

Putting Wales on a Path to Nature Recovery: Summary Briefing

The case for nature recovery targets in Wales | June 2021

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Wales' existing nature recovery framework has failed to halt the loss of biodiversity over the last decade. The new Welsh Government should strengthen the framework by building on international best practice to create new, legally binding biodiversity targets with a cross-Government duty to deliver them.

KEY FINDINGS

- The setting of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework at the CBD COP15 this year is a critical moment for Wales to commit to its own ambitious and binding targets for domestic action.
- In the absence of a legal framework, previous biodiversity targets have not been met. Making targets legally-binding and embedding them across Government is crucial for success.
- In policy areas and places where clear and binding targets have been introduced, they have been a catalyst for more effective action and progress.
- Targets must reflect Wales' responsibilities for international nature recovery efforts and address its global ecological footprint.
- There is business sector support and a clear financial case for urgent investment in nature recovery, and public support in Wales for nature recovery targets.

REPORT SUMMARY

Nature is under threat, with the recently published State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) for Wales stating that "the overall trend is one of serious decline, reflecting the global situation and internationally recognised nature emergency". Wales has a forward-looking legislative framework to encourage environmental improvements, but it has to date lacked the formal architecture to set realistic and stretching binding targets to halt the loss of biodiversity, and plan for recovering what has been lost. The benefits of adopting biodiversity targets for Wales have been acknowledged by the CCERA Committee, with a recommendation in its Fifth Senedd Legacy Report that the next Welsh

Government "should introduce targets to arrest the decline and restore biodiversity".

Governments across the world have adopted targets to achieve key policy objectives in many areas of economic, social and environmental endeavour. The nature emergency requires the same focus. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP 15 is being held later in 2021 to review progress against the objectives of the CBD, with signatory states set to negotiate and agree new decadal targets to achieve nature recovery. Now is the time for Wales to refresh and energise its actions for nature and put in place the architecture to bring about recovery.

Nature targets would allow Wales to evidence its progress and provide a means of harnessing the energy, innovation and efforts of all sectors and stakeholders in making Wales a better place for nature and people.

By considering the development of biodiversity targets both internationally and domestically over the previous two decades, and the success of targets in other sectors of public policy, this report considers what lessons can be drawn to aid the development of a robust set of targets to drive nature's recovery in Wales.

- In New Zealand and the Netherlands, targets set by governments are driving significant resources into large scale habitat creation and restoration, resulting in more resilient landscapes and creating new jobs.

- Here in Wales, ambitious targets have driven up recycling rates so that Wales is now first in the UK, second in Europe and third in the world for household waste recycling rates. Legal climate change targets with regular reviews and monitoring are driving cross-Government decarbonisation plans.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

The key recommendation of the report is for an ambitious, legally binding set of long term and interim targets to secure nature recovery in Wales to be introduced by 2022, covering terrestrial, freshwater and marine environments.

Analysis of biodiversity targets from across the UK and internationally suggests that a successful nature recovery framework must include ecological ends targets on species abundance, distribution and extinction risk, and habitat quality and extent. 'Means' targets, to ensure these ecological goals are met, should include resilient nature recovery networks to improve connectivity; nature-based solutions to climate change that secure benefits for species and habitats; and action on mainstreaming nature recovery targets across Government portfolios.

The legal framework should include:

- An overarching new duty on the Welsh Government to embed and integrate nature recovery and environmental protection across Government, expressing the key objectives to be achieved by 2050.
- A duty to halt and begin to reverse the loss of biodiversity by 2030 and achieve recovery by 2050.
- A duty to set long term and interim targets via a framework informed by independent expertise and scientific advice, aligned with those set in post-2020 CBD framework to 2030.
- Secondary legislation establishing a comprehensive plan with appropriate SMART targets, subject to regular review and reporting, with scrutiny at a high level, to maintain progress.
- A legal requirement on Ministers to ensure the targets are met, to help break out of the cycle of 'too little too late' that has dogged biodiversity delivery to date.

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