



Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales

Cofnod y Trafodion The Record of Proceedings

[Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a
Materion Gwledig](#)

[The Climate Change, Environment and Rural
Affairs Committee](#)

12/10/2016

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from Items 5 and 6

Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn
ogystal, cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd.

The proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in
the committee. In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation
is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Jayne Bryant Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Sian Gwenllian Bywgraffiad Biography	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Vikki Howells Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Jenny Rathbone Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Mark Reckless Bywgraffiad Biography	UKIP Cymru (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) UKIP Wales (Committee Chair)
Simon Thomas Bywgraffiad Biography	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Chloe Elding	Ymddiriedolaethau Natur Cymru Wildlife Trusts Wales
Mike Evans	Pennaeth Tystiolaeth, Gwybodaeth a Chyngor, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru Head of Evidence, Knowledge and Advice, Natural Resources Wales
Annie Smith	Rheolwr Datblygu Cynaliadwy, RSPB Sustainable Development Manager, RSPB
Dr Sarah Williams	Prif Ymgynghorydd Cyfoeth Naturiol a Rhaglen Ecosystemau, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru Principal Advisor Natural Resources and Ecosystems Programme, Natural Resources Wales

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

Chloe Corbyn	Y Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service
Alun Davidson	Clerc Clerk
Katy Orford	Y Gwasanaeth Ymchwil Research Service
Rhys Morgan	Dirprwy Clerc Deputy Clerk

*Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 09:31.
The meeting began at 09:31.*

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau, Dirprwyon a Datgan Buddiannau Introductions, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

[1] **Mark Reckless:** Bore da. Good morning, all. We're delighted—
[*Inaudible.*]

Adroddiad ar Sefyllfa Adnoddau Naturiol (SoNaRR) State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR)

[2] **Mark Reckless:** Thank you very much for coming, Sarah Williams and Mike Evans from Natural Resources Wales. We're delighted to have you with us. We are, I think, initially going to have a 20 to 30-minute presentation from you on the state of natural resources in Wales report, which is a very substantive piece of work. I'm grateful to the research team for what we have in terms of a summary of and briefing on it, but, given the timescale and the size of the document, we're also looking to you, in those 20 to 30 minutes, for that introduction, and the committee will then question you as appropriate. Thank you.

[3] **Mr Evans:** Diolch yn fawr iawn. **Mr Evans:** Thank you very much. Diolch am y cyfle i siarad â chi'r bore Thanks for the opportunity to come yma. Nid wyf i'n mynd i—. and speak to you this morning.

[4] Sorry, I'm not going to present in Welsh. It's just a greeting. So, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to you this morning. My name is Michael Evans. I'm the head of evidence, knowledge and advice for Natural Resources Wales, and my colleague Sarah Williams will introduce herself.

[5] **Dr Williams:** I'm Sarah Williams, I lead the sustainable management of natural resources embedding programme across Natural Resources Wales.

[6] **Mr Evans:** Okay. So, what we propose is a 20-minute presentation—it's probably best if you let us run through it and then keep the questions to the end. This is the first product of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, which came through this committee over the years, so you will be, or some of you will be, familiar with the environment Act. But this is the first product; this is the first thing that makes enactment real.

[7] We're moving away from the theoretical language of sustainable development and limits and that, and laying out the evidence now, which is where we can take action on the next steps. So, SoNaRR's really setting the direction for the journey ahead. It's the evidence that will inform the national natural resources policy statement, which is produced by Ministers, and it will also inform our own work on producing area statements.

[8] So, if I just go on, you can see we've lengthened the title, not that we needed it, really. So, 'state of natural resources report' doesn't really say what's in the tin. This is an assessment, and it's an assessment of how well we're doing on sustainable development. We all depend on the natural environment and our ecosystems for food, water, fresh air and energy, but the way we manage them actually compromises the ability of natural resources to provide these well-being goals. So, this is an assessment of how we're doing.

[9] It's a bit more than just a 'state of' report, which is why we've lengthened the title. You'll probably be aware that the non-governmental organisations released their own 'State of Nature 2016' report a couple of weeks ago, and much of the evidence is common to this report as well, but we've taken it to the next step and assessed what that means for humans in terms of our well-being now and in the future. So, it's really adding the 'so what' factor to the 'state of.' So, it's, essentially, an assessment of the degree to which sustainable management is being achieved. What I propose doing now is Sarah will run us through the report and how we've done that assessment and the key findings, and then I'll come in and tell you a little more at the end about how we've done it.

[10] **Ms Williams:** Okay. So, what is sustainable management of natural resources? So, this is defined in the legislation, it's defined in Part 1 of the environment Act. This slide sets out the words from the Act and it gives us a

great way of framing SoNaRR, and our assessment of sustainable management of natural resources. It provides us with a focus on the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits that they provide, and it makes really explicit the link through to the well-being goals.

[11] So, at the core of SoNaRR is the need to consider ecosystem resilience, the benefits that those ecosystems provide, and their contribution to the well-being goals set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. So, this definition gives us a way of framing SoNaRR, gives us the clues to what we have to do. It's also important to remember that this definition of sustainable management of natural resources is also NRW's new purpose. This is what we're here to do; we're here to focus on the maintenance and enhancement of the resilience of ecosystems, thinking about the benefits that they provide, and then linking it through and making clear the contribution to the well-being goals. And how we do that, how we go about our purpose, is by applying the principles of sustainable management of natural resources—those seven principles that are also set out in the Environment Act. Those are our ways of working.

[12] So, it's very clear that it's for us as NRW to take action, of course, but there is also a major role for NRW in enabling others to take action through engagement and collaboration, going back to the principles of sustainable management of natural resources. We cannot do any of this on our own. We all, across all of the sectors—all of the public sectors, private sector, third sector, Government, and you guys—have a role to play. And so SoNaRR is a tool, a resource for us all to draw on. It provides the evidence to show the risks and the opportunities and where we can collaborate; it starts to direct us all to think about what the problems are, and what needs to happen going forward.

[13] So, I'm going to take you through each of the chapters, just to give you sort of a sense of how it all fits together. And you might think, 'Oh well, that's quite a long narrative' and perhaps I just need to get to the last chapter and tell you what the conclusions are, but it's really important in this report to actually go through the chapters, because there's a narrative building. And, yes, you understand it all when you get to the end, but it's really important to get that insight into how each of the components build together. Because it's fair to say, for us as an organisation, it was hard to do this job, and it was only as we got to sort of August time that we really understood how each of the blocks needed to fit together and were able to articulate that coherently in the report and to our staff and to stakeholders.

So I would bear with it and try and read it all.

[14] So, the first chapter—well, not the first chapter; chapter 3 looks at our assessment of the state and trend of natural resources. So, we look at natural resources as they're defined in the Act in Part 1. So, we look at animals, plants and other organisms, but we also look at air, water, soil, geological features and minerals. So, that's one slice through our natural resources, and then we consider ecosystems as well, because those components of natural resources play out at an ecosystem level. So, we then look at mountains, moorlands and heath, semi-natural grasslands, enclosed farmland, woodlands, fresh water, urban, coastal margins and marine. And, through all of that, we also consider landscape.

[15] So, decades of really good work by NRW, our predecessor organisations, and a lot of private, third party, environmental non-governmental organisations, means that we have seen improvements across our natural resources in Wales. Our rivers and our beaches are cleaner, our air is fresher and many of our ecosystems captured in our beautiful landscapes provide a haven for biodiversity, and support world-class leisure opportunities. But, despite this really good work, we set out in this chapter some of the remaining challenges. So, there are between 40,000 and 50,000 early deaths across the UK every year due to poor air pollution. Many of our plants and animals are in decline, as the 'State of Nature' report, published in early September, sets out quite starkly. We are also seeing changes in the pattern of rainfall and increased flood risk. So, in this chapter we clearly set out and identify, for each of the natural resources, the remaining challenges. We paint the picture.

[16] So, the evidence set out in chapter 3 informs our assessment of biodiversity, which is also another requirement of the Act. So, for biodiversity in particular we conclude that biodiversity continues to decline across Wales, with some notable exceptions and good-news stories with birds and mammals showing improvement. But overall, biodiversity is declining and there's a very strong indication that we are not achieving sustainable management of natural resources if biodiversity continues on a downward trend.

[17] It's also important to remember that the state of natural resources report and this chapter, chapter 3, are also really important resources for public bodies—those who now have a strengthened biodiversity duty under section 6 and section 7 of the Act. So, this is a resource—chapter 3, in

particular, and the supporting technical annex—for them to take forward their new duties, their strengthened duties, on biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.

[18] So, after chapter 3, we then move on to consider resilience and ecosystem resilience. This is the first time that an assessment of resilience has been done for Wales, let alone the rest of the UK. This is a first. The assessment is framed around the five attributes of ecosystem resilience, which are defined in the Environment (Wales) Act, in Part 1, which is diversity, extent, condition, connectivity and adaptability, which is the result of the other four elements working together. So, we've completed this assessment of resilience at two scales. At a Wales scale we've looked at each of the individual attributes and set out an assessment. And then this slide shows the assessment that we've done at more of a regional scale, where we've looked at each of the ecosystems identified in chapter 3, and each of the attributes. So, for example, on the left-hand side we've got the mountain, moorland and heath ecosystem, and we've broken that down into three further categories. Then, for each of those, we've considered diversity, extent, condition and connectivity.

[19] This assessment draws very heavily on the evidence presented in chapter 3 and also technical assessments completed by the specialists across NRW. So, the deeper the green, the better the resilience. So, dark green means good resilience, medium green is moderate resilience, light green is poor resilience. So, in this example of uplands, the deep green around diversity and extent means that there's good resilience. The medium-coloured green for connectivity suggests that there's medium or moderate resilience. And then the pale green under condition suggests poor resilience. And there's a big table in chapter 4, which takes you through each of those ecosystems.

[20] So, for the assessment of resilience, we then conclude that all ecosystems have problems with one or more attribute of resilience. Their capacity—the capacity of ecosystems—to provide ecosystem services and benefits may be at risk. No ecosystem can be said to have all of the attributes of resilience.

[21] So, we then move from chapter 4 into chapter 5, where we then consider the assessment. We assess the contribution of our natural resources to well-being and to the well-being goals. We've set this out in chapter 5. So, as an example, we've considered, under the 'prosperous Wales' goals, how

natural resources provide opportunities for employment and economic activity. For example, wildlife and outdoor activity tourism provides 206,000 jobs, with an estimated worth of £6.2 billion to the Welsh economy. The three national parks attract 12 million visitors each year, who spend £1 billion on goods and services.

09:45

[22] We also consider, as a second example, the contribution that natural resources make to the 'healthier Wales' goal. So, natural resources make a significant contribution to the physical health and mental well-being of people in Wales. For example, trees help absorb pollutants and improve air quality. When air quality is poor, it can impact on people's health. Access to nature and green space has positive impacts on physical and mental health.

[23] For those of us who've been involved in the environmental world for a number of years, a lot of this is not new, but it really does underline how natural resources are at the heart of everything. It shows how interdependent and interconnected everything is, and this chapter, chapter 5, is a really important resource for our colleagues who sit on public service boards to start to see and understand how natural resources fit into their world, focusing on health, well-being and the economy.

[24] So, there's a big 'So, what?' question then. We've got the assessment of resilience and that's all very interesting. We've got the assessment of well-being. So, you know—so, what? How do we then take it to the next step? What we've done is integrated our assessment of resilience and that on well-being. We've tried to show how poor resilience poses risks to well-being now and in the future. We've done this through using the development of the natural resources well-being risks register. This is presented as another big table in chapter 7. So, this is presented by each well-being goal across the top, and then down on the left hand side, you have the assessment of the resilience of ecosystems taken through from chapter 4, the resilience chapter. So, we've tried to integrate them both. What this does is help us all focus on the important contributions that ecosystems make to well-being, but also—a big difference—it identifies potential risks to well-being now and in the future, which is implied by the well-being assessment. Throughout, we consider the risks posed by climate change and we draw very heavily on the climate change risk assessment, which was produced in the early summer. So, that's embedded in this assessment as well.

[25] This natural resources and well-being risk register is new; it builds very heavily on the work of the Natural Capital Committee and the work of Georgina Mace and Ian Bateman as well, and it's the first time that it's been done in the UK. Now, you'll say that, because you're all well aware of how you can use risk registers in project management and in programme management, this doesn't go to that step of assigning likelihood and probability. That is not the purpose of this at this point in time. We've described the risks and then our intention is to use this with our partners and our stakeholders to actually discuss and get their perspective of how this plays out in a particular place. There's a strong spatial element to a lot of this. This is a Wales-wide assessment, and when you talk about issues or these risks in a local place, you'll be able to get more of a tangible feel of what it means to that community and those natural resources in that particular place. That's what we intend to do over the next few months, and it will be a cornerstone of our work in preparing for area statements as well.

[26] So, rather than saying, 'Well, this is all bad', we've tried, then, to look at it in the context of, 'Well, every risk is an opportunity'. So, we've tried to draw together to look at the risks and opportunities—turning the risks into opportunities. We identify, in chapter 8, where the greatest opportunities are to build the resilience of ecosystems and contribute to the well-being goals. So, we've come up with a list of seven. Now, the challenge is not to put your—perhaps you don't have functional silos—narrow blinkers on and say, 'Okay, there's one there for flood, there's one there for woodlands, for the forestry sector, and there's one there for marine.' We mustn't do that—we really mustn't do that. We mustn't look at these opportunities in isolation. We all have to step back and think about the sectors and the other sectors' perspectives: how they contribute to well-being and what impact poor resilience will have on them. That insight will then help us all engage and find the opportunities to collaborate. So, we're not thinking about this in functional silos. We've all got to step back.

[27] So, if we were then to think about, for example—. I will just run you through the list. So, if we look at greening our urban spaces, which is making better use of our green spaces in our urban areas, what would that do? So, we could improve connectivity within and between ecosystems, help with water infiltration and improve water quality, reduce surface water flooding, create spaces and places for health and recreation, improve community cohesion, and help tackle health inequalities and poor air quality. If we were to look at managing our coastlines more effectively, what would that do? Well, it would bring more benefits to those people who live near the sea

through tourism and employment, help manage the rising threat of coastal flooding due to sea level rise, and support coastal habitats and flood and marine life.

[28] If we were to look at better soil and land management, what would that do? So, that's about really safeguarding future food production. Improving our soils is critical to our future food production of Wales plc. It would also support habitats for wildlife and reduce the costs of water treatment for the public water supply as well as private supplies. Restoring peatlands and our uplands would safeguard carbon stores to minimise the effect of climate change, help improve the condition of these ecosystems to support plants and animals, and help reduce flood risk. So, I'm going to leave the describing of those opportunities. There's a big table in the summary document as well, which starts to lay those out as well. So, those are the opportunities, and that's where chapter 8 starts to set that out.

[29] I wanted to just remind you of where SoNaRR now sits within the statutory framework of natural resource management, just so that you can understand what happens next. So, we've produced the state of natural resources report, and we are now handing the baton over to Welsh Government. It is for Welsh Government to set out the priorities—what they are prioritising in terms of the risks and the opportunities going forward, and what that means for policy—it's for them to provide the policy steer. Once that's produced, it will then be for Natural Resources Wales to start preparing area statements. Area statements will have to look to the risks, the priorities and the opportunities identified in the national policy document by Welsh Government, and also the evidence set out in SoNaRR. So, the area statements will provide more of the spatial context. They will allow us to work with, in collaboration, and engage with sectors and communities—people in a place—to actually discuss and agree what they think are the priorities that need to happen in that particular place. And then, in time—so, we will do all-Wales coverage of area statements by December 2019—that evidence from the area statements will then feed into the next SoNaRR, which is in 2020. So, we will go through the cycle of adaptive management through these three blobs. Okay, I'm going to pass to Mike now, just to do the next bit.

[30] **Mr Evans:** Okay, so just to sum up, we thought we would put in a slide on how we did this. The summary is that it was very difficult. No-one had ever written a report like this before, as you've heard. We looked at 25 or so other 'state of' reports. We ran workshops. We took advice from the Joint

Nature Conservation Committee and other bodies around the UK and Europe, but we had to design this from scratch.

[31] We, as an organisation, spend around £11 million a year monitoring the environment. So, we create and gather a huge amount of data and evidence, so we are already in a good place on this. We share this evidence with others, and we get evidence from others, such as the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. So, there's a lot of data out there. Data aren't actually one of the problems. We also employ around 1,800 staff, some of whom are world leaders in their fields. So, we've used a great deal of staff expertise. They've engaged, through four working groups, with some of our external partners to get more data and information in from other sources. We've followed the standard methodology for literature review, which is described in one of the annexes. We've been quite explicit in SoNaRR about the confidence we assign to our evidence. We've given it a high, medium or low score and the annex describes how we've done that.

[32] To give you an example, where we have very well established methodologies, such as the water framework directive, which we've been doing for decades, we'll give a high confidence to most of our conclusions from that. Where we've used more expert judgment to interpret evidence, such as the evidence from chapter 3 going into resilience, it's only got a medium score. But all the proceedings of that process have been recorded in the annex as well.

[33] We've been explicit throughout about the data gaps, in chapter 3 in particular around the biophysical elements. I think our opinion is that the lack of data hasn't held up the assessment. Where we're a little short on evidence is the links between the 'state of' and the benefits we get socially, culturally and economically. So, it's that handle that turns that into the 'So what?' factor, which we will need to fill some of our evidence gaps on. So, we haven't prioritised what we're going to do with the evidence gaps. We think that's part of the next steps. We only deposited this report a couple of weeks ago, so we're going to be going out and running some lessons-learned exercises with our stakeholders and partners.

[34] In terms of governance of the production of the report, I chaired the internal steering group with the various working groups. We also undertook co-production with Welsh Government officials who were responsible for drafting the Bill and the Act and guiding us on what SoNaRR needs to deliver

to comply with the direction in the Act.

[35] We also, internally, had a lot of interaction with our own directors on our board. We went to the board three times this year—to the full board sessions. We've employed our own internal quality-assurance process. It's a five-step process, going from self-assessment of quality right through to external peer review and board sign-off. This report is probably the most important report many of us have ever produced in our working lives, so this went through all five of those steps. The board of Natural Resources Wales signed this off at their September meeting.

[36] The peer review was done to a standard methodology, with standard questions. We used a range of academics, people from private companies with expertise, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and academics. So, a good spread of experts in their field gave us feedback on the report. We took that to our editorial group and built that back into the report.

[37] We also undertook engagement with our partners, both through the working groups in the data-gathering exercise and then through a series of webinars that we ran, which were quite successful in keeping people up to date with where we were. With our key stakeholders—I think there were 160 people on our stakeholder list—we shared with them a pre-release copy of the report to gather any information and see what the issues were. But, as Sarah was saying, this really was a chance for us to get our thinking clear and get the report done. Now, we think the journey on engagement starts. So, we didn't do huge co-production, because the task of doing the assessment had to be designed from scratch.

[38] This is a groundbreaking report. It's the first one of its kind. It will be of benefit to sectors right across Wales. For example, there are 42 public bodies who now have a duty to undertake sustainable development and the 'enhance biodiversity' role. So, we expect them to be using SoNaRR. We've already cut SoNaRR on a PSB level and have fed the evidence into the well-being assessments being undertaken across Wales now. So, our role is to directly deliver sustainable development. This is around action. This is not just a report that should sit on the shelf. Our role, as Sarah said, is also to help enable others to do their part, because Natural Resources Wales cannot deliver sustainable development. This is about businesses, land managers and other public bodies. This is all people working across sectors. It's the evidence base—it stops at the evidence base. It doesn't have answers. We

think that's the role of policy and the engagement we're going to undertake now. So, we've not put in targets, we've not put in proposed actions. We think that's the start of the next phase. But this is the information and this is what we need to move forward. This is what we need to build the resilience of ecosystems, which will help us with our building resilience now and improving the well-being of future generations. So, that concludes our presentation. Thank you very much for listening, and we'd be pleased to answer your questions.

10:00

[39] **Mark Reckless:** Can I thank you both very much indeed? I'll just open with a couple of questions before I go on to Jenny and Vikki and then other Members.

[40] The committee is very keen to follow up what is happening with the environment Act and what's actually happening with the well-being of future generations Act. As we discuss our work programme, it's a major issue for us, and I'm sure that the report you have produced is going to be a very, very useful input for our work there. What I would like to understand a bit better, though, is the relationship between NRW and Welsh Government as this initial report is produced, but then, thereafter, with the iterative process, because, you know, this is the evidence base to which the Welsh Government must have regard in setting its policy. To what extent is Welsh Government also itself determining that evidence base, or is that a matter solely for an independent NRW? Mike, you referred to co-production work with Welsh Government officials. Sarah, you referred—if I've got it right—that priorities and policy steer were for the Welsh Government, but then I thought you also said that risks and opportunities are identified by Welsh Government in its national natural resources policy. But isn't it SoNaRR that's there to identify risks and opportunities and the evidence base to which the Government has regard? Help me understand how this iterative process works and the extent to which you are completely independent within that, or that you're working closely and jointly with Welsh Government.

[41] **Ms Williams:** It's fair to say that we worked jointly with Welsh Government on the preparation of this first product. There's a joint NRW–Welsh Government NRM—national resource management—evidence group. So, we've shared various drafts of SoNaRR with that group. We've had feedback, we've considered their feedback, we've accepted their feedback, we've rejected their feedback, as you would do, and as we've done as part of

our own internal process of engaging with our staff. But, you know, we're the editors. It's for us to decide what's in and what's out. So, they haven't had a strong line in—. You know, it's our report, so it's not for them to determine what's in or what's out. They've helped us, when you look up the definition of sustainable management and natural resources, to work through the method and the building blocks, of how you can lock those things together, and that's their expertise that their teams have built up through the passage of the environment Act and in drafting the Act and in drafting the explanatory memorandum. So, we've used them to test and to make sure that we're keeping with the spirit of what they intended in the Act and in the explanatory memorandum. But, you know, it's our report; they've not had any editorial control over what's in or what's out at all.

[42] In terms of the risks, SoNaRR is to provide the evidence. So, we can't say, 'You need to do X, Y; you need to do more of this, more of that, or more of the other', because it is for Government policy and the democratic process to decide on that. That really was quite clear, as set out in the legislation. So, it's our role to set out what the risks are, which are what are set out throughout chapters 4, 5 and 7. We've clearly set out the risks, and then the opportunities fall from the risks. So, you know, we've set them out, but it's for them then to decide, okay, how are they going to prioritise those and decide which ones they want to target in terms of the policy and the direction of next steps. Does that help, or not?

[43] **Mark Reckless:** Could I perhaps take an example, just to explore that in a more concrete way? On forestry and woodland, I was quite struck by how supportive the report was, both on the need to increase the coverage of woodland, but also the support for that being managed. The chart you had earlier shows that, in terms of connectivity and extent, actually, the managed, commercial—you know, presumably to FSC standard—woodland was better on those fronts and was at least as good for both diversity and condition. Welsh Government's had this policy, I understand, since Elin Jones was the Minister, of increasing coverage of woodland forestry, but there doesn't seem to have been much, if any, progress on that. It strikes me as much more difficult for Welsh Government not to actually push strongly in that direction with this report, driving that policy and being the evidence base to which they had regard, than it was before. Would you agree with that?

[44] **Mr Evans:** If ever I'm trying to explain what integrated management of natural resources, and all that jargon, is to people down the pub, I use

forestry as the example. Wales has amongst the lowest area of forest cover in Europe, so we're not doing very well—that's the starting point. We've tended to plant our forests on poor soil or poor land, where it's not got good value for other things. But actually if you look at the benefits that we get from forestry, wood is just one of them. So, planting them far away from people is probably not the best thing to do.

[45] So, if we considered improvements to air quality and how we can mitigate downstream flood by root systems, keeping water in the soil, and how we can provide the recreation and access and community benefits through fitness, mental health and all of those things, we'd probably plant our forests in different places. We've done some of the mapping on this actually to show where our current forest estate is and where it should be. So, the difficulty is then deciding how much forest we want and where it's going to be, and that's probably the next step. What SoNaRR has done is identify that there's an issue with forestry, both in terms of the fact that we're not maximising the benefits that we can get from it—and then the area statements are probably the place where we'll be looking at designing forest production better, so that we get different species, more resilient to disease, in different areas of Wales.

[46] **Mark Reckless:** And as well as better, more—? Is that a clear—?

[47] **Mr Evans:** It will be more; it will be more diverse and it will be better managed. Because a lot of our forestry isn't under active management, so it means that we're not gaining all of the benefits in terms of access, timber production and all of the other things to keep that forest alive and productive in terms of carbon storage. So, it's an easy win on paper. The difficulty is then, when you come down to the practicalities of where to put it.

[48] **Mark Reckless:** Jenny.

[49] **Jenny Rathbone:** Congratulations on a really important report, which has got you national headlines, quite rightly. Obviously, it's work in progress, but as a first base for understanding where we are in order to inform our policy, it's really excellent.

[50] I just wanted to focus on one particular area—because I think it's very difficult to take it all at once—which is water. Water is the new gold and in chapter 3, you talk about the fact that we have few natural stores of water either in aquifers or in soil and that, therefore, rainfall rushes into the rivers

and streams and then we haven't got any when we need it in the summer. So, how do you think—given that you mentioned that we've had the water framework directive for some time now—it's going to inform NRW's own approach to this, never mind what the Welsh Government might do in terms of encouraging farmers to conserve water? What do you think you can do to—

[51] **Ms Williams:** Very much at the heart of this is around natural management of catchments. You've heard lots of different terms used: it's natural flood management; it's about slowing the flow and it's about managing the catchments in a way to retain the water in the catchment for longer and that will have important implications for us in our flood-risk responsibilities and it has important implications for us in our drought responsibilities. Most immediately, you can see the examples of Pickering and some examples in England, where they've looked at some of the natural processes where we can intervene—as landowners—to retain water within catchments for longer. So, that will have—. We're looking at that; we're exploring that. There's some work in north Wales, which has been looking at some of those opportunities.

[52] **Jenny Rathbone:** But don't you have powers as NRW to direct people to do certain things around water management?

[53] **Mr Evans:** In terms of demand management, we work with the water companies on—. So, if there's a hierarchy of this, the first thing would be to value our water more fully. So, in terms of use, making sure we're not wasting the water that is being taken out of the rivers, stored in reservoirs, treated, and then comes to our taps or our industry. So, the hierarchy is: value what you've got and use it more efficiently. So, we do spend quite a lot of time on water efficiency, working with companies and Ofwat, and then, of course, we're involved in the periodic investment programmes around infrastructure, on how we are going to supply future generations with water. So, I don't know whether Sarah can give a bit more background.

[54] **Jenny Rathbone:** Surely you have—. Don't you have powers to insist that people are not doing things that encourages the water to just disappear into the rivers?

[55] **Mr Evans:** Well, we have a regulatory regime in terms of how much water—

[56] **Dr Williams:** Extraction licencing, yes.

[57] **Mr Evans:** In terms of how much water can be taken out of natural systems. So, if we think that—

[58] **Jenny Rathbone:** But, surely, our aim is to get more water stored rather than running off into the river and so on.

[59] **Dr Williams:** It's about thinking about the role of land managers, and the role that, in managing our land, farmers can play in retaining water within catchments, within the soil, which has benefits for them, has benefits for flood risk, and has benefits for drought.

[60] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, what are NRW's powers to insist that farmers aren't simply, you know, are doing things like not planting in winter to allow the soil to run off—?

[61] **Dr Williams:** We have minimal. We can't—

[62] **Jenny Rathbone:** Minimal?

[63] **Dr Williams:** Minimal, I would say, yes.

[64] **Jenny Rathbone:** Alright. Thank you for that, I think.

[65] **Dr Williams:** I think, yes. But, let me just check.

[66] **Jenny Rathbone:** Obviously, I've got loads of other questions, but—

[67] **Mark Reckless:** Sorry, we haven't—. I'll come back if we have time. Vikki.

[68] **Vikki Howells:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, both, for your presentation. It's such a comprehensive report that I think it will provide us with lots of evidence and food for thought as a committee over the course of this fifth Assembly. I'd just like to go back to the evidence base that you were using for your report. I know you said, Mike, that data weren't a problem, but I've identified quite a few evidence gaps just reading through the summary we had here. And I was wondering whether you'd be able—. If I just read this through, I'd be interested in knowing what your thoughts were on the priority areas to address as we move forward.

[69] So, things like air quality, noise levels, monitoring of the near-shore environment, the state and trend of soils, areas with no geological mapping, limited information on mountain, moor and heath habitats, condition of grasslands in sites of special scientific interest, enclosed farmland habitats, extent and condition of woodland, which Mark's already touched upon, knowledge of how our coastal margin habitats recover after storms, impacts of chemicals on ecological status, and our intertidal and subtidal habitats as well. Which of those would you see as being the priority areas for more data gathering as we move forward into the next cycle of SoNaRR especially?

[70] **Mr Evans:** I think I identified throughout the report that there are data gaps, and we've been very open and explicit about that. What I was trying to say is that those data gaps have not prevented us doing the assessment of the links between resilience and benefit. So, the more data you get as a scientist, the better your confidence levels will be in this. So, what we haven't done is say that these data are more important than those data. We haven't put priorities on that, because we want to go out and engage with people, and it will depend on that democratic space, on what people think are the priorities.

[71] You might wish to, for example, use air quality as an example, and consider that we're suffering thousands of early deaths every year, which is a major social issue. We have new challenges in air quality. We're now monitoring very fine particulate matter—PM 2.5s. We don't have Wales-wide schemes for that. We probably know where the worst sources are, but there are new sources of air pollution coming up from diversification in farming, intense traffic problems, where we have air-quality management zones, and domestic heating. So, having a look at that, for me, would be a priority, but I think what we're saying is that we want to open that debate, so when we're doing the next steps, we will be asking people where they think the most important gaps are, and how we are going to go about filling them, because some of them will be very, very expensive to fill, for a marginal benefit. Some of them will be quite easy, and people might say, 'Okay, we can do this, we can help you with that.' So, that's the debate we're about to have.

[72] **Vikki Howells:** And in terms of the risk register then, which is really crucial in terms of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and so on, you don't think that any of these particular gaps in evidence would maybe mean that the risk register was missing something, or was inaccurate in terms of identifying particular areas for us?

10:15

[73] **Mr Evans:** It won't be inaccurate as such, because we will put confidence around it. So, with any evidence, you will have a certain degree of confidence in that evidence. The more published evidence you have on a subject, and the more it agrees with each other, the higher the confidence and we'll give it a high score. So, it won't make the risk register wrong, but the more evidence you can use to populate the risk register, the more secure you can be, and possibly then the more confident you can be that that's the area you want to concentrate on, compared to another.

[74] **Vikki Howells:** Thank you.

[75] **Mark Reckless:** Can we go to Simon and then Sian? Apologies if I didn't see you when you came in, Jayne, but we will come to you afterwards. Simon.

[76] **Simon Thomas:** Diolch, **Simon Thomas:** Thank you, Chair. Gadeirydd. Beth sy'n fy mhoeni i What concerns me a bit about this dipyn bach am y broses yma yw'r process is the next steps. Because we camau nesaf. Achos rŷm yn derbyn yr do accept the report as it is, and the adroddiad fel y mae, yn derbyn y evidence that is there, or not as the dystiolaeth sydd yno, o dro i dro, case may be, because you do note achos rŷch chi'n nodi bod data yn that data is scarce, and we also brin ac ati, ac rŷm ni'n derbyn hynny accept that. But the question now is: hefyd. Ond y cwestiwn yw: sut nawr y how is the Government going to act mae'r Llywodraeth yn mynd i on this? And how are you going to weithredu ar hwn? A sut ŷch chi'n report back on what Government is mynd i adrodd yn ôl ar yr hyn y mae'r doing, in relation to what you've set Llywodraeth wedi ei wneud, yn ôl yr out, especially perhaps in chapter 7, hyn rŷch chi wedi'i osod allan, yn the risks that Vikki Howells benodol efallai ym mhennod 7, sef y mentioned? risgiau roedd Vikki Howells yn sôn amdanynt hefyd?

[77] **Gan fod y SoNaRR nesaf ddim** As the next SoNaRR won't be yn digwydd tan 2019, a gan fod happening until 2019, and as that hynny'n mynd â ni reit yn agos at will take us very close to an flwyddyn bwysig ym mholisi important year in the Government's Llywodraeth, 2020, pan oedd yna policy, 2020, when there was doriad o 40 y cant i fod mewn nwyon supposed to be a reduction of 40 per

tŷ gwydr, er enghraifft, ac rŷm ni cent in greenhouse gases, for ymhell oddi wrth gyrraedd y nod yna, example, and we're far from reaching ac roedd yna nifer o bolisiâu eraill i that goal, and many other policies fod i ddod i rym i greu newid er lles were supposed to come into force to yr amgylchfyd naturiol yng change for the better the natural Nghymru—beth ŷch chi'n disgwyl i'r environment of Wales—what do you Llywodraeth wneud mewn gwirionedd expect the Government to do now? nawr? Ac a ydych chi'n rhoi And are you giving them clear cyfarwyddyd clir iddyn nhw ynglŷn â'r guidance as to the most efficient way ffordd fwyaf effeithlon o gyrraedd of achieving some of these goals? rhai o'r prif nodau yma?

[78] **Mr Evans:** Okay, so the question is on the next steps for Government and how we're going to move with that. I think the next steps we've identified are that the Ministers are responsible for producing the natural resource policy, and that will set out the priorities and the way forward right across Wales, so that's a really big step. They will be engaging with public debates on that this autumn, and it's quite a short timescale, so they're not hanging about. The policy will be in place in the spring of 2017, so I think that's a really important step. We've tried to make the evidence in this report as explicit and hard-hitting as we can, so that the Ministers do have to use this report—that's in the Act—to inform their policy. So, we're quite optimistic that this is gaining momentum and we will be moving forward.

[79] We're not sitting back now and waiting for 2019 to produce the next one, we will be doing—. I think it's really important that we pause and engage with our stakeholders to look at the next steps, because the NGOs have been quite vocal, they want to get engaged, we want them to get engaged because they have a really important part to play in delivering these integrated solutions, both as land managers, advocates and raising public awareness. So, that partnership that we need to form, I think, needs to gather momentum now over this period of the autumn consultation and into the spring. Then we'll be designing a way to make sure that, the indicators that we've lightly identified in chapter 7 of this report, we can report back on them, and we're getting the right evidence to do that.

[80] You will see we've been explicit about the gaps and the confidence in this report, and we will be working with our partners to try and make sure that we fill those gaps and improve on confidence, but the important thing was, for me as the, sort of, manager of this project, that it was delivered by the end of September. That was the four-month window from enactment to

delivery that we had, and so we've done that bit, now it's on through the next steps of the Environment Act. So, I think this is the first step, and we're quite excited about it. Many of us have been working in the environment sector for decades and this is actually a really big opportunity for us to make a difference on the ground. So, even though I'm the head of evidence, it's not all about the report, it's about the action that the report should inspire.

[81] **Simon Thomas:** Jest ar y pwynt yna, a throi i ben arall y telesgop fel petai, sut mae hwn yn digwydd nawr ar lefel leol? Achos rwyf wedi gofyn ar lefel genedlaethol. Rŷch chi'n sôn sawl gwaith yn yr adroddiad yma am y datganiadau ardal yma, a rŷm ni'n gweld eich bod chi eisoes wedi rhedeg arbrofion, mewn ffordd, ar sail yr afonydd—Tawe, Rhondda, Dyfi. Sut mae'r rhain wedi gweithio? A ydyw felly'n fwriad gennych chi fod yr holl ddatganiadau ardal ar sail afonydd? Sut mae cyfuno'r ffaith nad yw afonydd wastad yn dod â chymunedau at ei gilydd? Yn aml iawn, nhw sy'n rhannu cymunedau. Sut ydych chi felly yn mynd i gyfuno'r angen i gael pobl leol i weithredu gyda'r ffaith eich bod chi'n cynllunio ar sail afonydd?

Simon Thomas: On that point then, if we turn things on its head, how is it happening now on a local level? Because I've asked about the national level. You mention several times in this report these area statements, and I can see that you have also already held experiments, in a way, on the basis of rivers—for example, Tawe, Rhondda and the Dyfi. How have these worked? Do you intend for all the area statements to be on the basis of rivers? How do you deal with the fact that rivers don't always bring communities together? Very often they divide communities. How are you therefore going to link that with the need to have local people taking action if you're planning on the basis of rivers?

[82] **Dr Williams:** I'll take that one, if that's okay. So, you're talking about the area trials. We've had three area trials—the Tawe, the Dyfi and the Rhondda: three very different places in terms of the size and in terms of the scale. Those trials were set up very early on in the life of NRW, before the real detail of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and the ways of working, the principles and what's in the Act became firm. So, they tested ways of working, as we understood them, to go in and focus on what were the opportunities for building integrated solutions, and we've got a rich seam there of knowledge, understanding what works, but equally, what doesn't work. So, we're then using that intelligence, that evidence, that experience, really, to help us build what it is we need to do for area statements.

[83] So, please don't—. The trials were based around rivers, to an extent. That doesn't mean that, for area statements, when we go live, for real, we will not be using river catchments as the basis.

[84] **Simon Thomas:** Sorry; so you're not using catchments.

[85] **Ms Williams:** We won't be, no. At the moment, we see that one of the big audiences for area statements, one of the big customers for area statements as they're set out in the legislation, are the local authorities and public service boards. Those are the people that we need to build the evidence, work with, collaborate with, engage with, and then hand them the evidence in those area statements. So, that's the geography that we're looking to.

[86] In terms of what we've done so far, we are committed in developing our approach to area statements to working collaboratively and co-productively from the outset. So, in early September, we held a four-day workshop. I called it a 'lock-in', but we had a four-day workshop in north Wales in Nant Gwrtheyrn, where we took our staff and a range of different stakeholders and partners. We, together, started to work through what we've learned so far, what's good practice from a range of environmental planning initiatives, from the works of national parks and AONBs, to water companies, to a whole raft of stuff, and then used that to build four area statement processes. We are now going through a process of iterating that. We'll have another workshop where we're working to build consensus in early November, so that by early December we'll have an outline of what the process is, how we're going to work, the tools, the techniques that we're going to apply, and we'll have a manual-type thing that everybody understands.

[87] **Simon Thomas:** For me to understand: do you own that process, or does the Welsh Government need to do that?

[88] **Dr Williams:** No, we own that. In the legislation it's for us to do that. It's for us.

[89] **Simon Thomas:** Just a final real-life test, if you like, of how this could work. The Chair's already asked about forestry, and that's a positive example, but a challenging example would be an application, say, for fracking in Wales. How does this report enable the decision making around something like fracking to be made, and how do you expect it to be used in

such a process? Or is it remote from that actual decision making?

[90] **Dr Williams:** Well, that's a hard question. [*Laughter.*]

[91] **Mark Reckless:** That's what we're here for.

[92] **Dr Williams:** No, indeed it is. It's how the evidence should be informing our input, you know, local authorities—

[93] **Simon Thomas:** The purpose of the report is to change things, and the purpose of the report is to give us the evidence to make the right decisions.

[94] **Dr Williams:** Yes, absolutely.

[95] **Simon Thomas:** So, how do we apply the report to real-life situations? We're talking a lot about structures, which I accept you have to have in place because Government works by structures, and delivery works by structures, but it comes down at the end to: can this make a difference?

[96] **Dr Williams:** Absolutely, and we're working through, so in the programme that I run, there's a particular project looking at the interface between area statements, SoNaRR and all of the stuff in the environment Act and how it works together with what's been put through in the planning Act last year as well, and so making sure that those connections are real and explicit and we can make sure that the hand-offs of what's in SoNaRR area statements feed in appropriately to inform the appropriate decision makers in local authorities. So, I can't give you a definitive answer. We recognise it's a big issue and we're working that through with our specialists at the moment.

[97] **Simon Thomas:** You would expect local authorities to be looking at the SoNaRR—

[98] **Dr Williams:** Yes.

[99] **Simon Thomas:** —before they make decisions. Fracking was just an extreme example, in many ways, but there are other challenging examples of new developments that have an impact on the environment.

[100] **Mark Reckless:** I can see how you might apply aspects of SoNaRR when you were considering a fracking application, and that certain things might be

negatives you'd be weighing in the balance against that fracking application, but I've no idea about the scale—how important those would or should be, in your view, for the decision making.

[101] **Dr Williams:** I suppose, when you think about it, SoNaRR should be helping us all understand or get to the place where we get development in the right place. It's making sure that development is in the right place for the environment for the natural resources, so that it makes it easier for the developer, so they have less of a cost and a less burdensome process, but, equally, that it's in the right place for natural resources as well.

[102] **Simon Thomas:** Isn't it also your aim, ultimately, under the environment Act, with SoNaRR, to move those habitats or areas that Vikki listed, in detail, from the 'poor' to the 'moderate' to the—I don't know what you call it. Do you call it 'good'?

[103] **Dr Williams:** 'Good', yes.

[104] **Simon Thomas:** 'Good', yes. So, surely, the aim is to move all those habitats and different aspects of the Welsh environment over to the 'good'. So, if you're going to do that, there are clearly areas of Wales that will never be in the 'good', because you've got opencast mining, you've got fracking applications, you've got a new M4, you've got pipes that are releasing kerosene all over west Wales. There's a bit of a reality check here, isn't there?

[105] **Mr Evans:** There is, indeed, and this is a societal debate. You can do lots of things with Wales, you can have lots of things in lots of places, and this is why it needs, as you've referred to, the local people and the democratic process to get engaged in this. You could cover Wales in one type of habitat or with different types of habitat, with the geophysical constraints on that. So, it's how much you want and where you want it, what's appropriate for those local communities and, again, at the national scale and the international scale, because, of course, we have responsibilities to global communities. I think, in the question, it refers back to your, 'How do local people get involved?' I think we've outlined the area statements, but, of course, there will be fuzzy boundaries, as we've described them, on those area statements for issues that go across boundaries and where people can unite on single issues, whether they be fracking, energy or how much forestry we need. So, SoNaRR will just help inform those debates, but it won't give easy answers, for there are some very difficult answers facing us, particularly in respect of climate change, which—if you were going to read a

subplot right throughout this report, it's climate change.

[106] **Mark Reckless:** Thank you. Sian.

[107] **Sian Gwenllian:** Llaw ar galon, pa mor hyderus ydych chi eich bod chi wedi adnabod y dystiolaeth gywir rydym ni ei hangen ar gyfer symud ymlaen i greu polisi? Mae yna ardaloedd lle nad oes yna ddata. A ydych chi'n hyderus bod hwn yn mynd i arwain at y blaenoriaethau polisi cywir sydd eu hangen ar frys er mwyn symud pethau ymlaen?

Sian Gwenllian: With your hand on your heart, can you tell me how confident you are that you have identified the right evidence that we need in order to move ahead to create policy? There are areas where there are no data. So, are you confident that this will lead to the correct policy priorities, which are urgently needed in order to move things forward?

[108] **Mr Evans:** Digon hyderus.

Mr Evans: We are pretty confident.

[109] We've used a standard methodology, a published methodology in terms of collating the evidence and assessing it. We have said in our statement that we will expand that and we will use different methodologies. But, as I referred to, we have experts in their field within our organisation and we have very good contacts with those outside the organisation, both within Britain and wider. Many of these issues are not a surprise to us. We could've probably written the priorities for action without doing this. What this evidence shows us is the confidence that we are concentrating on the right things. So, pretty confident, but always room to improve.

[110] **Sian Gwenllian:** Pa wersi sydd yna i'w dysgu? Rydych chi'n gwneud hwn am y tro cyntaf, ac mae'n adroddiad swmpus iawn.

Sian Gwenllian: What lessons are there to be learnt? You're doing this for the first time, and it's a very substantial report.

10:30

[111] Mae'n rhaid bod yna rai pethau y buasech chi'n eu gwneud yn wahanol, petasech chi'n dechrau o'r dechrau rwan. Er enghraifft, a oes digon o ymgynghori wedi bod efo rhanddeiliaid? Ydy'r rhan yna o'r

There must be some things that you would do differently, if you were beginning again. For example, has there been sufficient consultation with stakeholders? Has that part of the process been right, do you

broses wedi bod yn iawn, felly?

believe?

[112] **Mr Evans:** Rydym ni wastad yn gallu gwneud yn well. Pe bai mwy o amser a mwy o adnoddau gennym, byddai modd gwneud mwy o gysylltiad gyda rhanddeiliaid. Ond, y *job* yw gosod y dystiolaeth allan a chymryd y cam cyntaf i gamu ymlaen o fan hyn. So, rydym ni'n mynd i gynnal sesiynau dysgu gwersi, ac mae hynny'n hollbwysig i'r broses, wrth fynd ymlaen. Felly, rydym ni'n edrych ymlaen yn fawr iawn at wneud hynny gyda'r rhanddeiliaid ehangach.

Mr Evans: I think we can always improve. If we had more time and more resources, of course, we could have closer links with stakeholders. But, the job is to set the evidence out and take that first step so that we can move forward from here. So, we are going to hold sessions regarding the lessons we've learned, and that's very important to this process, as we go forward. So, we're really looking forward to doing that with the wider stakeholders.

[113] **Sian Gwenllian:** Diolch. Rwy'n siŵr eich bod chi'n cytuno mai'r peth pwysig rŵan ydy symud ymlaen i gael y blaenoriaethau polisi a gweithredu ar y rheini. Cychwyn y broses ydy hon.

Sian Gwenllian: Thank you. I'm sure that you agree that the important thing now is to move ahead to get the policy priorities and to act on those. This is just the beginning of the process.

[114] **Mr Evans:** Ie, y cam cyntaf.

Mr Evans: Yes, it's the first step.

[115] **Mark Reckless:** Jayne.

[116] **Jayne Bryant:** Thank you very much. We appreciate the work is new, as you've outlined, and I think your presentation today has been really very helpful. Just following on from what Simon has said, I was interested in how practically these things can be delivered. Do you think that there's enough support for local authorities, particularly on these local area statements? Will they be well prepared and well resourced for going out, because, from what you said, they will be the ones dealing with the statements and making these things a reality?

[117] **Dr Williams:** It's very much about using us—. The area statements are owned by us; it's for us to be resourced and make sure our staff are trained, are engaged, and are starting those conversations in those places. We are a member of each of the public service boards, and we are trying very hard to make sure that we use those fora to build the links, to build the network so

that, when we come to start the area statements next spring, we can use the framework, the governance, that is in place around public service boards for us and for them to start with the area statement process.

[118] We have a plan to engage and to raise understanding and awareness of what is in SoNaRR, so that it then helps with the conversation coming forward next year with area statements. Of course, some parts of the public sector are at a lower level of understanding than others, because they perceive that the environment Act is just about NRW, when in fact it's about everybody, with the WFG Act together, with both of those things fitting together. So, it's for the public sector in total to think about the evidence in SoNaRR and to work together to think about resilience and ecosystem resilience against the other well-being goals, and for us to take that evidence through, with them, to the local public service boards. So, it's the start of a number of different journeys here and, with raising understanding and awareness, we clearly recognise that there's a gap and we need to raise the profile and understanding.

[119] **Jayne Bryant:** Okay; thank you.

[120] **Mark Reckless:** Jenny, you said earlier you'd a number of other potential questions. Do you want to take governance?

[121] **Jenny Rathbone:** Well, I think it's about the interlinking of the—. We can't divorce ourselves from Brexit and all that that's going to mean for our farmers. Water management is linked to better soil management, but the ways in which we can improve our soil are quite complicated. But, we do now have new technology to enable you to measure the quality of soil without even leaving your office. So, I wondered if you were now able to use those new ways of assessing the situation, like they're doing in New Zealand.

[122] **Mr Evans:** Yes, actually, as we mentioned earlier, we have a core natural resource management evidence group with Welsh Government, and they're doing some work on mapping soils. It was one of the gaps we picked up. We don't have a soil-monitoring programme for the whole of Wales, but there are organisations, such as Cranfield, that are doing some of this mapping, and we are working with them to try to understand what the issues are and where the priorities for action should be.

[123] **Jenny Rathbone:** The next generation of farmers are quite well educated in terms of understanding how to implement advice.

[124] **Mr Evans:** Yes.

[125] **Jenny Rathbone:** But surely this is one of the ways in which we can be much more effective in giving the correct advice without having to drive for three or four hours to get there.

[126] **Mr Evans:** And, actually, Brexit may give some opportunities in this respect. If we can use the incentivisation process to get the right outcomes in the round, rather than just one element, there could be some early wins here.

[127] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. So, the work you're doing with Cranfield, how far advanced is that? How much are we able to home in on Wales, because they'll be, presumably, looking across the UK?

[128] **Mr Evans:** Yes. Well, it's led by the Welsh Government, and we've just picked this up at the most recent meeting. So, what they're talking about is some modelling and predictive elements. Of course, the Glastir monitoring programme also has some modelling and predictive elements in it. So, between these two, we're hopefully going to make sure that we get the right outcomes and incentivise the right behaviours on farms so that we can just get a spread of those benefits and we're optimising each element. So, I think the modelling does have some real potential here.

[129] **Jenny Rathbone:** All right. Thank you.

[130] **Mark Reckless:** Thank you. Back to Simon, if I may.

[131] **Simon Thomas:** Jyst dau **Simon Thomas:** I just have two gwestiwn, os caf i, ar hyn o bryd. questions, if I may, for now. The Mae'r Llywodraeth am gyhoeddi— Government, I believe, wants to rwy'n meddwl mai ym mis Tachwedd publish in November, as a follow-up y mae i fod i gyhoeddi—fel dilyniant i in terms of the well-being of future Ddeddf llesiant cenedlaethau'r generations Act, their well-being dyfodol, eu hamcanion nhw o ran aims. They intend to publish that. I llesiant. Maen nhw i fod i gyhoeddi just want to understand a little more hynny. Rwyf i jyst eisiau deall sut about the interrelation between the mae'r ymwneud rhwng y datganiad high-level policy statement that we polisi, os liciwch chi, lefel uchel expect from the Government and hwnnw yr ydym yn ei ddisgwyl gan y how they're going to respond to this Llywodraeth, a sut maen nhw i fod i report, because, clearly, if they don't

ymateb i'r adroddiad yma, achos, yn weave together, there's going to be a
 amlwg, os nad ydynt yn plethu i'w failure. So, there's not much time
 gilydd, mae yna fethiant, onid oes? between the publication of this report
 Nid oes lot o amser rhwng eich and the fact that the Government
 cyhoeddiad nawr a'r ffaith bod y intends to publish the six aims in
 Llywodraeth i fod i gyhoeddi ei chwe relation to how they're going to
 amcan o ran y ffordd y maen nhw'n deliver this next month.
 delifro hwnnw fis nesaf.

[132] **Dr Williams:** That's why we've worked so closely with Welsh Government, in the development of SoNaRR, so that they can see the transition and the emerging conclusions, and the emerging evidence coming out of SoNaRR, so that they can then feed it into their national policy document. So, that's one of the benefits of the co-production, so that the documents that come out in November—we would expect—should properly be aligned.

[133] **Simon Thomas:** So, as a committee, we should be able to see that the documents are aligned.

[134] **Dr Williams:** Well, you'd hope so. Yes, absolutely. I'd hope so.

[135] **Simon Thomas:** The final question I had was about a national marine plan because that's one of the things that are identified in the document as missing at the moment. There's some persuasive evidence around some of the successes in the marine environment, but also some of the failures. The document contains the words, 'The marine plan is being developed'. Well, we've heard those words for quite some years now. How important will the marine plan be in implementing or moving towards what the SoNaRR is trying to achieve?

[136] **Dr Williams:** Well, I think it's a key step, isn't it, really?

[137] **Mr Evans:** Yes, it's the implementation tool. We have a common evidence base, so the issues are well known. Of course, it's a big part of the territorial element of Wales—40 per cent of Wales. People think of the sea in terms of the fishing industry, which is actually quite small compared to what we can gain from energy developments, for example, but also the interface with the land and the way that the land impacts on the sea. We're talking a £1 billion—industry and people coming to Wales to enjoy largely our seaside areas. So, the marine plan must address those issues that we've picked up in

SoNaRR.

[138] **Simon Thomas:** So, is it fair to say that you'd expect the marine plan to be part of the Government's response to the challenges you've set out in SoNaRR?

[139] **Mr Evans:** Yes.

[140] **Mark Reckless:** How would the marine plan relate to area statements?

[141] **Dr Williams:** Right, that's another very interesting question. The area statements go out to the 12-nautical-mile line. So it's that boundary. So, area statements will cover the marine environment to the 12-nautical-mile boundary. Depending on what's in the national natural resources policy, in the national policy statement, that will frame how we address them—whether or not there are specific area statements, a marine-specific area statement, which need to be developed—so, one or two—or if the issues between the interface between land and sea mean that it's covered in all of the area statements that have coast. We haven't resolved that yet, and we're not, probably, going to resolve it until we get the NNRP published next year. But they will need to talk to each other.

[142] **Mark Reckless:** Thank you. We've run a little over with this, but I think that was the right way to do it. We've stakeholders coming in next, but I think they'll be as interested as we are in what you've had to say. I'm clear on your relationship with Welsh Government. Just in terms of stakeholders, and to summarise, they haven't had great involvement so far, but you do anticipate that being a very significant part of your iterative work, and to the extent you have information gaps, the democratic process, but also, I assume, NGOs, you'll be interested in their steer and their priorities for filling those information gaps. Is that a fair summary of your—?

[143] **Mr Evans:** I think that's a fair summary. We see the NGOs, as other parts of civil society, as needing to play their full part in this. There are only 1,800 people in NRW and shrinking, so we need to make sure that we're advocating to other organisations and partnering to build consensus. This is what it's all about; it's not looking at sectoral approaches anymore, it's building that consensus about the win-wins.

[144] **Dr Williams:** And, don't go away thinking that it's just about us and the environmental NGOs. It's really important that it's the land management

sector, it's the industry sector, it's the business sector. Where we're going to find the opportunities to address these priorities, these risks, is by having a more inclusive conversation. Us talking to the environmental sector is not going to solve it, because that's what's at the heart of the legislation that you've all agreed, is actually driving a more integrated way of working and a more integrated way of talking to other parties as well. So, it's not just us and the environmental NGOs; it's a whole range of others.

[145] **Mark Reckless:** This committee will discuss and reflect on how we discuss and scrutinise your work in future. But, I think today's session has been a very good way to kick that off. So, Sarah, Mike, thank you both very much.

[146] **Mr Evans:** Diolch yn fawr.

[147] **Mark Reckless:** We'll have a five-minute break.

*Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 10:42 a 10:51.
The meeting adjourned between 10:42 and 10:51.*

Adroddiad ar Sefyllfa Adnoddau Naturiol (SoNaRR) State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR)

[148] **Mark Reckless:** Chloe, Annie, welcome. We're grateful for RSPB and Wildlife Trusts' input. We're grateful for the hospitality of both of your organisations on Friday at the Newport wetlands visit, which I greatly enjoyed. We slightly overran on the previous session. We'll still need to finish this by 11:40, but we thought it was probably useful for us and, I suspect, also for many NGOs, getting the information from NRW. I saw—I think you may have been in the public gallery for at least part of the previous session. At the end, I just summarised in terms of the approach to NGOs. With the report, there doesn't seem to have been a great level of engagement with writing and developing that initial report, although there was with Welsh Government. But, I think the assurance from NRW was that, in future, for the iterative process for future reports and for the area reports, they envisaged a significantly stronger role for NGOs with that. And where there are gaps in the evidence, which was another area we explored, NRW didn't see it as their role specifically to set priorities for closing those information gaps, but were looking to the democratic process, but also, I think, civic society and NGOs for what are your priorities, where you want to develop more of an evidence base and feed that in. I think that's an area where they're looking for input

from groups such as yours.

[149] When our staff spoke with you a week or so ago, I think we'd only had the report for two days at most. So, I think, as Chair, if I may, with my first question, I will offer you the opportunity for perhaps a more substantive response than we might usually have as the initial input, in terms of what you make of the report and what your response to it is for us, before I switch to Members for questions on specific areas.

[150] **Ms Smith:** Thank you, Chair. Thanks very much to the committee for inviting us here today. The first thing we are very keen to say is that we really welcome this report. As NRW said earlier, it's the first report of its kind in the UK. It's the only statutory report on the state of natural resources in the UK, and that sort of governmental commitment, you know, and the commitment of the Assembly through the legislation to having that statutory evidence base is really important. It's obviously the starting point for the kind of journey of environmental governance we're moving into under the new legislation. And, also, as well as welcoming the report in itself, we would like to congratulate NRW on the production of it, because it is a massive report that brings stuff together in a really new way and it was done to a very challenging timescale, I think. And there'll probably be an opportunity to discuss a bit more about process and so forth later on, but we did want to say that.

[151] So, the committee received a briefing on the state of nature report recently, and we're really delighted that the messages from this report are very clear within the SoNaRR report, which gives a sort of broader context looking at the wider suite of natural resources. But there's a clear message within the SoNaRR that the declines in our biodiversity are a clear signal that our ecosystems aren't resilient, and so, we need to put a lot of effort into maintaining and enhancing the resilience of our ecosystems, which is what the sustainable management of natural resources is about. There is a lot of discussion about the role of the report in terms of policy. Hopefully, we'll be able to come on to that in a bit more detail later.

[152] As our colleagues said from NRW, the report is the fundamental evidence base for building the national natural resources policy, which is needed to effectively set out the actions that we need to deliver to build that resilience in our ecosystems. A key measure of whether we do that is going to be whether we are delivering on biodiversity targets. Mr Thomas mentioned the 2020 emissions reduction target and the 2020 Aichi targets

to halt the decline of biodiversity, which are another suite of key targets that the NNRP needs to identify the policies that will enable the whole of the Welsh Government and public sector to move us towards.

[153] Those are the very overarching messages. As I say, we're really pleased about the strong messages coming through chapters 3 and 4 of the report in particular about the declines in our biodiversity and the impact this has on the idea of resilience in terms of our ecosystems. Then, the report looks at why resilient ecosystems are needed to deliver this suite of benefits that we're looking for through delivery of the well-being goals, which is a really important connection to understand, and fundamental to getting natural resources at the heart of the way the Government makes decisions into the future to ensure that sustainable development is happening.

[154] As I say, we feel very positive about the report and the contribution it's going to make. We have some initial concerns, which we have shared with NRW already. One of them is around some of the way the messages come from the report. They've been very careful to not stray into recommending policies, et cetera, although they have identified some opportunities. There is that division of role, through the Welsh Government being the responsible body for setting policy, but Natural Resources Wales being the statutory body that has responsibility for maintaining and enhancing the resilience of our ecosystems. They have the expertise and the powers and the understanding of the toolkit that exists to do that.

[155] We felt that some of the tools that need to be focused on, in order to actually build up that resilience, in order that it can provide the wider suite of benefits that have been discussed, have been somewhat underplayed. We'd really welcome a statement or a recommendation, whatever the right term would be, for example, on the fact that our protected sites are, in large part, in an unfavourable condition or that there are nationally, important protected sites, our SSSIs, and we don't know, in many cases, about their condition. These are some keys priorities for things we need to fix if we're going to get to building that resilience—just as an example.

[156] There are some areas where we kind of don't agree with the way assessments have been made, or we don't think they've perhaps gone as far as they might. Chapter 6 of the report looks at areas where sustainable management is falling short and picks a number of examples. That feels like a fairly limited approach. There's a real resistance, and this came through in NRW's evidence as well, to setting targets and so on. So, perhaps there is a

sort of tension in terms of the policy role and the more advisory role, but, actually, if we don't try and describe what 'good' looks like, how are we going to know what this report is telling us in terms of where we need to get to? So, we have got our international targets for biodiversity, for example, and, actually, trying to get a better handle on what sort of improvements we want to see in biodiversity over the years is something we'd be keen to work with NRW on, looking at future iterations of the report, for example.

11:00

[157] **Mark Reckless:** We may explore some more of these in questioning, but I think that helps the committee at least as an initial response. Chloe, could I just go to you in terms of Wildlife Trusts Wales: are there further strands that you would draw out, or any, perhaps, difference in how you see the report compared to what we've heard from the RSPB?

[158] **Ms Elding:** Well, we have had discussions before this, so we sort of compiled our responses together, and, really, that reflects the main concerns that we have together as well. I think the only couple of other things that I would raise as first impressions, which is quite useful to be aware of, is that we identified that the summary report that they produced does fall a bit short of expectations, really. It doesn't provide you with the input or with the content that you would hope for in a summary document. We would have hoped for a little bit more technical information, and maybe an executive summary or something similar, which isn't available at the moment.

[159] **Mark Reckless:** It's not that; it was so important that there was a chronology and development through the report that we needed to read all of it, but, given the size of us—[*Inaudible.*—]aren't spending all of our time on the field. It is a substantial report and it takes time to get through.

[160] **Ms Elding:** Absolutely, yes. We felt that as well, reading through it, I think. The only other point to raise here is that it would have been good to see a bit of a clearer link between how this is going to feed into the NNRP in terms of policies, and where they are hoping that will come from. We are aware, obviously, that Welsh Government, like Annie has said, is the body that is going to be doing the policy, and that's where it has been divided, so NRW aren't responsible for that. But a little bit of a link or how it would feed in—just some clearer messages, maybe—would have been useful to see in it, I think.

[161] **Mark Reckless:** Thank you. Jayne, would you like to open the questions before I go to Simon?

[162] **Jayne Bryant:** Thank you, Chair. Thanks very much for that. You mentioned that you had some initial concerns around the things that they hadn't elaborated on, and you identified one. Could you tell me a little bit more about your concerns with the report, and also what assessments you say aren't going as far as they could? And you said, 'How do we know what "good" looks like?' Do you think that that can be fed in next time, or have they given you any indication that that would be the case for the future?

[163] **Ms Elding:** I think we can identify what 'good' looks like. Certainly, I think the process for this was lacking in collaboration a little bit. We completely understand that that was due to timescales. We felt that NRW were keen to speak to us all. We had meetings with them early on, and they did ask for information. But they just—because of how quickly they had to produce it—felt that they weren't really able to share drafts with us or work fully in co-production. So, next time, I think, working together, we would be able to come up with something that could see what 'good' looks like. Because that's something that—. As environmental NGOs, this is what we work towards all the time, and there are international targets and things like that that show us what we should be aiming towards. So, in terms of identifying 'good', I think we can do that next time, in terms of sustainable management of natural resources.

[164] I think other things that they're missing out—. You said about concerns in the report; the particular area that we've identified was that they don't—and they do mention why, but they haven't talked about agriculture in their unsustainable land use chapter, in chapter 6. They don't say about the impacts of this land use, and this covers a really large area of Wales. They say that it is really complicated to do, which I completely understand. But I think that that's the role of this sort of report. It needs to be saying that sort of thing. It needs to give us the information. So, we felt that that would have been—. You know, for next time, I think that definitely needs to be included, and we can all work towards that.

[165] **Ms Smith:** I think that this committee's inquiry into sustainable land use, going forward, is an indication of what an important topic that is, especially in current times. Evidence does point—particularly because it is such a widespread land use—to agriculture as the most important historic driver of change to our biodiversity, at any rate. So, it obviously needs to be

part of the policy response, and there are a lot of discussions going on around that, so it feels like a bit of a gap in that regard in the evidence base.

[166] **Jayne Bryant:** Okay. Thank you.

[167] **Mark Reckless:** Thank you. Simon.

[168] If you need it, translation's available on channel 1.

[169] **Simon Thomas:** Yes. I might spare you that pain just for the moment. You are membership organisations, so how do you think that this report can be used to disseminate greater information amongst your members, but also the wider stakeholders that we've heard a lot about this morning? As you quite rightly said, this is useless. It doesn't tell you anything of what SoNaRR does or what it's trying to do or anything. Then, online, trying to read the report, it's delivered as each chapter separately. It's not one PDF, which you could put on iBooks or something and just read through. We're encouraged to read it all and yet it's damn difficult to read it. So, how are we going to try and get this message across to people when it seems to be quite a remote process, which hasn't involved yourselves in the last several months, but has been co-produced with the Welsh Government?

[170] **Ms Smith:** I think that is a really important question for us all. Again, you've seen the 'State of Nature 2016' report recently. Our organisations have worked in partnership with many other organisations in Wales, and across the UK, to compile this evidence base, and also to think about how to feed that information into the public domain and into the political domain, where it needs to be to influence decision and policy making. We'll obviously continue to try to spread that message with our supporters through the routes available to us. I think that both NRW and the Welsh Government, in sort of setting the future direction for policy in regard to management of natural resources, have a responsibility to try to make the most of the newness of this approach. We're trying to move from a place where we kind of forget about the natural environment because it's not something that we can put a sort of market value on, as such, to a place where we understand that it underpins all of the economic benefits and the social benefits that we rely on in normal life. So, I think there's a massive job for the Welsh Government in not only proudly putting that in its messaging publicly, but also working it through the Government structures and departments to really bring about the change that's needed to deliver resilience in the way that it's framed in this legislation. I'm afraid that's not really answered your question,

but I agree it's a challenge.

[171] **Simon Thomas:** To be fair, you've tried to. What I'm trying to get at, I suppose, and another way of asking the question is: putting aside the difficulties of trying to use it as an actual document and understand what—. There isn't an upfront 20-page analysis that the average layperson who's just interested in how the environment has improved in Wales can just read and understand what's going on. So, that's a weakness. But, taken as a whole, the whole document, has it delivered what you had expected the environment Act to do? Okay, you've already talked about land management. That's missing. We know that there are other things missing, I would say, in marine management as well. Has it delivered what you were expecting the environment Act to do, and, particularly, is the fact that it doesn't make any recommendations, or the fact that it doesn't have any good practice examples, or the fact that it doesn't say, 'This is the previous evidence of what we've done and this was the effect on the environment, and therefore you shouldn't do this'—isn't that an extreme weakness in this report?

[172] **Ms Smith:** There is obviously some tension with the report as an evidence base and its role in making recommendations. I think that that is a tension that exists in the definition of roles between NRW and Government in terms of who is responsible for making policy and who's responsible for providing the evidence.

[173] **Simon Thomas:** But aren't NRW supposed to give advice?

[174] **Ms Smith:** Yes. I would agree with that. I think NRW have got masses of expertise, experience and resource, and, you know, they should be the body that the Government is looking to for advice, certainly in how to build up the resilience of our natural environment. I mentioned that we were slightly disappointed that they weren't a bit bolder about saying that biodiversity's declining—to take the example that we're most familiar with, obviously. Biodiversity is declining. Our ecosystems aren't resilient. The tools that we've got to deliver improvements to biodiversity aren't working. We need to invest more in making sure that these deliver. So, I've used protected sites as an example. There's masses of evidence that they provide results for biodiversity but they also provide the wider suite of benefits that we're talking about in terms of ecosystem services and socioeconomic benefits, et cetera. That's kind of a no-brainer for us, but it needs to be prioritised in policy going forward, or else NRW won't be given the direction by the Government to deliver on that.

[175] So, yes, I do agree with you to an extent. I think the summary report does identify opportunities. There are some pushes, so that—without that sort of direction around nature conservation, for example, which is one of NRW's core functions. That feels like a missed opportunity.

[176] **Ms Elding:** I'd just like to add a couple of things, actually. I think, in terms of our expectations of the report, we were actually quite pleased, because we had no idea what it was going to look like initially, having not been able to see a draft. So, we were a bit concerned that it wasn't going to go the full way and say, 'Look, our ecosystems are in a sorry state, we need to do something about this, we're not resilient'. It does say that, which we think is really good—that it's bold enough to be honest about these things.

[177] We all were hoping, I think, for some mechanisms and tools to come out of it—a little bit of an idea of what we should do and what doesn't work. But the area statements process that's now going on is probably—I think they've decided that that's where that's going to come in. So, I've been involved in the workshops that Sarah mentioned earlier, and that process, so far, has been done completely as co-production. Everyone's got an equal say, and that's where the more local, 'How are we going to do this?' is going to come out, I think. So, I think maybe that's why they've shied away here from it; they're going to move it on to the next stage, and the policy will be—'this is what needs to be done', and then go to the area statements of where we're going to be doing it. I suppose that will also be an opportunity to share the messages out, because that will be working with local communities and organisations within those localities to share the evidence base from SoNaRR. So it's a bit further down the line, and it means that obviously it's not maybe getting the priority it should do at the moment, but I think that it will come through eventually, and, once the process is rolling, it might be less of an issue.

[178] **Simon Thomas:** Just on that—

[179] **Mark Reckless:** Just before you ask, can I just say, Chloe: would it be okay if the headphones, when you're not using them, if we could have them on the desk rather than round your neck? We seem to be getting a bit of interference back through the microphone. Apologies. Simon.

[180] **Simon Thomas:** The final question was just on that. What's your understanding of the areas that we're talking about for these area

statements? How will they be constructed and put together?

[181] **Ms Elding:** This was actually a major—I don't want to say 'sticking point', but it was something a lot of people were concerned with at the workshops, like: 'Do we not need to start with what areas are we considering?' But actually they decided that, instead of deciding on the areas now, 'Let's look at the process for putting together an area statement: we'll come up with that, and say how we're going to do it, and then we'll see where that would fit in an area'. So, they said, just as an example, we'll use something like the public service boards. But that's not set in stone, and it all still feels quite flexible, and, if anyone had a major objection, I do feel like it would all be taken into account. So, 'I don't know' at the moment is the honest answer to you. We'll have to see how it all progresses, but I think the process of it so far has been very positive.

[182] **Mark Reckless:** Thank you. We could go to Jenny, if you're ready.

[183] **Jenny Rathbone:** Just as there's a tension between NRW as the experts and Government as the drivers of policy implementation, is there not also a tension within NRW as the experts who have gathered all this evidence and the people who are supposed to be in charge of ensuring that, for example, the water directives are being implemented? Because I didn't get the answer that I was hoping for on this when we were talking to them. Two thirds of all freshwater bodies are not either 'good' or 'better'. This is a key area.

[184] **Ms Smith:** So, do you mean a tension between NRW being responsible for saying how good things are, but then also responsible for delivering—

[185] **Jenny Rathbone:** Yes.

[186] **Ms Smith:** —so, potentially needing to point out where they're failing.

[187] **Jenny Rathbone:** Who else is responsible for ensuring that the water directives are being paid attention to? I would have thought it's NRW, isn't it?

11:15

[188] **Ms Smith:** Yes. So, I think—.

[189] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, they're reporting on their own performance.

[190] **Ms Smith:** Yes. I think it probably is a difficult situation, and I suppose a key mechanism around making sure that that doesn't have an impact on the validity, I suppose, of the report is the fact that, within the Environment (Wales) Act, there's a lot of emphasis on collaboration and engagement in the production of this and also the national policy that comes from it. As we've talked about slightly, that process hasn't happened on this occasion, but then, as Chloe said, we haven't read the report and said, 'But that doesn't reflect the real situation'. That's not, certainly, my area of expertise, but I don't think we're concerned that NRW have painted a prettier picture than is actually out there for the purposes of this report.

[191] **Jenny Rathbone:** No, okay. I'm not decrying the quality of the research itself. They've pulled together the best available information as of today. In terms of both your expertise, worrying about the ecosystems in relation to your organisations, was there anything in the report that surprised you in terms of your areas of expertise?

[192] **Ms Elding:** I think, having had 'State of Nature' just recently published, we were expecting and kind of hoping that they would say that it was not going well. Although they are different reports, they do have common elements. They're looking at biodiversity, which is what we're looking at, and they have said it's a problem, which is what we were expecting. So, I don't think I had any massive surprises going through it.

[193] **Ms Smith:** No, and I think we did really welcome the painting of an honest picture in that regard, and the clear statement that we're losing species and that is a signal that our ecosystems aren't resilient.

[194] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay, so no surprises, but just disappointment that there wasn't a clearer steer in terms of what we've got to do now.

[195] **Ms Smith:** Yes, I think that's an area where we feel there could have been a bit more clarity.

[196] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay, thank you.

[197] **Mark Reckless:** We're seeing NRW again on 2 November for our annual scrutiny session with them, and the committee will think about how our scrutiny evolves in light of SoNaRR and the iterative process around that. Clearly, there are timescale constraints on non-governmental organisations' involvement in the production of this initial report, and that's understood,

and you'd like more input in future. But in terms of the relationship between NRW and Welsh Government, how much do you think there are problems with that? Is it proper or inevitable that you have co-production and close working between NRW and Welsh Government, albeit NRW says it has ownership of the report and the area reports and takes responsibility, or is it a concern, the closeness of that relationship in terms of appropriate accountability?

[198] **Ms Elding:** I would say that it's a good thing, as long as other people are involved as well. It's only something that we would be concerned about when it is done just between the two of them. You want to be transparent about these things, and we would want to be involved in that, really. So, for this report, that's the best they could do in the time frame, and we completely understand that, but I think in future, if that was the way they were going to do all of their processes, then we would have concerns about it. Is that fair?

[199] **Ms Smith:** Yes, that's what I was going to say.

[200] **Mark Reckless:** This committee has a scrutiny role, but isn't there also at least a potential problem, even if NGOs are also involved, if you have NRW working hand in glove with Welsh Government—and, yes, it involves NGOs and there's a common view of what needs to be done? Don't you see the role of NRW as more chasing, pressing and being a step away as a critical friend of Welsh Government, rather than there being a single process and nexus involving NRW, Welsh Government and NGOs? Don't we need a clearer definition of roles?

[201] **Ms Smith:** I think there is a really important division of roles that comes into NRW's remit, much more broadly than the specifics of this report. So, just as an example, NRW is a body that provides advice to Government on nature conservation issues, as an example, to stick with what we're most familiar with. And it's critically important that that valuable role is not dented by a way of working that precludes criticism or public disagreement, because it is the Government's responsibility to take those decisions.

[202] The Government is responsible, as the broader public sector, for delivering sustainable development, and NRW needs to provide advice about the various aspects of that, and how they may be impacted by specific decisions. So, I think, as long as you can see a separation between the advice NRW is giving and the decisions Government is making, then that's a real issue of fundamental importance. And we saw that, for example, on a recent

decision that was taken by the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs on Greenland white-fronted geese, which went against NRW's advice. We've seen NRW objecting to the Government's current proposals for the M4 relief road. So, as long as NRW is visibly doing that, and not squashed from doing that, that's a really important aspect of that relationship.

[203] **Ms Elding:** And I think I'd just add as well, going back to these workshops, these area statement workshops, Welsh Government and NRW are at the table, but there's also—. I think it's quite important to include both, because they have different views on how things work, and you can get different departments from both as well. It wasn't just NGOs that were also there: they had private landowners, representatives of the farmers unions were invited, the healthcare organisations were invited. So, it's not just like we've got to check on them, but that it's all transparent and everybody's involved in it together. I think to exclude, or to try and separate out, would not have the same benefits as including them. I think it would be better to include them in the same way as everybody else.

[204] **Mark Reckless:** Thank you. Sian.

[205] **Sian Gwenllïan:** Wrth symud ymlaen o'r adroddiad rŵan i'r polisi, sydd yn amlwg angen digwydd rŵan ar sail y dystiolaeth yn yr adroddiad, a'r targedau, beth yw'ch dealltwriaeth chi o faint fydd mewnbwn mudiadau fel chi i'r polisi ac i'r targedau hefyd? Ac ai eich dealltwriaeth chi yw y bydd lefel cenedlaethol o dargedau, ac wedyn lefel ardal o dargedau hefyd? Mae'n bwysig iawn ein bod ni'n cael hwn yn iawn rŵan, onid ydy, a dylai'r ffocws symud yn reit gyflym, yn fy marn i beth bynnag, at greu y targedau cywir. Efallai y gallech roi rywfaint o'ch syniadau chi o gwmpas hynny i'n helpu ni i ddeall y maes yna.

Sian Gwenllïan: In moving forward from this report to the policy, which clearly needs to happen on the basis of the evidence in this report, and the targets, what is your understanding of the input of organisations such as yours to the policy and those targets too? And do you think there will be a national level of targets, and then an area level of targets also? It's very important that we get this right, isn't it, and the focus should move quickly, I believe, to creating the correct targets? Perhaps you could give me some of your ideas around that area to help us understand that.

[206] **Ms Smith:** It's probably not true to say that we've got a massive expectation for targets to be set in a national policy, although we don't know

that at the moment. I think the issue is really about being able to set a level of ambition for making things better, which we feel that currently the report shies away from. So, there's a statement in one of the chapters that you can't really set targets for the future of ecosystems because everything changes. You know, that's true to a point, but you can look at the fact that your biodiversity is on that trajectory, and aim for the future where it's on another trajectory. So, describing the changes we want to see in that regard I think is a really important part of this.

[207] There's one really important connection, which is with the national indicators that have been established under the well-being of future generations Act. So, two of those specifically relate to the 'resilient Wales' goals, and one of them is about the biodiverse natural environment and is based on the species. There's potential for that to be, basically, an indicator based on priority species and how they're changing over time, hopefully, in terms of abundance and distribution, but work is still going on on that. That would give us a real signal of whether changes in management are helping to address biodiversity decline.

[208] The Government has an opportunity, fairly soon—I'm not sure quite what the timetable is for it—to identify milestones against those national indicators, so that would be a key opportunity for setting a target of that sort. There may be other opportunities within the national indicators. For example, there is an indicator as well on habitat extent, so that would be a way of looking at how we expect the extent of semi-natural habitats to change and what progress we want to see, so that there's another process for setting that sort of target.

[209] **Sian Gwenllian:** In fact, it's a piece of work that we as a committee should be looking at, maybe—you know, what the actual indicators are going to be and follow those through, or indicators or outcomes. I'm talking in broad terms now; I'm not actually a big fan of specific national performance indicators, but the outcomes—you know, the improvement that we want to see in the various areas, they need to be there, don't they, I think? We as a scrutiny committee should be following that through.

[210] **Ms Smith:** Yes, and Jenny will remember, during the scrutiny of the environment Bill, there was a lot of discussion around creating targets for biodiversity, and the Government's response was, very clearly, that the framework of national indicators and milestones would be the place to do that. So, we'd certainly welcome the committee's engagement with those

issues.

[211] **Mark Reckless:** The report clearly links through to the seven well-being goals in a way I think we'll find useful, but I just wonder if there are some risks in that. At one point, SoNaRR sets out the concept of ecosystem services, and it defines ecosystem services as benefits provided by ecosystems that contribute to making life both possible and worth living. I just wonder whether the way it sets that out, the 'worth living' in particular, sets ecosystem services as things that benefit humans rather than also looking at how ecosystems benefit all the other life that are part of that ecosystem. Isn't there a danger they're almost taking that as endogenous as part of the ecosystem systems, and only looking at it in a way that it's there to help humans and make our life worth living. It's an important part of it, but it's not all of it, is it?

[212] **Ms Elding:** I think we're obviously big advocates of biodiversity. It's got intrinsic value just for itself and we should be promoting that. It does mention in the report—. It does provide the values of biodiversity in and of itself—nature is good and we need to try and promote it. But I think there is also this link, all the way through, to people: we can only do it if people like it, which is something I feel that, throughout the sector, it's been moving more towards, because that's a good way of justifying it, basically. So, I think, in some ways, it's good to say that, because then you can get people on board and it makes it a lot easier to put these things through and to get it into their understanding. But, at the same time, I think the report does actually do quite a good job of saying that resilience and biodiversity are intrinsically important on their own.

[213] **Ms Smith:** Recognising the intrinsic value of natural resources and ecosystems is among the principles of sustainable management of natural resources, which are part of NRW's statutory purpose, which aren't discussed in any way in the report, which is, perhaps, a bit of an omission as well. But I think I'd echo what Chloe said and really just emphasise that sustainable management of natural resources has the objective of maintaining and enhancing the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide. So, the ecosystems themselves are recognised as a fundamental basis for delivering all of those benefits.

11:30

That includes managing the way we use them, but also taking proactive

actions and stopping bad things from happening. So, the biggest danger, in that discussion of ecosystem services, is that all the focus goes on the opportunities and the potential benefits as opposed to the actions needed to build up that resilience in the first place, in order to have this natural capital there, if you like, from which the benefits flow. So, I think it's something we've all got to have an awareness of, but the fact of making those clear links between the health of ecosystems and our own prospects in life and so forth, is a really important process in itself.

[214] **Mark Reckless:** Finally, in speaking to your organisations and many others in the voluntary sector, as well as some colleagues in the Assembly, I've repeatedly heard 'environment Act', 'well-being of future generations Act', 'groundbreaking and really good legislation', but then a sort of scepticism as to how much they would genuinely be followed through and what the product would be, coming from Welsh Government and its associated bodies, to implement the Act. Given that support in principle, but scepticism about the process and what would happen next, has SoNaRR met, exceeded or fallen short of your expectations?

[215] **Ms Smith:** I think it's probably exceeded them in terms of a starting point, given the timescale and the challenges in getting it together. We should emphasise again that we really welcome the report and it's a great piece of work in itself.

[216] **Ms Elding:** Yes. It has been recognised by NRW that the process maybe wasn't perfect this time, and they've said to us that it will be improved in future and they've been quite clear that it was not ideal; it's not how they would've preferred to work it, as well.

[217] **Ms Smith:** I think that's very polite and the process wasn't there, really, this time. Mike Evans described the process of webinars and things, and we saw a version of the report with the word 'draft' written across it about a week before it was formally published, but that wasn't an invitation to provide comments to make changes or suggest improvements in any way. It was more of an absolutely fair forewarned-is-forearmed approach, wasn't it? So, there hasn't been the engagement process around the production of this report that is required in the Act and that we would expect to see for the next report, starting from now, really.

[218] Those principles of engagement and collaboration do also apply in relation to the national natural resources policy that the Welsh Government is

responsible for producing, and which has also got a very short timetable before publication, because it's due out in March, but, again, the engagement and collaboration, so far, has not been as evident as we would want. In part, that is due to the fact that a lot of the focus of stakeholders around natural resources and, in particular, sustainable land management, has been somewhat diverted because of discussions around future policy outside of the European Union and outside, for example, the common agricultural policy. Hopefully, those discussions will have created some very valuable input into the national natural resources policy, but that policy is much wider and that process has fallen victim, I think, to shifting capacity. So, that process hasn't been there.

[219] May I say one more thing before we finish?

[220] **Mark Reckless:** Of course.

[221] **Ms Smith:** Simon talked about the marine environment as a gap, and I did want to make that point as well, actually. So, thank you for reminding me. There's a bit more in the fullness of the report, but, in this summary document, the focus is very much on the coastal interface between land and sea, and that's really not an adequate approach to the marine environment in terms of what we need to come through the national policy.

[222] So, there is a framework for planning in the marine environment, and the marine plan is being developed at the moment, but that's not based around the sustainable management and natural resources, i.e. the resilience of ecosystems. It's a development planning process and, although sustainable development is meant to be at the heart of it, the environment actually moves on the way we understand what that means in terms of managing natural resources. So, it's absolutely vital that the NNRP has a role in shaping marine management, leading on to the positive benefits that area statements can potentially provide, and having an influence, whether on the delivery of nature conservation tools, on the planet's health or on the way we get stakeholders together to deliver an ecosystem approach to management et cetera. That feels like it needs more emphasis than it has certainly in the summary document.

[223] **Mark Reckless:** Annie and Chloe, I thank you and your organisations very, very much for your input today.

[224] **Ms Elding:** Thank you.

[225] **Ms Smith:** Thank you very much for having us.

11:36

**Cynnig o dan Reol Sefydlog 17.42 i Benderfynu Gwahardd y Cyhoedd
ar gyfer Eitemau 5 a 6 o'r Cyfarfod
Motion under Standing Order 17.42 to Resolve to Exclude the Public
from Items 5 and 6**

Cynnig:

Motion:

*bod y pwyllgor yn penderfynu that the committee resolves to
gwahardd y cyhoedd ar gyfer eitemau exclude the public from items 5 and
5 a 6 o'r cyfarfod yn unol â Rheol 6 in accordance with Standing Order
Sefydlog 17.42(ix). 17.42(ix).*

Cynigiwyd y cynnig.

Motion moved.

[226] **Mark Reckless:** Following those two panels, I'd now like to move a motion under Standing Order 17.42 to resolve to exclude the public—although I don't think I can see anyone in the public gallery—and for us to move into private session. Is that agreed? Thank you.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 11:36.

The meeting ended at 11:36.