



Mike Hedges AM  
Chair of Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee  
National Assembly for Wales  
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Dear Mike

### **Natural Resources Policy Stakeholder Workshop**

Thank you for your letter of the 6 November 2017 on the Natural Resources Policy, in which you set out recommendations from your stakeholder workshop to inform the process of implementation and to suggest improvements for the next iteration of the policy. For ease of reference I have responded using the headings in your letter.

### **Purpose and alignment with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016**

As the second key product of the Environment (Wales) Act, the role of the Natural Resources Policy (NRP) is to set out the over arching risks and opportunities facing Wales' natural resources and identify the key priorities we will take forward, as a Government, in order to address them. In developing this first statutory NRP, we have identified three national priorities, namely delivering nature based solutions; increasing resource efficiency and renewable energy; and taking a place based approach. The priorities have been developed to both tackle the challenges facing Wales' natural resources, realise the significant opportunities and contribute across the well-being goals.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

In taking forward the implementation of the NRP, the policies identified within the document are fundamental to its delivery and within my Department, work is already underway within the individual policy areas, for example, the *Water Strategy for Wales* sets out how it supports the sustainable management of natural resources and the well-being goals in delivering the strategy's vision. The waste strategy for Wales, *Towards Zero Waste*, has already made significant progress towards increasing resource efficiency. Building on the significant success in recycling, it will be updated in 2018 with the development of a route map for a more resource efficient economy. The *Wales National Marine Plan* has been developed to support the implementation of the NRP and more broadly the implementation of the Environment Act and the new *National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management* will take forward the delivery of natural flood management and coastal adaptation.

In terms of economic, environmental, social and cultural considerations, the Natural Resources Policy is an important component in the delivery of the overarching framework in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. In addition, the Environment (Wales) Act contains the key principles for the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources that were developed to align with and apply the five ways of working in the Well-being of Future Generations Act in the context of managing Wales' natural resources. Both Acts, therefore, drive an approach that ensures the contribution across all four areas is fully considered, however the emphasis is on the identification of the action that can drive the greatest 'win-win' benefits. The priorities set out within the NRP are those that have the potential to contribute to our sustainable economic, social, cultural and environmental development. With guidance for the Well-being of Future Generations Act already in place, we are working on key areas of guidance under the Environment (Wales) Act which will supplement the explanatory information that we have already produced on the Act. This includes guidance for public authorities on the Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty and for Natural Resources Wales on the implementation of part 1 of the Act.

## **Implementation of the NRP**

Collaboration is at the heart of the principles within the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Environment Act. As set out above, work is already well underway to ensure the key policies across my portfolio are taking forward the delivery of the NRP. In doing so, reflecting the requirements of the Acts, collaboration with stakeholders is a key part of the work in each policy area. Furthermore, in producing the Natural Resources Policy, its development was informed by engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, on a sector and cross sectoral basis, alongside a more traditional public consultation. The *Environment, Planning and Rural Affairs Department's Brexit Roundtable* played a key role in this process, underlining the important read across to Brexit and its implications for the management of our natural resources. Going forward, the Roundtable will continue to play an important role in informing its delivery, in particular through the working groups set up on *Trade and Supply Chains; Evidence and Scenarios; Land Management; Seas and Coast; Air and Climate; People and Communities; and, Legislation and Regulation*.

Area statements, which will be developed by Natural Resources Wales, will provide a key source of evidence in relation to the risks and opportunities associated with the natural resources in a given area. In doing so, they will look at the opportunities to take forward the national priorities whilst also looking at the local issues within the area. This will provide a vital evidence base to both guide action by Natural Resources Wales and inform Public Service Boards, in particular in the development and implementation of Well-being Plans and Local Development Plans. In this way, Area Statements play a vital role in both the implementation of the Natural Resources Policy and the wider delivery of the Environment Act and Well-being of Future Generations Act.

In relation to monitoring and evaluation, against the role of the NRP in setting out the overarching risks and opportunities facing Wales' natural resources, we are developing an overarching framework for its monitoring and evaluation which will be informed by the sustainability appraisal undertaken. The appraisal drew on the evidence in the State of Natural Resources Report and appraised the contribution of the NRP across the well-being goals. In relation to the delivery of the priorities by the policies set out in the NRP, the monitoring and evaluation of those individual policies will play a vital role. For example in relation to the marine area, this will be through the Welsh National Marine Plan which will monitor and report on the effectiveness of its delivery. In relation to land management, the monitoring and modelling programme for Environment and Rural Affairs will provide an evidence base to inform the design and monitor the impact of Glastir and subsequent programmes' delivery of the Natural Resources Policy.

### **Alignment with domestic and international policies**

Clear alignment to international obligations was at the heart of the approach to the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Environment (Wales) Act. The legislative framework that they put in place is founded on the international obligations enshrined within the three key UN frameworks on sustainable development, climate change and biodiversity. For example, Part 1 of the Environment Act legislates for the principles of the ecosystem approach adopted by the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The implementation of the Environment (Wales) Act and the Natural Resources Policy directly contribute to the Aichi Targets set out in the CBD's strategic plan. The priorities within the Natural Resources Policy have also been developed to tackle the underlying drivers and pressures affecting biodiversity and ecosystems as required by the Convention on Biological Diversity. The Natural Resource Policy's monitoring and evaluation framework will therefore include reporting against the CBD Aichi Targets.

As has come through our engagement with the Roundtable very clearly, the Environment and Well-being of Future Generations Acts provide a strong foundation for the management of Wales' natural resources that will not change as a result of Brexit. The engagement with the Roundtable to inform the development of the Natural Resources Policy has also further underlined the importance of Wales' natural resources to defining Wales' new place in the world. Going forward, the Roundtable working groups, and sector engagement, will play a vital role in informing the implementation of the policy, including emerging new policy, legal and financial frameworks as we move forward on the UK's withdrawal from the European Union.

In relation to Planning Policy Wales, a key part of the work to review the policy is to ensure it reflects the goals and ways of working enshrined in the Well-being of Future Generations Act and is aligned with the Natural Resources Policy. For example, Flood and Planning officials are working closely together to ensure that policies relating to development and flood risk are fully aligned in the relevant sections of the flood strategy, Planning Policy Wales and associated planning guidance (in TAN15). The revised policy will be issued for public consultation early next year.

### **Use of evidence**

The State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) was a key source of evidence that informed the development of the challenges, opportunities and priorities sets out by the Natural Resources Policy. In addition, an independent sustainability appraisal of the Natural Resources Policy was undertaken where the assessment criteria for the appraisal were informed by the evidence within SoNaRR. In addition, in taking forward the implementation of the NRP, SoNaRR will be a key source of evidence for the delivery of the priorities through the individual policies.

Going forward, my department is working closely with Natural Resources Wales, through the joint Strategic Evidence Group, however any deficiencies in the evidence to be addressed for next iteration of SoNaRR is a matter for Natural Resources Wales.

### **Timescales and engagement**

Part 1 of the Environment Act sets out a clear, iterative cycle linked to the Assembly's election cycle. This comprises the requirement for NRW to produce the national evidence base in SoNaRR and the Welsh Government to produce the NRP, which in turn links to key requirements within the Well-being of Future Generations Act. Given that we are only partially into the first iteration of this cycle and there is a clear timescale for the production of the next version of SoNaRR, I have no plans to assess the appropriateness of its timing and frequency.

The key interface between the NRP and the role of the Public Service Boards in developing the Well-being Plans is set within the Environment and Well-being of Future Generations Acts. In particular, the area statements being developed by Natural Resources Wales, play a key role in providing an evidence base, including on the implementation of the NRP priorities, to inform the development and implementation of Well-being Plans. Natural Resources Wales are also statutory members of Public Service Boards and the Welsh Government is represented by a Senior Official at the Public Service Boards.

I welcome the Committee's interest in the implementation of the NRP and agree that it is an important opportunity for Wales. Not only in terms of improving the management of Wales' natural resources, but also in terms of the benefits that the NRP priorities can deliver across the Well-being Goals and in support of our delivery of *Prosperity for All*.

Yours sincerely



**Lesley Griffiths AC/AM**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Ynni, Cynllunio a Materion Gwledig  
Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs

