



Statutory Targets for Biodiversity: Environment (Wales Bill)

July 2015

1. The case for statutory biodiversity targets

1.1. A background of repeated failure to halt biodiversity loss

The Environment Bill provides an excellent opportunity to build on the existing suite of nature conservation legislation and provide renewed drive for biodiversity. To do this, we believe it needs:

- clarity that turning around biodiversity declines is part of the aim of 'sustainable management of natural resources';
- a focus on biodiversity outcomes, against which progress can be measured; and
- Government leadership and accountability for progress towards international biodiversity commitments.

Wales' failure to meet the 2010 target to halt biodiversity loss prompted an inquiry by the Sustainability Committee. Other specific outcomes in the Environment Strategy relating to protected sites (for favourable condition of Natura 2000 sites by 2010, and SSSIs by 2015) have also not been met. **The Sustainability Committee's [Biodiversity Inquiry report \(2011\)](#) recommended that interim targets be put in place** to ensure achievement of the revised target, under the CBD and the EU Biodiversity Strategy, for halting biodiversity loss by 2020. Half-way to 2020, we need renewed commitment if this goal, and longer term recovery (in line with 2050 vision statements of the CBD and EU) is to be achieved. **Statutory targets would provide a driver to ensure that existing legislation, together with the new tools established in the Environment Bill, is implemented effectively to secure results for biodiversity.**

1.2. A necessary focus on species and sites

The State of Nature report found that **many of the species suffering dramatic declines are those with specialist habitat requirements, dependent on appropriate management and protection of their habitats.** The new approach to the sustainable management of natural resources provides a great opportunity to ensure species' needs are properly integrated into new management approaches aimed at broader environmental health, through the National Natural Resources Policy and the Area Based Approach. If this does not happen, we are concerned that priorities will be based on broad habitat types and the ecosystem services they provide – like timber and drinking water. Prioritising actions without consideration of whether or how they impact upon the needs of priority species could create negative impacts or miss opportunities to provide benefits.

Our experience of Glastir shows that, to produce meaningful results for species, their requirements have to be fully considered at the appropriate scale. Learning from Glastir also highlights the need to measure success in terms of outcomes, not only reporting on actions taken. The recent response to the Environment and Sustainability Committee from Sir John Lawton emphasised that species are a vital metric of the success of environmental management in terms of addressing biodiversity loss.

Our protected sites are generally the best places for nature, but they have been allowed to deteriorate largely through absence of appropriate protection or management. Protected sites already deliver multiple benefits and are the logical starting point for securing wider resilience. In spite of this, outcomes set in the Environment Strategy for Wales (ESW) for protected sites to be in favourable condition have not been delivered. One ESW outcome remains in the future – favourable condition for all Wales’ protected sites by 2026, and its delivery requires renewed commitment.

1.3. Improving leadership, scrutiny and accountability

The Well-being of Future Generations Act made an important step in formally recognising that a biodiverse natural environment is a goal of sustainable development, and the wider public sector has to play a role in delivering it. The Welsh Government has recognised that biodiversity loss is one of the key challenges we face (p 22, Explanatory Memorandum), so **strong leadership from Government is critical to address the biodiversity crisis.**

Achieving the targets will require action from a variety of actors, and Government will need to use its influence (via legislation, policy, funding, etc.) to ensure progress is made. We believe **ownership of the targets by the Welsh Government is critical, to place the delivery of international biodiversity commitments firmly in the public domain, enable the public (via the Assembly) to hold the Government to account on progress, and ensure remedies are identified if progress is not made.**

2. The Targets

The Welsh Ministers should be required to ensure that a national biodiversity index increases by 15% by 2050 from current levels

This national index would need to be based on population trends of priority species that are rare or declining, based on the current ‘section 42 list’ (which will in future fall under s7 of this Bill) – like the UK Watchlist Indicator described in the State of Nature report. It is possible to produce a Wales specific indicator even though, initially, it would only represent a limited range of species and groups. We are confident this can be improved upon over time, with support for an increase in comprehensive monitoring programmes, to ensure the robustness of the indicator. The suggested increase of 15% is reasonably ambitious considering the effort that will be required to halt long term species declines. There is precedent for this sort of long-term statutory target in the UK Climate Change Act, reflected in Part 2 of this Bill.

The Welsh Ministers should be required to take all steps to achieve favourable condition of Wales’ protected sites by 2026.

For some sites it is likely that attaining favourable condition will be a longer term goal, because of the extent of deterioration and the impact of wider environmental factors (e.g. air and water pollution) that should be addressed through sustainable management of natural resources. However, appropriate management should be secured in line with the target above. Milestones will need to be developed leading up to and beyond 2026, and may need to reflect different timescales for different types of sites (e.g. Natura 2000 sites, SSSIs and Marine Conservation Zones).

3. Milestones, actions and reporting

To drive progress towards achieving these biodiversity targets, the following requirements should also be made in the Bill:

- Milestones towards these statutory targets to be set every five years in the National Natural Resources Policy;
- NRW to identify the priorities for biodiversity delivery and means of achieving them within Area Statements, in order to implement the National Natural Resources Policy effectively;
- Milestones to be reported against in the SoNaR reports to be prepared every five years by NRW;
- If the SoNaR report shows milestones are not met, Ministers should report to the Assembly on proposals and policies to address the reasons for this and ensure progress.

This format – of long term targets with 5 year milestones and reporting processes – resembles that created for emissions reduction within Part 2 of the Bill.

These processes would need to be linked with the WFG indicators and milestones, as the targets relate to the 'biodiverse natural environment' required under the Resilient Wales Goal. They should complement the broader suite of milestones and indicators that will relate to this and the broader suite of Well-being Goals.