



Wildlife Trusts Wales

Brexit What will it mean for wildlife



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Voice for nature

Brexit

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30 Days Wild

My Wild Life

Every Child Wild

Inspiring People

Recovery of nature must be at heart of Welsh Government's proposals for the future of food, farming and the environment

“

Beware of false knowledge it is more dangerous than ignorance”, George Bernard Shaw

Welsh Government have set out a sustainable future for Wales in the Well-Being of Future Generations Act and the Environment Act. But, just as we set out on this journey, Brexit happened, creating an uncertain world. The big question is, what does this mean for a sustainable future for wildlife? The simple truth is that we don't know, all we can do is assess where we are now and where we want to be in the future.

The Wildlife Trusts want to take the benefits that the European Union (EU) has offered and to integrate it into our future. EU environmental legislation has helped us to tackle water and air quality issues, protect endangered species, including pollinators, and has cleaned up our beaches. Also the greening of the Common Agricultural Policy provided much needed financial support. But there are concerns about how this beneficial legislation will be dealt with as we invoke Article 50.

The great bulk of EU environmental law is in the form of Directives which have been transposed into UK law. The Great Repeal Act will end the primacy of EU law and seems likely to roll over current EU legislation until UK and devolved governments decide what to do with it. That should provide a breathing space (though a Hard Brexit may result in deregulation to create market advantage). Also, environmental legislation could be unwound through a light Parliamentary procedure, and we will no longer have recourse to EU law to challenge this. At a UK level the Wildlife Trusts are leading work by the environmental NGOs on possible new legislation to mitigate these risks.

it may have limited impact in the future. In reality it will be the political decisions on future agricultural policy, influenced by what trade agreement we make and the future agricultural support model adopted, that will make the most difference to wildlife recovery in Wales.

“The true sign of wisdom is not knowledge but imagination”, Albert Einstein

Developing a sustainable land use policy could make a major contribution to tackling some of Wales’s important future needs on energy, food, carbon, water and environmental security. We have started to address energy needs through renewable energy generation. Food security has to be placed into a globally context, the food Wales produces is not meant to solely feed the nation. Rather we should be examining the quality not quantity of food produced by increasing local food production to high sustainability standard. We know that carbon management to reduce the effects of climate change needs action now. Climate change predictions are for more severe weather and therefore, increased threats of flooding and drought, highlighting the need to manage the flow of water. However, all of the above are best managed by addressing environmental security. When natural systems function they provide cost-effective solutions to these risks. However, we have seen 90% of lowland grassland, 44% of upland heathland and 30% of sand dune habitat lost in Wales. This has resulted in the decline of 56% of species (1970-2013). When you consider that 70% of Wales’ land is farmed, then changing the financial model on which land management is supported, offers a real opportunity to reverse these trends.

We need the multiple benefits that nature brings us but how can we restore this? We can start by understanding that over the years natural processes in our landscape have slowly been broken. The uplands with their tremendous capacity to store carbon and water have been drained to stimulate grass growth to feed sheep and cattle. This contributes to climate change and flooding. Housing has been built on 12% of our flood plains and rivers canalised, inhibiting the natural management of flooding. Our fish stocks are depleted but new powers in the Wales Bill will fully devolve the Welsh in-shore so we will have the opportunity to increase sustainable fisheries in Wales.

So what happened in our farmed environment? In post war Britain, farming practice was intensified to an extent that nature in the landscape started to decline. However, all farmers were doing was responding to government incentives to produce cheaper food, to address food security issues. This intensification was carried out to the detriment of wildlife and natural processes. Also, in this time our relationship with food has become unsustainable with half of food purchased wasted and our over consumption results in 58% of us being overweight (22% obese), which costs NHS Wales £73 million a year. Shouldn’t we be creating the right conditions to produce more high quality, healthier food, produced to high welfare and environment standards?

The Wildlife Trusts are seeking a future where Welsh biodiversity is recovering and the direct links between the health of our natural environment and the health and well-being of our society are valued and understood. We believe Wales is ideally placed to implement an innovative, integrated framework for the ecologically and economically sustainable management of Welsh farming, forestry and marine natural resources. This integrated natural environment policy would invest and support nature and would be based on:

- Creating multiple outcomes: everywhere has the potential to be a home for wildlife, to store water and carbon
- Societal funds for societal good: society needs to feel the benefit of sustainable land and sea management
- Fostering greater public understanding of the value of the natural environment and the role of consumer choice
- Promoting high quality, high welfare, ecologically sustainable food production
- Upskilling and supporting innovation for those who work in the environment including land owners and manager

We can only achieve the above through collaboration. The recent austerity measures mean that we need to pool our resources and knowledge. This has been a positive outcome of Brexit as change has brought everyone around one table, giving us a once in a lifetime opportunity to create a truly sustainable future. Change is inevitable and so by using our imagination, we need to enact the brave legislation of last year, for a brighter sustainable future.

Downloads

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wtw_slm_policy_2017.pdf	624.63 KB
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wel_simp.pdf	375.89 KB

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