

**Powys and Brecon Beacons National Park Environmental
Record Centre Ltd (BIS)**

BIS 10th Anniversary Recorders Forum

Thursday 17th March 2011 12 pm

Mae'n bleser mawr gennyf fod yma yn Fforwm y Cofnodwyr 2011, i helpu chi ddathlu 10 mlynedd o'r Gwasanaeth Gwybodaeth Bioamrywiaeth ym Mhowys a Parc Cenedlaethol Bannau Brycheiniog. Hoffwn hefyd ddiolch i chi gyd am y gwaith rydych wedi wneud yng Nghymru dros y 10 mlynedd diwethaf drwy gasglu, goladu, rheoli a lledaenu data bioamrywiaeth Cymru.

It is a great pleasure for me to be here at the 2011 Recorders Forum and to help you celebrate 10 years of the Biodiversity Information Service in Powys and the Brecon Beacons National Park. I would also like to thank all of you for the work you have done in Wales over the last 10 years in collecting, collating, managing and disseminating the biodiversity data of Wales.

While you have been busy recording and disseminating information, we in government have also been busy developing ***A Living Wales***, which is one of the major statements of policy principle by the Assembly Government. It is about more effective governance of environmental resources in Wales. It is a crucial element of sustainable development, which we put at the heart of everything we do. It will sit below the Sustainable Development Scheme and above the Environment Strategy and the individual policies which set out present detailed actions.

The recent consultation - ***A Living Wales – a new framework for our environment, our countryside and our seas*** - sets out the principles against which we will together develop this new approach and invited input to help to design how the new approach will be made operational.

NEF – Summary of approach

The main changes that the new approach will bring are:

a focus on the value of the environment as a whole, delivering environmental, social and economic outcomes nationally, regionally and locally delivering positive environmental change, or restoration where appropriate, not simply conserving what we have;

increased emphasis on the science to underpin evidence based policy and delivery

looking at the potential creation of a single environmental delivery body to regulate and manage the environment in Wales;

changes as to how decisions are made affecting the environment, and over time, to the guiding regulatory and management frameworks
positive economic and social opportunities;

positive opportunities for public involvement.

This approach is increasingly the focus of international and European work and action now will place Wales at the forefront of policy implementation, as appropriate to our commitment to sustainable development as our central organising principle.

The Ecosystems Approach

All aspects of the environment should be looked at as a system and therefore at the same time recognising that all components are interrelated. The aim of

interventions and regulations should be to optimise the functioning of the system as a whole against the principles of sustainable development, not to favour a particular aspect.

The approach must work positively for landowners, farmers, fisheries, forestry, developers and regulated industries to reflect the common goal of sustainable development and to ensure the approach delivers the economic and social opportunities that will make it a reality. It must reduce, not increase, compliance costs overall and over time.

The consultation was the second most popular Assembly consultation in 2010, attracting around 6,600 views. The consultation document was downloaded over 1,200 times and we received 180 responses ranging from short email messages to documents with multiple annexes.

Many of the consultation responses were of a very high quality displaying a deep understanding of the issues and challenges for ecosystems and biodiversity in Wales. The consensus of the consultation responses was to welcome the proposed move to an ecosystem approach, to offer

assistance and to ask some hard questions about the details of how this would be carried through in practice.

The following messages from stakeholders were particularly clear:

On timescales – it will take time to develop the new culture and ways of working that will be needed to implement Living Wales; awareness and understanding will need to be increased in parallel to taking immediate actions to deliver outcomes for nature.

In devising the consultation exercise we acknowledged that our environment is both our life support system and the context within which we do everything that we do. Biodiversity is central but it is not just about biodiversity; we need to consider the whole environment. While collating the responses our attention was particularly drawn to the need to consider the geodiversity that underpins our ecosystems. Our definition of

ecosystems needs extending to include species, rocks, soils, water and air as the fundamental elements. In a nutshell our approach will be to put biodiversity back at the centre of the environment back at the heart of sustainable development and therefore at the heart of everything we do.

We also noted a very strong desire to simplify, normalize and merge existing systems of regulation - a sentiment coming about equally from regulators and their supporters and from those who are regulated. A real challenge for *Living Wales* will be to increase outcomes for nature not by creating yet another layer of legislation but by simplify existing systems. Somehow we have to ensure better outputs for nature alongside improved efficiency from our regulation and administration.

Many of the respondents felt that one environmental body would provide a more holistic, integrated and streamlined approach to environmental management. However a number of respondents did not agree that the current arrangements needed to be reviewed as the existing mechanisms tended to work well in many circumstances. A crucial element will be building on the successes of the past to create an even better future for biodiversity and, therefore, for us.

A Further lesson for us is that our language still needs to become clearer and simpler. We need to achieve this without watering down the complexity of the issues or the reality of challenges facing us – a perennial challenge for the biodiversity community and environment sector more widely.

If you want to delve a little deeper into the messages I have just described a summary of consultation responses

and statement of next steps has been made available on the Welsh Assembly Government website. This will be followed by more useful documents over the next few months. These documents should be read in combination with the original consultation documents. We hope that altogether they will stimulate further discussion and input to feed into the decisions of a new government.

The *Living Wales*' documents set out the principles against which we can take positive steps to develop a holistic approach to managing land and sea in the future. It is rooted in sustainable development and taking an ecosystems services approach to considering and managing risks and benefits in the environment.

For example the pollination service provided by honey bees and other pollinating insects contribute an additional £440m per year to the UK economy. In America some companies have to truck bees from one state to another

in order to pollinate their crops and in China they are already starting to pollinate by hand in some cases. As we can see from reports such as the UN report on the Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiveristy (TEEB) it is cheaper, more ethical and more effective – and more fun - to protect and enhance the nature around us.

I am delighted that the work to design the new approach is being taken forward collaboratively with you and many others with an interest in the protection and enhancement of our land and waters. It is not too late to join in and I hope you will look at the website to find out how you can take part.

Only by building on existing strong and positive collaborative partnerships and by working with you and closely with other public, business and voluntary sectors, can we can all ensure that *A Living Wales* secures a truly sustainable approach. The co-production and close

collaboration present in developing the consultation is continuing during development of the framework itself. We especially want to reach out to wider groups who are not normally directly concerned with issues of environmental management to reconnect Welsh people and organisations with their environment, our life support system.

There are five key areas of the framework which I think are worth mentioning:

One - Building the evidence base

We already have a clear evidence base for a new framework due to Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity Study (TEEB) and insights from the up-coming National Ecosystem Assessment for Wales. However, we need to improve and develop our understanding. The outcomes from this work stream will be information, techniques and

tools for identifying sustainable use of land and water and setting appropriate priorities within local areas.

Two - Valuing Ecosystems

Most of the services that our land and water provides are currently not accounted or charged for. This work stream will be looking at the way we value ecosystem services and how their importance can be better reflected in decisions and/or turned into payments. The aim for this work stream is to establish a clearer valuation of our ecosystems and how this can be built into decision making.

Three - Refreshing regulatory and management approaches

The environment has been subject to a large amount of domestic, European and international regulation over the past decades. However much of this legislation has been produced piecemeal, encompassing a wide range of

issues making it difficult to holistically shape and inform better decisions for the environment as a whole.

This work stream will provide us with fresh approaches to the design of regulatory and management regimes that deal with the health of the relevant system as a whole.

Four - Refreshing Partnership Mechanisms

A large number of stakeholders across many sectors are vital to the delivery of healthy ecosystems but the current relationship of stakeholders to the issues can vary widely.

An ecosystems approach can only be made fully functional at a localised scale which is why engaging with landowners, forestry, fishery and other interests is vital for successful implementation. The outcome from this work stream will be the widest possible engagement of stakeholders and key sectors in developing the future work.

And finally, closely linked to Refreshing Partnership Mechanisms,

Five – Refreshing Institutional Arrangements

In conjunction with the strategy, we are taking the chance to look afresh at the current roles, functions and organization of our key delivery agencies: the Environment Agency Wales, the Countryside Council for Wales and the Forestry Commission in Wales. We are looking principally at the potential benefits of restructuring their activities in order to better enable them to take a more integrated and sustainable view of environmental management to serve the *Living Wales* agenda.

A Living Wales highlights the need for data, information, surveillance and monitoring. It reinforces the importance of the work that you have been doing for at least the last ten years. And will provide fresh impetus for new ways of continuing to develop your work in the

years to come. You may have come across the statement of principles which we hope you will be able to help us implement. This document includes commitments to:

Agree minimum monitoring standards and provide transparency on levels of uncertainty;

Maximise use of existing information - for example by identifying repeatable projects already completed and re-testing rather than designing new projects from scratch;

Ensure mechanisms are practical, repeatable, effective;

Negotiate solutions and methodologies that meet central data needs and are comfortable, enjoyable and appropriate for data collectors;

Involve stakeholders collaboratively in agreeing field procedures;

Establish systems which match people with necessary skills to the appropriate monitoring tasks;

help each other to develop new skills & knowledge,
engage non-specialists in appropriate ways and
provide clear objectives and good feedback.

In all of this we should recognise that:

Everything we do has a cost. Volunteers provide an excellent way of increasing recording capacity, but harnessing such effort into an effective monitoring scheme requires additional resources to develop and administer the scheme, to provide training, and to analyse and communicate results.

Monitoring can be repetitious and requires persistence. Monitoring often involves the repeated measurement of a few parameters. This is very different from general natural history observation, and people good at the one are not always good at the other. We need to design a system that makes best use of everyone's skills.

Local Record Centres will have a central role to play in stimulating data collection, helping recorders to develop their skills and collating and disseminating data

In this period of constrained resources I have asked WLGA and CCW to work with Value Wales to investigate the possibility of pan-Wales public Sector agreement with LRC services to the public sector. I hope this will result in a once for Wales agreement that will give everybody what they need for the future.

Having mentioned the future and ongoing work, I would now like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the importance of the role of recorders, volunteers and those other experts who rarely get a thank you. I'd like to thank you now. Without your efforts we would not know the size of the challenge we face. We would be unable to measure what we have achieved and we would be far behind our current beginnings of

understanding the complexity and importance of the nature around us: thank you.

When I was invited to attend this event to celebrate the ten years of the Local Records Centre in Powys and the Brecon Beacons I looked back to the event I attended to launch the Wales Local Record Centre Network in 2007– the first fully complete national network of local record centres in the UK. We should be proud of the work that this network and each of the individual centres have done in the past years. I encourage you all to keep working on these shared goals so that we can ensure that biodiversity information is fed into decision-making processes in a timely and effective way.

I know and trust you will all work to ensure:

That we continue to provide efficient, high quality information services to a range of users from public bodies to commercial consultants.

That we continue to pro-actively encourage the recording and sharing of biological data and engage in initiatives to develop biological recording skills.

That we provide appropriate support to strengthen networks of local voluntary recorders and ensure that the efforts of voluntary recorders are consistently recognised.

That the network improves data flows by implementing and promoting simple and efficient systems for record submission, validation and verification.

That we improve links with the National Biodiversity Network, including greater data sharing with the NBN Gateway.

And perhaps most importantly of all that we continue to share best practice and expertise, particularly in the fields

of management and technology so that the role of managing and disseminating biodiversity information across Wales is valued and sustained through local and national partnerships.

I welcome your recognition of the value of working together, whilst embracing the local distinctiveness of each Local Record Centre.

There is an African saying 'When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion', which illustrates perfectly that by working together; even the smallest of us can be strong. Greater perhaps than the sum of our parts.

A Living Wales provides an ideal opportunity for us to pull together in this way. We must work towards creating tomorrow's experts today, deliver more for nature and more cleverly and get others to understand the importance of this agenda. I encourage you all to get involved.

Full details of the process that has been put in place and of how you can join in are available on the Welsh Assembly website under *A Living Wales*. I hope that you will take up the chance to host a workshop on geographical information systems or to input your views on the effectiveness of our current regulatory framework. I am indebted, but more importantly Wales is indebted to you for the crucially important work that you do. I wish you another ten years (at least) of increasing success. I may not be the Minister attending the celebration of your next decade of success but I will still be taking an interest

Thank you