Cyswllt Amgylchedd Cymru | Wales Environment Link

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Protecting 30% of Wales' land and sea to help ensure nature's recovery

Wales Environment Link (WEL) welcomes the support of the Welsh Government for the target of protecting 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030 ('30x30'), as part of international efforts to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity.

Why is this important?

Addressing the nature and climate emergency and restoring a healthy natural environment for future generations is a crucial challenge for the next decade.

While global targets have been set before to stop and reverse the decline of nature, the 5th Global Biodiversity Outlook published earlier this year concluded that the UK – and the rest of the world – has failed to deliver on these targets. In Wales, the State of Natural Resources Report 2020 (SoNaRR) found that the overall trend for biodiversity in Wales is one of serious decline, in line with global trends. At sea, Wales has failed to achieve Good Environmental Status[1] for seas by 31 December 2020, as required under the Marine Strategy Regulations (2010)[2].

How should the 30% target be defined on land and what should count towards it?

With the wider landscape designations – National Parks and AONBs[3]– included, 29.4% of land in Wales is reported as being within protected areas. However, when you exclude those parts of National Parks and AONBs that are not covered by a specific nature conservation designation, **the percentage of land protected for nature in Wales currently stands at just 10.6%**[4]. A baseline evaluation recently published by NRW reported that, due to limited monitoring, it is only possible to report on the condition of around half of protected site features, and only 20% of protected site features are considered to be in favourable condition. This suggests that, in fact, much less than 10.6% of our land is effectively protected and managed for nature.

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Although National Parks and AONBs have the potential to contribute significantly to the 30% target, only those parts of them that meet the criteria of long-term protection, positive management for nature and good condition should count.

WEL believes that to contribute towards a '30% by 2030' target, areas must meet two conditions:

1. Protected for nature in the long-term: the entirety of the 30% should be given long-term protection for nature and long-term protection against damage such as pollution, over-exploitation, invasive non-native species, habitat destruction and development.
2. Well managed and in good or recovering condition: It must all be regularly monitored at appropriate intervals as part of a programme of active management and investment.

This 30% target can be met by:
Enhancing the protection, monitoring management of the existing suite of SSSIs, SACs, SPAs and Ramsar sites, and expanding the area covered by these designations by ensuring that all areas of land that meet the qualifying criteria are designated;

- Reforming designated landscapes to give National Parks and AONBs the[5] a clear requirement to play a greater role in reversing biodiversity loss, along with the powers, tools and resources that they need to deliver this
- Other sites or areas could also be included, but they must undergo a robust assessment process and demonstrably meet the two conditions outlined above. For example, Local Wildlife Sites and nature reserves form a significant natural resource of good quality or restorable habitats. Relevant site designations should be reviewed to strengthen the long-term protection that they offer for nature.

How should the 30% target be defined at sea and what should count towards it?

Despite a substantial area of Welsh seas being designated as Marine Protected Areas, most of these remain in unfavourable or unknown condition. WEL therefore believes that the Welsh Government should set a target that, by 2030, at least 30% of Wales' seas are within fully or highly protected MPAs, within the context of wider ecologically coherent networks. Furthermore, at least 10% of Wales' seas should be within fully protected areas by 2030. We refer to the terms fully and highly protected using the following definitions[6]:

- **Fully protected:** no extractive or destructive activities are allowed, and all impacts are minimised.
- **Highly protected:** only light extractive activities are allowed, and other impacts are minimised to the extent possible

There are currently no fully or highly protected MPAs in Wales. As such, this would require a change in management of some existing sites and/or designation of further MPAs.

Conclusion

Protecting and effectively managing 30% of land and 30% of sea for nature would help to reverse the long-term decline of wildlife in Wales, restore habitats and wildlife populations and has significant co-benefits for climate and people. This alone, however, is not sufficient and nature's recovery will also depend on what happens to the remaining 70%. Integration of nature recovery targets into broader policy areas – such as land – and sea – use plans, fisheries and farming policy (ensuring that farmers and land managers are fairly remunerated for managing their land to benefit nature) will be essential.

Wales Environment Link
Tramshed Tech
Unit D
Pendyris Street
Cardiff
CF11 6BH
enquiry@waleslink.org
www.waleslink.org
Twitter: @WalesLink

1. Marine Strategy Regulations 2010
   www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1627/schedule/1/made
2. Marine Strategy Regulations 2010
   www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1627/contents/made
3. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty
4. JNCC Protected areas
   jncc.gov.uk/our-work/ukbi-c1-protected-areas/
5. One of the statutory purposes of National Parks is to conserve and enhance natural beauty , wildlife and cultural heritage, while AONBs are designated to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
6. Protected Plant Marine Protected Areas Guide
   www.protectedplanet.net/en/resources/mpa-guide