# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Biodiversity Deep Dive**  |
| **DATE**  | **25 July 2024** |
| **BY** | **Huw Irranca-Davies MS, Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs** |

The Biodiversity Deep Dive Core Group was established to support implementation of the [Deep Dive Recommendations](https://www.gov.wales/biodiversity-deep-dive-recommendations): a set of collective actions we can take in Wales to support nature’s recovery.

I recently had the pleasure of chairing my first Core Group Meeting. I was delighted to hear about the extensive work that has already been undertaken to support delivery of the recommendations. I would like to express my sincere thanks to members of the Core Group, the expert groups, and other individuals for their continued support and contributions. I look forward to working with the Core Group and stakeholders to drive forward action. Below is an overview of key actions taken since the previous update.

One key action is to transform our protected sites series so that it is better, bigger, and more effectively connected.

The first stage of the Nature Networks Map has been completed, making available key datasets and evidence on habitat connectivity in an updated and consistent form through [DataMap Wales](https://datamap.gov.wales/) and the [Wales Environmental Information Portal (WEIP)](https://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/evidence-and-data/accessing-our-data/beta-wales-environmental-information-portal/?lang=en).

We continue to help improve the condition and connectivity of our protected sites through the [Nature Networks Programme (NNP)](https://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/our-projects/nature-projects/nature-networks-information-on-nature-projects?lang=en). £15m was allocated in 2023/24, and a further £17m in 2024/25 to support the scaling up of the delivery of the NNP.

We continue to match fund the Natural Resources Wales (NRW)-led LIFEquake, the Four Rivers for LIFE, and Natur am Byth projects.

On marine matters, we remain committed to the enhancement of our Marine Protected Area (MPA) network as part of the MPA Network Completion Programme. We have been working with Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies and stakeholders to develop potential sites, assessing the socio-economic impacts of any proposed designations.

We are also creating a framework to recognise Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas (NREAs) and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) that deliver biodiversity outcomes.

To support this work, an expert working group was established and asked to recommend processes and criteria for recognising, monitoring, and reporting on existing and candidate Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas (NREAs) and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in Wales. The group has recently produced an initial recommendation report that will inform next steps.

We are committed to unlocking the potential of designated landscapes (National Parks and National Landscapes) to deliver more for nature.

A Designated Landscapes expert group has identified a number of prioritised workstreams to take forward. These include developing a series of Prioritised Nature Recovery Action maps for each Designated Landscape that highlight priorities and opportunities for conservation and landscape-scale nature recovery.

National Park and National Landscape management plans must put the nature and climate emergency at their heart, so we have worked with NRW to update its Management Planning guidance. This guidance will be available later this year.

NRW continues to assess the detailed case for a new National Park in northeast Wales and will consult on proposals later this year. We are working with NRW to ensure climate change mitigation and nature recovery are a priority for delivery in a new National Park.

We will continue to reform land and marine management and planning (including spatial) to deliver more for both protected sites and wider land / seascapes.

[Planning Policy Wales - Edition 12](https://www.gov.wales/planning-policy-wales) was published in February 2024 and the SSSI Policy and Stepwise Approach were strengthened and updated.

We are committed to strengthening guidance for Policy 9 in [Future Wales: The National Plan 2040](https://www.gov.wales/future-wales-national-plan-2040), piloting via the Gwent levels Natural Resources area. As of October 2023, a project manager has been assigned to take this work forward, working with the Task and Finish group to help deliver further guidance on Policy 9.

We have worked with NRW to develop maps showing environmental considerations for marine planning. The maps, now available on DataMap Wales, bring together data for birds, marine mammals, seabed habitats, and fish so that new development proposals can better take them into account at an early stage of planning.

The Welsh Government will work with partners to build a strong foundation for future delivery through capacity building, behaviour change, awareness raising, and skills development.

The Net Zero Sector Skills Outcomes report was published in June 2024 and will inform the development of Sector Roadmaps and key actions to support the development of sector-specific skills.

Our [Climate Action Wales](https://www.climateaction.gov.wales/) national campaign continues to raise public awareness on the climate and nature emergencies, and to explain the co-benefits of action at a household and community level. Through initiatives such as [Wales Climate Week](https://www.climateweek.gov.wales/) and the Climate Conversations fund, we continue to involve people in Government decision-making. The next event in November will encourage discussion on the role of nature in shaping a more climate resilient future.

Through the latest round of the Coastal Capacity Building Fund scheme, we are supporting 11 projects to deliver sustainable action, accelerating growth and recovery in local marine and coastal areas. The Coasts and Seas Partnership are now developing further actions to improve capacity and skills development in the marine environment.

We will work to unlock private investment to deliver for nature at far greater scale and pace.

We are developing a new approach to sustainable finance to increase and diversify the funding available for nature recovery. Recognising the legitimate concerns that exist about sustainable finance, we will be shortly consulting on a set of principles to guide our policy. These principles are intended to ensure any funding is high integrity, benefits and engages local communities, prevents inappropriate land-use change and avoids green washing.

I have recently approved funding for the next three years for the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) to employ a development manager for the MARINE fund Cymru. The fund is a collaboration with the WCVA as a delivery partner, and the Coasts and Seas Partnership Blue Investment Working Group focussing on marine enhancement.

We have also provided funding for a new Head of Natural Capital Development in Bannau Brycheiniog National Park (Y Bannau). Integrating the purposes of National Parks and their unique qualities, the post will scale up nature recovery funding by exploring and implementing high-integrity ecosystem service markets.

We are developing and adapting our monitoring and evidence frameworks to measure progress towards the ‘30 by 30’ target and to guide prioritisation of action. In support of this work, we have established an expert working group tasked with developing robust and appropriate monitoring and evidence frameworks for ‘30 by 30’ and wider nature recovery targets. The group has recently produced an initial recommendation report that will guide the next steps for implementation.

To embed nature recovery in policy and strategy in public bodies in Wales, we are committed to developing legally binding biodiversity targets. We published a [White Paper](https://www.gov.wales/environmental-principles-governance-and-biodiversity-targets-white-paper) and consultation in January 2024. We have reflected on stakeholder feedback and will shortly publish our policy response to the consultation.

This statement is being issued during recess in order to keep members informed. Should members wish me to make a further statement or to answer questions on this when the Senedd returns I would be happy to do so.