainly been no break in the programme as a result of the transfer into Natural Resources Wales. The programme was agreed some time ago and it is continuing. However, you are absolutely right; this is quite a serious position at the moment. The aerial surveys that have been carried out—and they can only be carried out at this time of year—have revealed that the spread is far wider than originally forecast. We are in urgent discussions with the forestry sector and the Welsh Government about the situation, and, indeed, there is a meeting happening in Llandrindod this morning, as we speak, of the Welsh group on that. We are very well seized of the urgency of this issue. We will be discussing this with Government, as I said, and we are doing so already.

[65] **Antoinette Sandbach:** The problem mainly is in the public estate rather than the private estate and it seems to me that there is a risk that there may be further transmission. I do not know what you are doing about biosecurity or what steps you are taking to inform

people who own woodlands in the areas that are near the infected forest estate. There is quite a lot of concern about how plant disease is being tackled, not just within Natural Resources Wales, but within the wider community.

[66] **Dr Roberts:** I share the view that this is a worrying situation for everyone. We are obviously complying with all the plant health regulations. As you say, this crosses both the public and the private woodland sectors, so it is really important that we have a joined-up approach to responding to it. I can say as chief executive that I am well seized of the seriousness of the issue.

[67] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** William Powell is next, then Vaughan Gething.

[68] **William Powell:** I would like to go back for a moment to the issues to which you referred earlier around the need to invest additionally in ICT facilities. What impact do you see that having on the overall staffing budget for Natural Resources Wales going forward, in terms of the unexpected cost that has arisen?

[69] **Dr Roberts:** From the outset, we set a budget for ICT and we are keeping to that budget. So, there is no indication as yet that we are going beyond the budget that we have already set for ourselves. As I said, we have to make investment upfront in order to release savings, and we are obviously looking at every opportunity to reduce our ICT costs, but we do have to make that investment upfront. What I am saying is that I very much hope that we will stay within the budget that we have set and that we would not exceed that.

[70] **William Powell:** Thanks for that. I have heard from a number of sources that there is quite a high number currently of short-term and fixed-term contracts within some of the NRW departments. Do you have any comments on that? It is a matter that I raised just last week when we had the Minister before us and he said that he would look into the matter at a meeting at the end of last week, I think. That would appear to be causing some concern within certain sections of the organisation.

[71] **Dr Roberts:** I am surprised to hear that it is causing concern. There is probably a mixture of short-term contracts at the moment. It is normal business for significant parts of the organisation to have short-term contracts. For example, much of the work that we do in terms of water sampling is seasonal. That is normal business. We have also brought in some people to help us with the transition process and those are contracts of up to two years. This just helps us to deal with transition issues; we have a transition programme within Natural Resource Wales. Those, I guess, are the two main kinds of short-term contracts that we have. To the best of my knowledge, the people employed on short-term contracts work effectively, alongside permanent members of staff.

[72] **William Powell:** My concern would be the potential impact on staff retention with people being in a long-term state of short-term contracts and not having that security of tenure in terms of pension arrangements and so on, and the potential loss of knowledge capacity, particularly in some of these specialised areas that you referred to as being of importance.

[73] **Dr Roberts:** We are very aware of the position of people on short-term contracts. A lot of this is about being clear with individuals with regard to what kind of basis there is for their employment. So, some of the posts are specifically linked, for instance to project funding, and that has been explained from the outset. I believe that all the individuals concerned will be very clear about their employment status. If that is not the case, then please let me know.

[74] **William Powell:** That is reassuring. I have one final question. What is the NRW approach to staff appraisal from the very senior executive level right down through the ranks,

because I presume that there would have been three distinct approaches in the legacy bodies? What is the approach to that, because you have referred consistently to the importance of the performance indicators of your organisation, but, clearly, that also has to cascade down through the staff?

[75] **Dr Roberts:** For me and the executive directors, we have put in place a new staff appraisal scheme for Natural Resources Wales and we are implementing that. So, for instance, I have received from each director a delivery plan for the coming year, which relates to the business plan. The remainder of staff are on their existing staff appraisal schemes. However, as part of the harmonisation of staff arrangements, we will need to discuss with the trade unions and staff so that we have a single staff appraisal system. That is the way we are approaching that. Those discussions have started. We had a meeting of the partnership forum with the trade unions last week, for instance. You will appreciate that there are other elements as well, such as pay and allowances, and all kinds of things that we need to bring together in a single system. So, that work is ongoing.

[76] **William Powell:** So, over what period would you expect that particular exercise to be complete in terms of the harmonisation?

[77] **Dr Roberts:** I hope that that will be completed within the current financial year. A strong caveat is that there is a lot of work to be done and I am sure that our trade union colleagues will co-operate fully. However, there is an enormous amount of work to be done and that is recognised, I think.

[78] **Professor Matthews:** I would like to make one comment. I have run large organisations and, of course, this is particularly difficult in terms of implementation, because you need to have clear objectives in order to have a good appraisal. So, it is going to be a couple of years before we can see the system fully embedded with clear objectives at the beginning of the year and appraisal at the end. However, to assure you, right at the top, I have set objectives for the board for this coming year. The board members will be appraised at the end of the year on that basis. We are living the values. We are starting right at the top and doing exactly the same thing.

[79] **William Powell:** That is excellent, thank you.

[80] **Vaughan Gething:** I listened—[*Inaudible.*]—the permitting scheme and in particular the information scheme. I have had a quick look at the scheme and at the decisions register, particularly at the areas where there are self-permitting decisions. I have noticed that there are a couple of rejections in them, which is positive to see and means that not every application is waved through. However, I wondered about the level of information that you are giving and whether you would think again about it. When I was looking through the decisions, I saw that you have summary information in a table and what you then have is either ‘accepted’ or ‘rejected’ in the general area. There is no real understanding after that. For example, one of them was about a waste exemption. That could cover a range of things, from a fairly minor to a much wider point. The ones that were rejected were about water course diversions. Again, it is pretty easy for most people to understand why you would reject that sort of application. Turning again to this issue of transparency, would you reconsider having some more summary information about not just what the application is, but perhaps the reason for rejection or acceptance, so that there is that further assurance that the summary information is accurate and gives people a real idea about what is being asked and what the decision is, whether it is positive or negative?

[81] **Dr Roberts:** Can I take that point away, rather than give you a response today? I will think about it, as you suggest, and I will write to the Chair and the clerk, if that is okay.

[82] **Yr Arglwydd Elis-Thomas:** Cyn imi droi at Llyr ac yna Russell eto, carwn ofyn un cwestiwn fy hun. Mewn gohebiaeth â'r gymdeithas gwarchod adar, RSPB Cymru, ar Ionawr 29 eleni, amlinellodd cyn-Weinidog yr amgylchedd ei fwriad i osod canllawiau i Gyfoeth Naturiol Cymru er mwyn sicrhau bod eglurder llawn ynglŷn â'r amcanion a osodir gerbron yn y Gorchymyn gwreiddiol i sefydlu'r corff a sut y dylai'r rheini gael eu dehongli. A ydych chi fel corff wedi derbyn y math hwnnw o ganllawiau, neu a yw hyn wedi cael ei ddelio ag ef mewn rhyw ffordd arall? Nid oedd yn glir i ni fod y llythyr cylch gorchwyl yn nodi'n union yr hyn roedd y Gweinidog blaenorol wedi'i amlinellu.

[83] **Professor Matthews:** No, we have not received that guidance yet, but we would find it useful. We are talking to the Welsh Government about those guidelines and we are expecting them in due course.

[84] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** So, if this committee were to write to the Minister to chivvy him along, you would not have a problem with that. [*Laughter.*]

[85] **Dr Roberts:** Hefyd, rwy'n meddwl bod cysylltiad gyda Bil yr amgylchedd, achos mae hwnnw'n gyfle i ofyn am ganllawiau.

Dr Roberts: Also, I think that there is a link here with the environment Bill, because that is an opportunity to request guidance.

[86] **Yr Arglwydd Elis-Thomas:** Felly, rydych yn rhagweld y bydd Bil yr amgylchedd, a fydd yn destun gwaith craffu i'r pwyllgor yma, yn gosod gerbron cyfrifoldebau cliriach na'r hyn a oedd gennych yn wreiddiol yn y Gorchymynion a sefydlodd y corff, gan fod y rheini wedi cael eu codi o gyrff blaenorol ac wedi dod i chi drwy'r Ddeddf Cyrff Cyhoeddus 2011, yn hytrach na drwy Ddeddfau amgylcheddol neu Ddeddfau ddatganoli.

Lord Elis-Thomas: So, you anticipate that the environment Bill, which will come before this committee for scrutiny, will set out clearer responsibilities than you had originally in the Orders that were used to establish the body, as they were taken from previous bodies and came to you through the Public Bodies Act 2011, rather than through environmental Acts or devolution Acts.

[87] **Dr Roberts:** Yn hollol. Mae'r pwerau wedi cael eu trosglwyddo yn eu cyfanrwydd, felly rwy'n meddwl bod cyfle rŵan i edrych ar y pwerau hynny i weld a yw'r balans rhyngddynt yn iawn. Rwy'n cymryd mai un o amcanion y Bil newydd fydd i edrych ar hynny.

Dr Roberts: You are quite right. The powers were transferred in their entirety, so I think that there is an opportunity now to look at those powers to see whether the balance between them is correct. I assume that one of the objectives of the new Bill will be to look at that.

[88] **Yr Arglwydd Elis-Thomas:** Mae hynny'n help mawr inni oherwydd, yn naturiol, rydym yn pryderu am y cyfrifoldeb fydd arnom fel pwyllgor wrth inni ddelio unwaith eto â deddfwriaeth a fydd, o bosibl, yn newid egwyddorion sylfaenol cyrff fel

Lord Elis-Thomas: That is a great help to us because, of course, we are concerned about the responsibility that will lie with us as a committee in dealing once again with legislation that will possibly change the fundamental principles of bodies such as

eich corff chi. Mae'n bwysig iawn ein bod ni'n deall ein gilydd, a deall beth yw bwriad y Llywodraeth a beth fydd y pwyllgor hwn yn ei adlewyrchu wrth gasglu tystiolaeth wrth graffu cyn deddfu ar y Bil hwn.

yours. It is very important that we understand each other in that regard, and understand what the intention of the Government is and what the committee would reflect in collecting evidence on any pre-legislative scrutiny on this Bill.

[89] **Mick Antoniw:** One of the things that will have a big impact on a lot of the work that the new body is doing is what is coming through Europe at the moment. How are you operating in terms of monitoring what is happening on the European side, particularly with the environmental legislation—all sorts of stuff on invasive species and so on—and how is that being fed through in order to ensure that any concerns that you have over the direction of that legislation is either lobbied or that the representations on it are put through, either to the Welsh Government or to other channels?

[90] **Dr Roberts:** We are fortunate to have inherited a very good monitoring arrangement, which we have continued with. We monitor and track what is happening in terms of UK and European legislation. That is circulated to a wide number of staff. If there was an issue that we needed to raise, we would discuss that at a policy level and seek to respond to that, depending on what the issue is. I can assure you that we do not just have a tracking and monitoring system; we also have links to a number of European organisations. We are maximising those, too, so that we are well informed about what is happening around us.

[91] **Mick Antoniw:** I understand that certain people have, in the past, been seconded. Are there any secondments under way at the moment within the area of environmental legislation or any other areas?

11.45 a.m.

[92] **Dr Roberts:** I am not aware of any current ones on that basis. There could well have been some in the past. We would certainly look at that, partly to get information back, but also to extend someone's development. We would also seek to work with the Welsh Government and other organisations similar to ourselves in extending our information and our knowledge base.

[93] **Llyr Huws Gruffydd:** Hoffwn bigo i fyny ar bwynt a wnaed mewn ymateb i gwestiwn gan y Cadeirydd. Credaf fod eglurder yn bodoli. Yn amlwg, mae angen i Gyfoeth Naturiol Cymru daro cydbwysedd rhwng materion economaidd, cymdeithasol ac amgylcheddol. Fodd bynnag, pencampwr amgylcheddol yw Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru, a gresynaf nad ydym wedi cael yr arweiniad hwnnw hyd yn hyn. Edrychwn ymlaen yn fawr at weld hynny.

Llyr Huws Gruffydd: I would like to pick up on a point that was made in response to a question from the Chair. I believe that there is clarity. Evidently, Natural Resources Wales needs to strike a balance between economic, social and environmental issues. However, Natural Resources Wales is an environmental champion, and I regret that we have not had that leadership as of yet. We look forward greatly to seeing that.

[94] Yn yr un cyd-destun, mae llythyr cylch gorchwyl ar gael sy'n amlinellu'r blaenoriaethau a osodwyd ar gyfer 2013-14. Serch hynny, rwyf wedi fy syfrdanu, a dweud y gwir, nad oes cyfeirid at fioamrywiaeth yn y llythyr hwnnw. Hoffwn ichi gadarnhau bod amddiffyn a chyfoethogi bioamrywiaeth yn un o'ch blaenoriaethau. A allwch chi egluro

In the same context, there is a remit letter available that outlines the priorities set for 2013-14. However, I am amazed, in truth, that there is no reference to biodiversity in that letter. I would like you to confirm that defending and enriching biodiversity is one of your priorities. Could you explain how that will fit in with the priority programme set for

sut y bydd hynny'n ffitio i mewn i'r rhaglen you by the Minister?
flaenoriaethau a osodwyd ar eich cyfer gan y
Gweinidog?

[95] **Professor Matthews:** I look upon the priorities that have been set in the letter as ones of particular interest in that year. Underneath that, there is a whole range of responsibilities, such as biosecurity, biodiversity and catchment management, that we see as being very important. So, I do not see the exclusion of any particular issue from the remit letter as meaning that it is of lower priority. I just think that, for this particular year, there is a focus on those issues. Who knows what next year's remit letter might hold? It might refer to biosecurity or biodiversity. It remains for the Minister to determine what his interests or his department's interests will be next year. The fact that there are four priorities does not mean that biodiversity is not a priority for the organisation. I suggest that you look at our frameworks for delivery. We should focus on those frameworks, which reflect all of the priorities that we have to address.

[96] **Dr Roberts:** Mae'r rhaglen waith sy'n mynd rhagddo, a sonnir yn y llythyr am y fframwaith ecosystem. Mae gwaith yn mynd rhagddo ar y sail honno. Rydym yn cael trafodaethau â'r Llywodraeth am y modd orau o wneud y gwaith hwnnw.

Dr Roberts: There is an ongoing work programme, and the letter mentions the ecosystems framework. Work is ongoing on that basis. We are having discussions with the Government about the best way to do that work.

[97] **Llyr Huws Gruffydd:** Hoffwn ofyn un cwestiwn yng nghyd-destun y cwestiynau blaenorol a ofynnwyd am yr achos busnes a'r ail-broffilio sy'n digwydd, o ran nodi lle bydd y manteision a'r arbedion yn dod i'r amlwg yn ystod y cyfnod nesaf. A yw hynny'n effeithio'r proffil o ad-dalu'r arian ar gyfer y cynllun buddsoddi i arbed mewn unrhyw ffordd? Mae'r llythyr cylch gorchwyl yn eithaf clir ynghylch faint y bydd disgwyl ichi dalu a phryd. A yw'r sefyllfa honno'n parhau?

Llyr Huws Gruffydd: I would like to ask the same question in the context of previous questions asked about the business case and the reprofiling that is going on, in terms of identifying where the benefits and savings will emerge in the next period. Will that affect the profile for repaying the money for the invest-to-save scheme in any way? The remit letter is quite clear about how much money you will be expected to pay and when. Is that still the situation?

[98] **Dr Roberts:** Ydy. Rydym yn parhau i weithio ar y cynllun buddsoddi i arbed. Bydd rhagor o wybodaeth yn cael ei darparu dros yr wythnos nesaf. Rydym yn glynu wrth y ffigurau hyn. Yn amlwg, mae hyn yn ddibynnol ar faint o staff sy'n gwneud ceisiadau am unrhyw gynllun gadael yn gynnar, ond rydym yn parhau i lynu wrth y ffigurau hyn. Mae ein cyllidebau yn parhau, ac rydym yn ymwybodol o'r materion hyn.

Dr Roberts: Yes. We continue to work on the invest-to-save scheme. More information will be provided over the next week. We are adhering to these figures. Evidently, this is dependent on how many staff members apply for voluntary redundancy, but we are continuing to adhere to these figures. Our budgets are continuing, and we are aware of these issues.

[99] **Llyr Huws Gruffydd:** Felly, ni fydd hyn yn cael unrhyw effaith ar gyllidebau eraill sydd efallai o dan ychydig mwy o bwysau.

Llyr Huws Gruffydd: Therefore, this will not have an impact on other budgets that may be under a bit more pressure.

[100] **Dr Roberts:** Na. Mae'n rhaid inni gadw at yr hyn sydd gennym. Rydym yn deall hynny'n llwyr.

Dr Roberts: No. We have to stick to what we have. We understand that fully.

[101] **Russell George:** The state of the nation report was published last month. In respect of that report, the Minister said that we cannot continue as we are. What progress have you made in identifying the actions that Natural Resources Wales needs to undertake to respond to that report? Also, how will these actions be integrated into the functions across the organisation?

[102] **Dr Roberts:** I think that you are referring to the ‘State of Nature’ report.

[103] **Russell George:** Yes.

[104] **Dr Roberts:** Clearly, we received that report—it was widely publicised. We entirely concur with the Minister’s reaction to that report. The Minister is very clear that he wants to pull together the various organisations, including the third sector, land owners and so on, to look at the implications of the report. I believe that he said that he will be holding a summit in the Royal Welsh Show to start discussing that. From my reading of the report, it was a very good analysis of what is happening. However, it is now up to us to come up with the solutions. Already, the RSPB has been in touch with us, wanting to set up a meeting to discuss what the solutions might be. We are anxious to work with other organisations on this. We will bring all the evidence that we have. We have a major stake in this, being a land owner, and we can possibly incentivise certain things. We have site-protection powers and so on. We want to play an active part in that. We are just at the stage of having a discussion about what we want to do as a nation about that report.

[105] **Russell George:** Sorry, I think that I might have said ‘state of the nation’ instead of ‘state of nature’. I should say that for the record.

[106] **Professor Matthews:** There are also some extra issues. This is a long-term problem with a long-term solution, so we cannot knee-jerk ourselves into any particular action. We need swift action. We have a corporate planning process that will be very active this year in addressing the issues identified in the report. That will be very much a part of our corporate plan, which will start on 1 April next year. However, a whole range of issues have been highlighted by the report. The one for me that is quite interesting is how to understand what the state of nature will be in the future. We are blessed in Wales with a whole variety of citizen groups collecting information, popularly known as ‘citizen science’. One of the ideas that we are bandying around at the moment is how we can bring all that information together to give us an ongoing picture of what it is like to live in Wales as far as the environment and wildlife is concerned. There are many things going on and that is very good, because it engages the public as well. It does two things at once: it tells us what it feels like to live in the environment of Wales in a particular locality, and it engages people in what we are doing. We are pretty keen to develop those sorts of ideas alongside the remedial action that will be necessary to address the issues.

[107] **Russell George:** I have one supplementary question. In light of the findings in the ‘State of Nature’ report, what discussions have you had with the Welsh Government around prioritising the delivery of the 2020 biodiversity target?

[108] **Dr Roberts:** We are well aware of that target. There are ongoing discussions and we are part of that group. It is important now, particularly in light of the ‘State of Nature’ report, that we have a common action plan that pulls all the organisations together. There is a need for clarity around this. Clearly, the status quo is not acceptable. This is not the time, as the chairman said, for sound bites; it is time to seriously consider what we are doing and how we should go forward.

[109] **Professor Matthews:** Earlier, we talked about the priorities set out in the remit. Underneath all of those set priorities are issues around ecosystems management and the state

of nature. So, if you are moving forward on access and recreation then, quite clearly, there is a dimension to that that is relevant to the state of nature, just as the state of nature is relevant to access and recreation and so on.

[110] **Dr Roberts:** We need to look at the evidence on this, but there is quite a lot of discussion at the moment about the scale at which we carry out some of the activities. I have seen some fantastic examples of the ecosystem approach of reinstating wetlands and bogs and things like that, but they have been on a fairly small scale. Part of the discussion needs to be around whether we should take a much wider and more ambitious approach to that and look at, for example, river catchment areas in their entirety and what might be done in monitoring the land at that level. That needs a lot of thought, but we at Natural Resources Wales manage 7% of the land area in Wales, so what contribution can we make? This is the time to have that kind of serious discussion about the scale at which we are doing things and how we go about it. We are very much up for a discussion and open debate. Our colleagues in the wildlife groups have a tremendous amount to offer in relation to that.

[111] **Antoinette Sandbach:** Emyr, I want to come back to the point that Vaughan Gething raised. When you are considering that, I would like you to bear in mind that, because you are publicly funded, presumably those decisions would be available under FOI. One of the concerns that we had was about the consistency of decision making, because there were clear differences between different people in different regions within the same organisation applying different criteria. I think that that was something that was identified in relation to water, particularly with the consenting around hydro schemes. If you want to show consistency of decision making, it would be useful to have the reasons, as Vaughan said. He obviously has a far better internet connection in here than I do. I am not sure why but I cannot get a signal.

[112] To go back to the 'State of Nature' report, I think that the main problem is that it is based on 5% of data, so it is drawing conclusions from a limited data set. Right at the beginning of the report, it says that the key problem is that it is making assumptions about what is happening in Wales, rather than that being based on concrete evidence, because it only has evidence from 5% of Welsh species. First, what steps have you taken to identify the data that you have in your possession from the legacy organisations, which you might be able to make publicly available for armchair audit, if I can put it that way? Secondly, I am very excited about the prospect of citizen science and it is lovely to get people engaged, but are you going to be looking at biosecurity issues around that, because of the problems around not only the spread of disease but also the spread of invasive alien species? We have been hearing about Himalayan balsam seeds being spread upstream on the bottom of people's shoes as they are walking. We need to be very careful around citizen science, to ensure that there are proper biosecurity measures in place, because you may end up gaining information in one area but also causing a problem in a different way. How are you addressing those two issues around data and biosecurity within citizen science?

[113] **Dr Roberts:** I will also pick up on the points that you made on hydro. Obviously, we are aware of previous practice. As was explained to the committee in another session, there is an extant consultation out from the previous Environment Agency Wales. We are looking at the responses that we have had to that and we will be coming to a conclusion and presenting a paper to the September board following analysis. I agree with you entirely that we need to have a consistent approach: that is what we are aiming for.

[114] In terms of evidence, I do not know whether the chairman wants to add anything, but that is very important, too. We have identified that as a key area for Natural Resources Wales to make a difference. I am keen that we should pull together all the information that is available: stuff that we generate ourselves and things that sector organisations generate, particularly the universities. We have some strength and depth in our universities on

environmental matters. A key objective is to pull that together, as you rightly say, to provide a bedrock for that evidence. I am keen to do that and that is part of the discussion that we need to have. I am meeting vice-chancellors of Welsh universities next week and I want to float that idea with them. We would be very happy to be the repository of that information but we need co-ordination and collaboration with universities and other groups.

12.00 p.m.

[115] **Antoinette Sandbach:** That is a great idea, but I am asking whether you are going to be able to put that into the public arena. You then become a central reference point and people know that, if they want to find information, they can come to NRW resource sites.

[116] **Dr Roberts:** We do need to make that information accessible, so that everyone can see that.

[117] **Professor Matthews:** At the moment, it is just a concept. We have been working for 70 days and we have lots of ideas. Everything has to take its time and be in its place. I go around talking to many people and groups, and the idea of the engagement of people in understanding their environment is a very powerful one. As I say, we are the best in Wales, we have these local record centres that are connected in bio blitzes and all such things. We have the RSPB, which does its birdwatch programme and I have talked to the Wildlife Trust in south and west Wales, which is very keen to get involved. I went to a meeting where I heard a presentation from the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and someone from Sweden, I think, was talking, saying that global businesses had a system whereby they asked people to go out and stand in the same place twice a year and look at what was around them. In other words, report the environment as ordinary people experience it. So, off the top of my head, perhaps about 500 sites throughout Wales are chosen strategically, and go out on 1 January and 1 July and report what it is.

[118] That is a wonderful idea, but now we need to be a bit more rigorous than that. How do we want to record that information and how is it stored? Perhaps iCloud computing is an answer. I do not know. At the moment, we are at a conceptual stage in which, when we talk to people about it, their reaction is much the same as yours, they say, 'What a fantastic idea'. Now we need to turn rhetoric into reality and make it a resource that everyone in Wales can access, so that we can truly understand what it is like to live with nature in Wales.

[119] **Dr Roberts:** On biosecurity, it is absolutely important. I hope that you will see, particularly in woodland areas at the moment, that we have signs informing the public about what the situation is. Obviously, from some areas, we have to exclude the public, because of concerns that we have, but more widely, we are trying to inform and educate the public for them to take precautions. It is a facet of our staff health and safety procedures.

[120] **Antoinette Sandbach:** I might pick up on that. Given my register of interest—I am declared a woodland owner—I have had one communication from Natural Resources Wales explaining the handover, but nothing about park life biosecurity and nothing saying, 'Look out for chalara', or 'These are the basic steps that you should be taking', or 'These are the symptoms of phytothphora'. I think that there is an important role there. If, as a woodland owner, you are not being made aware of the signs, symptoms and steps that you could be taking, you cannot actually educate the people around you who might be using your woodlands, or ask whether people who are coming in have taken the basic steps, such as whether they have cleaned their footwear. It is important that, if you are communicating with people, for example, over the change of e-mail addresses, that you look at what else you could put in the letter. So, you are not increasing your costs in terms of the stamp that you are using, but you can use that communication to target people. So, if there are water catchment areas and you are writing to people on the river within the water catchment, you might want to put

in information about invasive alien species. I would like you to look at that opportunity, because on the user end of it, I have not seen that and I think it would be a welcome way of limiting your postage costs and getting the message out there.

[121] **Dr Roberts:** Thank you for that suggestion. We will certainly take that one away.

[122] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** This committee is nothing if not constructive. Thank you, Antoinette. Julie James is next then Joyce Watson and the last word goes to William Powell.

[123] **Julie James:** I just want to go back a little bit to what you were talking about with your forward work programme and your hopes for how you could pull things together. We have gone round and round that a little bit during the course of this discussion. I recently attended a seemingly completely unrelated event in Swansea where something called CIPHER, the Centre for the Improvement of Population Health through e-Records Research, was being opened. The point of that was how much data the various health organisations in Wales already have that they could not mine for research purposes because they did not have the necessary computer software systems in place to access the data that they already had. So, effectively, large parts of those data were useless because they could not be accessed in any realistic way. When you were designing your ICT systems and so on, had you given any thought to those sorts of issues, particularly with this digital stuff? As soon as your computer goes out of date, no-one has the faintest idea what is on it any more. That is the first question.

[124] Perhaps I could develop that a little bit. For a long time during the lifetime of the various legacy bodies, it seemed to me that you had bits of the legacy bodies, such as the Environment Agency, for example, responsible for policing permitting schemes and so on, that knew that the schemes that they were policing were struggling because technology had moved past the point where the regulations made any sense. So, for example, the waste regulations are lagging hopelessly behind the technology of recycling. So, we can now recycle things so that they are no longer waste, but we still class them as waste, and we have all sorts of problems. However, the agency was split so that the people doing that work were not able to feed in to say, 'This regulation is useless, actually, and it is holding up all kinds of really good schemes. Could we lobby someone over here to get this regulation sorted out?' They did not see that as their job; they just saw it as their job to enforce the current regime. It seemed to me that you had a large amount of information available on those permitting schemes, but that no-one was actually accessing that information to look at whether the new regulatory regime under the new environment Act, for example, might be fit for purpose in the light of that. We might just be repeating the mistakes of the past.

[125] That is a very roundabout way of asking a question, but I hope that you can see where I am trying to go with that. It worries me that we have these lagging regulations where we want to move on for all the things that members of the committee have talked about, such as biodiversity, biosecurity and so on, but it seems to me that we have regulatory regimes that quite often work against them.

[126] **Dr Roberts:** Thank you very much for those comments. In terms of the compatibility of information, it is a very key issue for us. For instance, we have a number of geographic information services available. A key aim of our information strategy going forward is actually to make those compatible. I think that we have a lot to gain from that. I know that the previous Forestry Commission had a fantastic database of trees, for instance, and I know that the previous Countryside Council for Wales had a fantastic database of footpaths. It is a question of whether we can bring those together so that people who are out walking can recognise the trees around them. I am sure that there are lots of opportunities like that. We are very conscious of that, and it is part of the information strategy going forward: making the information compatible. I think that you are absolutely right that there is also an opportunity to use other data sets, such as health, for instance, to put that information in there. I will go

back again to talk to my team about that.

[127] On waste, may I take those comments back and talk to the teams on that and discuss whether we can feed into an improvement in the regulatory situation?

[128] **Julie James:** Waste just happens to be one example. I could give you another 20 examples, if you would like.

[129] **Dr Roberts:** Right. Okay.

[130] **Julie James:** It was really more about your regulatory bit being able to feed into your policy-making bit about whether the regulations are actually doing anything, or whether they are so bogged down in enforcing them that they never look up and think about it.

[131] **Dr Roberts:** Okay; that is an excellent point and we will get some cross-departmental working on that. Thank you. That is what we are all about: to try to make those links between the operational and the policy.

[132] **Professor Matthews:** That does raise an even more fundamental issue. For Emyr and me, this is about creating an organisation that is proactive rather than reactive. It is not just about feeding information across from permitting to regulation to IT or whatever; this is about the organisation, right the way from the top to the bottom, thinking positively and looking forward. When I was director of operations and managing director at Anglian Water, I had some personal mottoes, and one of them was that if I see that something needs doing, I see that it is done. If we can get that kind of thinking into the organisation, then we really will start motoring. That is what we have been aspiring to—getting the organisation to be positive and proactive. So, the sentiment that you have observed in the past is something that would be endemic across organisations, and now we want to turn it round right across the organisation, so that no matter where you are, you think positively and proactively rather than reactively.

[133] **Julie James:** When you figure out how to do that, please let us know. [*Laughter.*]

[134] **Professor Matthews:** When you have got me on the ropes in a couple of years' time, saying that it did not work—. We know what needs to be done; the challenge is getting it done.

[135] **Julie James:** Absolutely.

[136] **Joyce Watson:** This is an interesting session. I am fairly new to this committee, but I am certainly not new to being interested in the environment. My question is—perhaps, in a way, it follows on—about interaction, which was mooted earlier, and inter-departmental or governmental working, and how you take note of, and how you would advise us that you have taken note and taken action on, all the new legislation that is going through. So, you have the new planning Bill; what comes out of that? I am very interested in surface water and an element of devolution. Will we have further devolution on that, what are we going to do with it, and how will it impact on the environment? I am very keen to know about the citizen engagement aspect that you talk about, because it is not just the case that people engage—and they do—with RSPB projects and such like; they also engage in the things that they can see will have a direct consequence for them because of a policy change. I will use planning because I think that it is the most obvious example. How are you going to be joined up, if I can use that phrase, to that level of engagement? How will you take that on board to inform your future policy? Of course, we have the common fisheries policy and CAP reform just for starters, and not least the planning regulations that they will change.

[137] **Dr Roberts:** We have a strong interest in all of that, and I hope that what we will

bring is a combination of our operational experience and the policy experience that we have picked up. We are actively engaged in discussions with Welsh Government on the environment Bill, and in fact the Minister has asked for our input on that, so a group of the board has been meeting to input some ideas into that. I would hope that we would have a similar input to the other Bills that you mentioned—the planning Bill for instance. Obviously we know about the sustainable development Bill, and we have already been involved with the heritage Bill as well. You will note from our remit letter that that was the expectation of the Minister for us, that we would provide input on these matters, and we will do that. We will take those opportunities to bring our experience and skills to bear. With wider things like the CAP reform, yes, we have responded to the consultation documents. We had an active response to that. I would hope that we are asked to contribute, but we will also be contributing to those aspects, because it is important to us that the legislative structure is right. We will work best if that is right.

[138] **William Powell:** The very first time that you both came to committee, Professor Matthews referred to the new organisation as being very much a learning organisation and engagement being at the centre of things. Some of the legacy bodies have been very active in the field of education. I am thinking about the forestry schools initiative that was strongly supported by the Forestry Commission, and also CCW in terms of things like the Mosaic project, which was developed by the national parks in Wales. What are your priorities in the field of education and, linked to that, social inclusion, which the Mosaic project was very much about? I am interested in that not falling off the radar among all the other priorities that we have discussed this morning.

12.15 p.m.

[139] **Dr Roberts:** Education is a key part of our remit, and I would like to see everything that we do have an educative element to it. I am aware of the projects that you mentioned, and I think that we are building from a very good base on that. So, I regard, and I think that the board regards, education as being a very important aspect. There are opportunities for us to work innovatively in this area, to bring together our experiences of working with schools, disadvantaged groups and so on, and of working with the non-governmental organisations around this. I guess that we will need to work up an education programme over time. If I may take this opportunity, Chair, one thing that we have not mentioned today is that we are about to embark on a big process of informing our corporate plan for the next three years. So, we are holding a number of stakeholder meetings over the next few weeks, including at the Royal Welsh Show, and we will be bringing those views together for a formal consultation on our corporate plan in the autumn. That is a chance to bring all these issues, including education, into that, for us to decide what priority we attach to it. However, there is good work already. You mentioned the forestry work that already takes place with disadvantaged communities, for instance, and I am keen that we build on that as an organisation.

[140] **Professor Matthews:** May I add that we are both excited about this dimension? Too often in the past, education has been stuck on the end of what we do; it has been seen as a means of selling projects—we will just put out an educational programme. We have inherited some really good schemes, but there are wonderful opportunities to bring those together. You know that my catchphrase is ‘Creating a greener, wiser, wealthier and healthier Wales’. The wisdom bit in there is important, because we need to be wiser, so we are building our strengths and skills. We are about to launch the apprenticeship scheme, Cyfoes. There is a bunch of things that we are doing. The idea of citizen science is about reaching out and helping people to contribute. So, I think that education is a broad concept that we can contribute to by working with universities and creating a universities network.

[141] This is all part of wisdom creation, which is about lifelong learning. We have appointed a member of the board as a champion for lifelong learning, Madeleine Havard, and

she has been charged with taking her ideas on green education forward with the department for education. We believe passionately that there should be a core element that relates to sustainable development and natural resources management, because if we are going to make Wales a vibrant economy—I saw a programme last night about building a new economy for Wales—and make it a green economy, we have to have people coming from secondary education who are fit for purpose. Therefore, built within the heart of secondary education, there has to be an element around green management, sustainable development and natural resources management. That responsibility lies with the department for education, but we are here to help.

[142] You have got me going now; I will give another example. The Cabinet has decided that it wishes to encourage a greater diversity of membership of arm's-length boards—Welsh Government sponsored boards. That is a laudable target, but how are we going to do that? I drew on my experience in Northern Ireland, and we have suggested to our Minister that the Cabinet might like to consider a programme that we have called Come on Board, in which a learning opportunity is offered to the people of Wales who are interested in our sort of life, to learn what it is like to be a board member. This would not be for experts, but ordinary people who have said, 'I'd like to be a citizen on the board of Natural Resources Wales, but I don't know anything at all about corporate life'. So, the Welsh Government would offer a programme of learning opportunities to ordinary people who have an interest in this sort of thing, but it requires existing board members to offer themselves as mentors in that process. In other words, ordinary people, as part of the programme, have to come to see how we operate. We have offered ourselves to be mentors to that programme. We would welcome people coming to talk to us about what it is like in the audit committee, or remuneration, or on the board, or whatever it is. So, that is our suggestion. We are gifting that idea to the Welsh Government and, if it takes it up, we will be very willing partners to deliver it. So, that is all about education in the widest sense of the word.

[143] **William Powell:** Thank you very much, both; that is a really good note on which to end.

[144] **Lord Elis-Thomas:** You have got me going now, chair. [*Laughter.*]

[145] Mae gennyf un pwynt bach eto i gloi. Diolch yn fawr i chi'ch dau am fod yma. Diolch am y sylwadau ynglŷn ag addysg a phwysigrwydd addysg a chyfranogaeth gyhoeddus mewn byrddau. Un arall o'r themâu y bu ichi ei chyflwyno i ni yn un o'n cyfarfodydd blaenorol oedd eich bod chi am i'r corff hwn fod yn fwy caredig tuag at fusnes a mwy llawn o fentergarwch yn ei wahanol agweddau nag oedd y cyrff blaenorol, efallai. Yn hynny o beth, rwyf yn eich llongyfarch chi ar benodi pennaeth mentergarwch—un arall o'm cyfeillion o'r gogledd—i gydweithio o dan y cyfarwyddwr gweithredol, Trefor Owen, sydd yn ymwneud â gwasanaethau cenedlaethol. Tybed a allwn gael syniad o sut y mae'n mynd ar hyn o bryd o ran Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru yn dod yn gorff sydd â diddordeb mewn cyfoeth ym mhob ystyr, ac efallai yn fwy llawn o fentergarwch nag oedd y cyrff blaenorol yn eu gweithgareddau? I have one small point to close. Thank you very much, both, for being here. Thank you for the comments with regard to education and the importance of education and public participation in boards. Another theme that you introduced to us in a previous meeting was that you wanted the organisation to be more friendly to business and more enterprising in its different aspects than, perhaps, the previous organisations were. In that regard, I congratulate you on appointing a head of enterprise—another of my friends from north Wales—to co-operate under the operational director, Trefor Owen, who works on national services. I wonder whether we could have an idea of how the work is progressing to make Natural Resources Wales a body that has an interest in wealth in all senses of the word, and perhaps more enterprising than the previous organisations in their operations.

[146] **Dr Roberts:** Mae gennym restr hir iawn o syniadau ar hyn o bryd. Rydym yn tynnu'r syniadau hynny at ei gilydd ac yn trio rhoi rhyw fath o flaenoriaeth iddynt. Yn wir, bydd strategaeth mentergarwch yn mynd i gyfarfod y bwrdd fis nesaf i gychwyn y broses honno. Felly, mae'n bwysig iawn i ni ein bod ni'n bwrw ymlaen gyda'r gwaith hwnnw ac mae cyfleoedd i'r corff i ddatblygu a helpu i ddatblygu'r economi hefyd.

Dr Roberts: We have a long list of ideas at present. We are drawing all of those ideas together and trying to prioritise them. Indeed, an enterprise strategy will be presented to the board at its meeting next month to begin that process. Therefore, it is very important to us that we carry on with that work and there are opportunities for the organisation to develop and help to develop the economy as well.

[147] **Professor Matthews:** You will have noted from the information that we provided that one of the four basic principles of natural resources management, which I have referred to, is economy and enterprise. There is a group that is looking at the issues of the broader economy and our impact on the economy, taking account of the needs of the economy, but also focusing on our own enterprise activities. It is a case of holding back enthusiasm, rather than trying to encourage people.

[148] **Yr Arglwydd Elis-Thomas:** Diolch yn fawr iawn. Cofiwch ni atynt yn Peterborough. Siwrne dda i chi. Diolch i'r cadeirydd a'r prif weithredwr.

Lord Elis-Thomas: Thank you very much. Give them our regards in Peterborough. Have a good journey. I thank the chair and the chief executive.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 12.23 p.m.
The meeting ended at 12.23 p.m.*