

Sustaining a Living Wales: the Natural Environment Framework for Wales

Background/Progress

Sustaining a Living Wales makes use of information coming out of existing sources such as the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UK NEA) and builds on the Environment Strategy for Wales. The Environment Strategy for Wales was one of the first policy documents in the UK to address the environment as a key asset that underpins our health, economy and quality of life.

The original '**A Living Wales**' consultation was launched on 15th September 2010 and was open for responses until 31st December 2010. A Living Wales was the second most popular Welsh Government consultation in 2010, attracting around 6,600 views, almost 3,000 visits and over 170 responses.

A joint Reference Group is in place for **A Living Wales** (covering Sustaining a Living Wales and the Single Body) including high level representatives from many sectors.

Ecosystems - their health and services - form a key element of our future approach to sustainable development in Wales. A list of the services being considered and scales at which they occur can be found on the 'Living Wales' website.

The **Environment Strategy for Wales** was launched in 2006 and referred directly to the environment as 'a key asset that underpins our health, economy and quality of life' and 'the mounting evidence that our actions are pushing natural systems beyond their ability to cope'. The Natural Environment Framework sits below the Sustainable Development Scheme and above the Environment Strategy and the individual environmental policies which set out present detailed actions.

Further information on **Living Wales**, including how to join in, can be found at: www.wales.gov.uk/livingwales.

Further information about the **UK National Ecosystem Assessment**, including copies of the Synthesis Report, can be found at: <http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/>.

Plan/Proposals

The Welsh Government recognises that our environment:

- has an intrinsic value,
- is our life support system,
- is a finite source of raw materials and resources,
- is central to our quality of life, sense of place, health and wellbeing, and
- underpins our economic development.

The Welsh Government also recognises that people experience environmental inequalities which must be addressed. To address these inequalities and ensure sustainable use of all our resources, we are committed to:

- recognising and living within environmental limits, locally and globally,
- ensuring that all of our policies take the environment into account, in accordance with our statutory Sustainable Development duty,
- stimulating and enabling collaboration across the Welsh public sector,

- working with business and voluntary sector partners,
- encouraging individual citizen and communities to live in an environmentally sustainable way, and
- providing leadership by acting now for the future.

The Welsh Government's approach in **Sustaining a Living Wales** is to look at the environment as a whole and act to secure a more integrated approach to managing the natural environment that improves the health of ecosystems.

During the next term the Welsh Government will:

- Lead significant changes in the way we regulate the environment and deliver policy, ensuring our communities and neighbourhoods have the highest possible standards of health and wellbeing.
- Bring together the functions of the Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency Wales and Forestry Commission Wales and **create a new Single Body** for the protection and management of natural resources in Wales.

In December 2011 the Welsh Government decided to bring together the Natural Environment Framework and Single Environment Body into a combined programme for the period during which we are creating the new body. Although this will change the format of the programmes, it will not alter their fundamental purpose. **They will now be known collectively as Living Wales.**

Up-to-date information on progress can be found on the **Living Wales website** including the latest papers on:

- the services provided by ecosystems that contribute to making human life both possible and worth living
- the scales at which ecosystems function
- the biodiversity targets that we have to meet
- Wales' geodiversity resource
- natural capital accounting – which extends the traditional economic concept of capital to environmental goods and services
- an introduction to the main economic tools that are currently available

We are seeking your feedback on these papers in order to inform the next stages of the programme and you can let us know what you think via the contact details on the website at: www.wales.gov.uk/livingwales.

The Minister made a Cabinet Statement launching phase II of the Natural Environment Framework on 15th June 2011 which can be seen at: <http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2011/5065504/?lang=en>

The Green Paper was launched on 30 January 2012. This outlines proposed changes to the governance and delivery of the management and regulation of the environment in Wales, **based on the ecosystem approach.** The Green Paper consultation will run from Monday 30th January 2012 till Thursday 31st May 2012.

Living Wales **communications materials** are continually being developed and will be published on the website from January 2012.

Living Wales **workshops and presentations** will be available. Contact livingwales@wales.gsi.gov.uk to arrange one for your organisation or association.

Proposed Time Line for next Phase of the Natural Environment Framework Programme

Throughout 2012 and early 2013:

- Sustaining a Living Wales workshops and presentations
- Additional background papers will continue to be made available via the web including; literature review regarding valuing ecosystems; report on effectiveness of current regulatory approaches, Wales' ecosystems services and scales and monitoring and surveillance next steps
- Marine Conservation Zones: iterative public consultation exercise
- Development of an integrated approach in sustainability appraisals which embeds an ecosystem approach
- Collaboration with Law Commission project on Wildlife Legislation

Early in 2012:

- **Launch of consultations on the Sustaining a Living Wales Green Paper** (30 January 2012 for 12 weeks)
- **Launch of consultations on proposals for new Single Body** (6 February 2012 for 12 weeks)
- Consultation on a refreshed policy statement for National Parks which may also include Areas of Outstanding Beauty
- UK National Ecosystem Assessment Stage II
- Water Policy Consultation

Spring 2012:

- Additional background papers available via the web including full set of illustrative examples covering environmental, economic and social significance of Wales' ecosystems
- Report on review of the delivery of planning services within national parks and AONBs
- First area pilots start work on the ground
- Launch of widespread public engagement at Wales Coast Path launch (May)

Summer/Autumn 2012:

- **Government Response to Sustaining a Living Wales** Green Paper consultation

From late 2012 onwards:

- Reviewing implementation of current regimes to ensure effective and efficient delivery
- Review of each policy area to consider how ecosystem requirements might be integrated as we update them

Later in 2012:

- Legislation workshop to consider how our implementation of European legislation might look in Wales if it had been possible to design it from scratch to address the full suite of environmental directives and regulations
- Commission work to begin to consider how designations might be re-designed, updated or linked to improve delivery of environmental outcomes
- Initial scoping of single spatial framework and national principles for local natural resource planning
- Development of all Wales engagement including GIS
- Sustainable Development Bill consultation on legislation to embed sustainable development as the central organising principle in all of our actions across Government and all devolved public bodies

Spring 2013:

- Proposed vesting date for new Single Body 1 April
- Commission work to identify how we might bring together existing regimes to allow single permits or consents

- Planning Bill White Paper Consultation
- Designate Marine Conservation Zones

Autumn 2013:

- Sustainable Development Bill: legislation to embed sustainable development as the central organising principle in all of our actions across Government and all devolved public bodies
- Outcome of Law Commission project on wildlife legislation

Target date – 2014:

- Consultation on national marine plans for inshore and offshore areas
- Environment White Paper outlining possible legislative changes
- Sustainable Futures Commissioner revisits the existing targets and indicators from the Environment Strategy for Wales to ensure that these are consistent with the ecosystem approach
- Review of current monitoring to ensure it is adequately provides strategic as well as specific information
- Provide a clear spatial context fro regulatory and other decision making
- Begin designing steps to rationalise and simplify regulatory system to implement new approach

Target date – 2015:

- Environment Bill

Target date – 2016:

- Planning Bill

Decision Points

To encourage responses to the Green Paper and Single Body consultations

To consider the implications of Living Wales for the priorities of Wales Biodiversity Partnership and the Future of BAP Project

To consider how the WBP can ensure that it delivers an effective framework for Living Wales