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Environment and Sustainability Committee Inquiry into Sustainable Land Management Response from Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

Committee Clerk
Environment and Sustainability Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay,
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By Email: es.comm@wales.gov.uk

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Inquiry into Sustainable Land Management Response by Brecon Beacons National Park Authority

Thank you for providing an opportunity for the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority to give evidence to this inquiry. As National Parks Wales, the three National Park Authorities in Wales have submitted a joint response to this inquiry. This Authority submits additional evidence herewith, which compliments that provided already by National Parks Wales.

1. What do we want sustainable land management in Wales to look like and what outcomes do we want to deliver in the short, medium and longer term

In the short to medium term, we recommend that great weight be given to implementing a national biodiversity recovery plan in order to bring Wales as close as possible to meeting the European Union's 2020 target to halt the loss of biodiversity; and in order to ensure that Wales will definitely meet the



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2050 EU target to have protected, valued and appropriately restored Wales' biodiversity.

Given the close fit between the purposes of protected landscapes, their management principles and the emerging principles of the ecosystem approach, we believe that short, medium and longer term benefits can be achieved by providing National Parks and their Authorities with the right tools for the job. We recommend that measures be developed explicitly for Wales' designated landscapes in the Rural Development Plan for Wales, future agri-environment schemes and national policies (e.g., forestry, planning etc). This would be consistent with objectives in the draft National Parks Policy Statement "Taking the Long View," which envisages National Parks as "*areas where new solutions to environmental and rural issues are tried, tested and shared,*" (paragraph 12) and "*articulating visions of rural development*" (paragraph 30).

2. What are the barriers preventing us from delivering these outcomes now and how do we overcome these challenges?

Solutions to overcoming these challenges include growing the "sustainable land management workforce" to get the job done. Wales needs more people employed directly in this field and, in order to meet EU biodiversity conservation targets in 2020 and 2050, more people employed and volunteering directly in biodiversity conservation.

The public scepticism about human-induced climate change must be addressed in order to incentivise people better to understand their relationship with their local environment.

Better alignment of policy advice and decisions would avoid the situation whereby the environmental regulators have to mitigate the environmentally damaging fallout caused by other public policy decisions and actions. The solution is to provide good practice guidance that ensures that environmental damage is avoided.



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3. What are the main policy drivers and how can these be shaped to overcome these challenges?

All relevant national, regional and local policy can be appropriately shaped by ensuring that they are correctly and effectively assessed through Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitat Regulations Assessment. These assessments can be adjusted in order to take into account the challenges identified.

The Committee would also welcome views on these questions too:

How we develop a baseline from which to measure progress? This includes how we collect, coordinate and use data to support sustainable land management in Wales.

Wales, together with the rest of Britain, already has a long tradition of collecting and co-ordinating data but, with the exception of designated sites, is less good at using it. Conservation has always relied on volunteer recorders and naturalists and Wales needs to invest effort to ensure this legacy continues, by supporting measures to recruit new recorders and naturalists. There is a national shortage of these sorts of skills. There are opportunities here to grow the sustainable land management workforce.

Alongside national monitoring schemes such as the Countryside Survey and the Environmental Change Network (<http://www.ecn.ac.uk/>) run by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Wales could capitalise on these by developing land-based research stations, for example by sponsoring farmers or landowners to permit this research on their land. The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority is at the very earliest stages of considering a monitoring network for this National Park.

There is a wide range of national surveys governed by the specialist organisations that run them (British Trust for Ornithology, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, The Woodland Trust, Bat Conservation Trust, Bug Life, Botanical Society for the British Isles,



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Butterfly Conservation, Plantlife, etc). We recommend that you figure out a way of co-ordinating and extrapolating information from these for Wales as a whole and for each unitary authority boundary.

These organisations also offer their own training courses and each of them boasts their own roster of volunteers; use them.

It would be extremely helpful to other stakeholders if Natural Resources Wales was to release the digitised Habitats of Wales. This is the most comprehensive baseline of broad habitat types yet developed.

The Brecon Beacons NPA is commencing discussions with the British Geological Survey on what it would take to extend the Tellus Programme (<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/gsni/tellus/overview/>) to cover the Brecon Beacons National Park, as well as other areas of South Wales.

The Brecon Beacons NPA has developed a Research Prospectus, with which it aims to develop research partnerships with universities, to help provide answers to a range of environmental questions. One research partnership has already been established.

What incentives we can provide land managers to develop sustainable practices, and in particular, any new sources of investment we can attract to support these?

The Brecon Beacons NPA has previously provided a paper outlining how the Welsh Government might re-design agri-environment schemes to provide incubator capital for farm-based environmental management plans designed to improve the market value of farm produce alongside better environmental outcomes; as opposed to one off payments for ecosystem services. The PES approach has limited likelihood of long term sustainable outcomes because it relies on finite sums of money, which are always under review during modulation between financial pillars; and for which there will be less cash available during future iterations of CAP as the EU expands.



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An investment scheme on the other hand would be able to grow the incubator investment, achieve added value and through this recoup the investment for re-investing elsewhere. This approach would stimulate diverse original thinking amongst farm businesses (as opposed to the prescriptive approach of agri-environment schemes); it would attract private sector interest (business advice as well as additional investment to meet corporate social responsibility portfolios); it would avoid agri-environment payments functioning as income (which risks creating a raft of agri-environment-dependent farm businesses to follow on the heels of subsidy-dependent farm businesses); it would provide a market incentive to farmers to learn more; it would help to broaden the public support for farming and farm-based environmental goods and services; and it would help to create and expand a farm-based market where the success of the farm business is based upon environmental outcomes as much as food quality. This would also create space for new entrants with new ideas. Wales and Britain will need more, new farmers in order to help build resilient future.

The most appropriate geographical scale(s) at which we should be delivering sustainable land management policies and practices in Wales?

The existing network of designated sites and landscapes and seascapes (National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Natura 2000 Network, Ramsar Sites, Biosphere Reserves, Marine Reserves, Geoparks, Sites of Special Scientific Interest), alongside other nature reserves owned and managed by non-governmental organisations, provide Wales with a network with which to develop a national biodiversity restoration plan. This can work by ensuring that this network is provided with opportunities to expand (in an ecologically coherent way) and that it is supported and provides support in turn, by more biodiversity conservation in the wider countryside; the latter approach has been



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articulated widely and repeatedly over the past thirty years and it is still true today.

Finally, as an appendix we provide examples of sustainable land management underway in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Yours sincerely,

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Conservation Manager
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Appendix: Examples of sustainable land management underway in the Brecon Beacons National Park

Partnerships:-

- Meithrin Mynydd Group (chaired by the Authority, with representatives from the Mynydd Du Graziers and conservation organisations affecting Mynydd Du SSSI)
- Waterfall Country Management Plan partnership (affecting Coedydd Nedd a Mellte SAC and environs)
- Waun Figen Felen Management Forum (bog restoration partnership affecting an area of bog on Mynydd Du SSSI)
- Cantref Catchment Management Steering Group (led by Dwr Cymru Welsh Water, a catchment management project to solve water discolouration in Cantref Reservoir)
- Partnership with Manor Penderyn Commoners Association to obtain Welsh Government consent for the retention of a fence separating two commons, enabling sustainable land mgmt. to be developed
- Llangors Lake Advisory Group (all stakeholders and landowners affecting this SAC lake)
- Wye and Usk Foundation fisheries restoration projects
<http://www.wyeuskfoundation.org/>, including the ISAC Project restoring the River Irfon (<http://www.wyeuskfoundation.org/isac/>)

Direct work:-

- High standards of planning conditions for planning permissions affecting biodiversity
- The Woollenline Project on Pen Trumau (Black Mountains SSSI)
<http://woollenline.wordpress.com/>



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- Service level agreements and now staff secondment to The Green Valleys CIC, generating a range of community-led biodiversity and local woodland group initiatives
- Completion of hedging, ditching and scrub clearance works on terrestrial habitats within Llangors Lake SAC
- Annual heather and grass burning on Authority-owned land (Black Mountains SSSI, Mynydd Du SSSI and Mynydd Myddfai)
- Service level agreement with Biodiversity Information Service for Powys and the Brecon Beacons National Park
- Completion of a biodiversity audit of the four key settlements in the Park under the Planning Improvement Fund
- Partnership with graziers of four commons on the Mynydd Du complex to assist them to develop their Glastir advanced schemes; also providing advice to graziers on Mynydd Illtyd and Cefn Llechid
- Other graziers associations in the Park to have submitted expressions of interest include Brecon Beacons, Mynydd Llangynidr, Mynydd Llangattock and Buckland Manor
- Moving closer towards the designation of Talybont Reservoir LNR
- Dwr Cymru Welsh Water submitted a Talybont Reservoir catchment management project to the Resilient Ecosystems Fund
- Brecon Beacons NPA submitted an evidence-gathering and partnership-building project proposal for the Black Mountains SSSI to the Resilient Ecosystems Fund
- Better Woodlands for Wales grant-assisted projects completed at four woodland sites, most notably Carreg Cennen SSSI
- Rights of Way Improvement Plan and capital budget projects completed on time and to budget



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- Successful year with the Black Mountains Volunteers and Waterfall Country Volunteers, both groups growing
- Completion of the Mellte lower plants survey to extend the Gorge Walking Code of Conduct for this gorge
- Provision of training and early career development for new entrants into countryside management; most recently this Authority has received Heritage Lottery Funding under the Future Skills Future People theme. This will provide countryside management training for six trainee wardens each year for the next three years, commencing 2014
- This list does not include all the habitat and species management undertaken by Natural Resources Wales on National Nature Reserves; the Section 15 management agreements on Sites of Special Scientific Interest; the habitat and species management work undertaken by The National Trust Wales and Brecknock Wildlife Trust on their reserves; and the work undertaken by farmers and other landowners, with or without agri-environment schemes.
- Sustainable land management can and is also being achieved through the planning system. The Brecon Beacons NPA uses its Planning Obligations Strategy to provide management measures that are relevant to the development but which cannot be achieved through planning conditions. Additionally, through its draft Local Development Plan, the Brecon Beacons NPA has used an environmental constraints model to develop planning policies; the LDP is nearing its final stages of inspectorate scrutiny. Once adopted, the Authority will commence a programme to work in partnership with communities to develop community plans. These have the potential to evolve into local land management plans.



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