

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Amgylchedd a Chynaliadwyedd
NRW 2015 – 92
Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru – Craffu Cyffredinol 2015
Ymateb gan KJ.Gibbs (Saesneg yn Unig)

Personal Observations for the Annual Scrutiny 2015

I had the opportunity of hearing Morgan Parry speak about his hopes for the new organisation Natural Resources Wales. He knew that it would take time for the three merging organisations to work as a single effective unit. It is Wales's great loss that he did not live to help this process and I hope that his place will be taken by someone of equal stature.

1. Loss of expertise. With changes to personnel, roles and job descriptions a number of key posts do not seem to have been filled. For example Barbara Jones was senior mountain ecologist with CCW and has not been replaced by someone with her experience and seniority. I have known Snowdonia for 45 years; its importance is not just in Wales. It merits having sufficient well-qualified staff to monitor the montane habitats and special features with the increasing pressures of tourism, recreation and climate change at this time

2. Support for non-governmental organisations. There is a huge amount of interest in the wildlife and natural history of Wales reflected by the large membership of organisations such as the Wildlife Trusts, Butterfly Conservation, Marine Conservation Society, and RSPB.

A significant number of these members have a wealth of knowledge and give their time volunteering in many ways. NRW could capitalise on this human resource by giving the 'seed corn' to the NGO's to enable them to organise, train, supervise and lead their volunteers. Thereby generating (for example) more valuable conservation work on SSSI's, biological recording on nature reserves, and wildlife gardening in schools and communities. These activities would also lead to improved health and well-being for the participants as they improve biodiversity in their local area.

The 'seed corn' is needed by the environmental NGOs to run all the back office services such as: publicising the opportunities to volunteers, rotas, reports, doing risk assessments, carrying out first aid training, phone bills, vehicles, insurance, membership recruitment. It appears that the senior staff have their hands tied as resources are pared to the bone. How can these small teams of staff mobilise the hundreds of volunteers who could then be a great support to the aims of NRW?

3. Short-termism. In the past a good working relationship with CCW developed and an agreed grant aid programme lasting two or three years was in place. This process has been replaced by NRW so that NGO's have to compete for short term grants that have to be spent in a specified few months. This has led to a huge waste of time as criteria for grants have sometimes been changed after the first announcement; dates for steps in the process alter when it is already underway. The % allocated for managing the project is unrealistically small so that directors are left wondering how they can achieve their aims and still pay their skeleton staff.

4. Reintroductions. NRW has taken the lead in a number of reintroductions following research, detailed planning and now helped by regular monitoring by partner organisations. In Magor Marsh, Gwent, the water vole population is thriving following reintroduction. A similar scheme at Ffrwd Farm nature reserve in Carmarthenshire began in 2014. Mink control is integral to the success of these projects and it is hoped will also continue.

During the last 5 years research and consultation into the feasibility of reintroducing beavers to a Welsh catchment has taken place. This was initially supported by CCW and later had the full support of NRW. These exciting projects can capture the public's imagination, as well as helping to enrich the habitats for other species and so increase biodiversity. I hope that these successes for NRW will lead to more in the future. Wildlife enthusiasts such as me want to have confidence in the new organisation which has responsibility to restore and safeguard our biodiversity for future generations.

(KJ Gibbs BSc Wales, MSc UC London. I belong to a number of environmental charities in Wales and completed a 4 year term as Chair of the N. Wales Wildlife Trust in 2014).