



Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales

Cofnod y Trafodion The Record of Proceedings

[Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a
Materion Gwledig](#)

[The Climate Change, Environment and Rural
Affairs Committee](#)

14/06/2017

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Cofnodir y trafodion yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynnddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal, cynhwysir trawsgrifiad o'r cyfieithu ar y pryd. Lle y mae cyfranwyr wedi darparu cywiriadau i'w dystiolaeth, nodir y rheini yn y trawsgrifiad.

The proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee. In addition, a transcription of the simultaneous interpretation is included. Where contributors have supplied corrections to their evidence, these are noted in the transcript.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Jayne Bryant Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Sian Gwenllian Bywgraffiad Biography	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales
Vikki Howells Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Huw Irranca-Davies Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
David Melding Bywgraffiad Biography	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Jenny Rathbone Bywgraffiad Biography	Llafur Labour
Simon Thomas Bywgraffiad Biography	Plaid Cymru The Party of Wales

Eraill yn bresennol
Others in attendance

Martin Bishop	Rheolwr Cenedlaethol Cymru, Confor National Manager for Wales, Confor
David Edwards	Rheolwr Ardal, Tilhill Forestry District Manager, Tilhill Forestry
Andy Fraser	Pennaeth Pysgodfeydd, Dirprwy Gyfarwyddwr yr Is- adran Môr a Physgodfeydd, Llywodraeth Cymru Head of Fisheries, Deputy Head Marine and Fisheries Division, Welsh Government
Lesley Griffiths AC/AM	Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs

**Ymchwiliad i Reoli Ardaloedd Morol Gwarchoddedig yng Nghymru:
Sesiwn Dystiolaeth Lafar gydag Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr
Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig**

**Inquiry into the Management Marine Protected Areas in Wales:
Oral Evidence Session with the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and
Rural Affairs**

[2] **Simon Thomas:** Rydw i'n Simon Thomas: Can I welcome this croesawu y bore yma yr Ysgrifennydd morning the Cabinet Secretary to Cabinet i barhau â'n hymchwiliad ni i continue with our inquiry on marine mewn i ardaloedd gwarchoddedig protected areas? Welcome, therefore, morol. Croeso mawr, felly, i Lesley to Lesley Griffiths. Can I ask the Griffiths. Os caf i jest ofyn i'r officers to introduce themselves, swyddogion ddatgan eu henwau a'u please, for the record? swyddogaethau jest ar gyfer y cofnod hefyd, os gwelwch yn dda.

[3] **Mr Rees:** Graham Rees, head of marine and fisheries division.

[4] **Mr Fraser:** Andy Fraser, deputy head of marine and fisheries division.

[5] **Simon Thomas:** Diolch yn fawr. Simon Thomas: Thank you very Felly, os ydych chi'n hapus, fe awn ni much. So, if you are happy, we'll go jest yn syth at y cwestiynau ar yr straight into questions on the ymchwiliad. Tybed, i ddechrau, a inquiry. Perhaps, can I ask, to begin, fedrwch chi, Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet, Cabinet Secretary, could you give us roi amlinelliad i'r pwyllgor bellach, yn an outline to the committee, in light wyneb y ddeddfwriaeth amrywiol of the various legislation that exists sydd yn y maes yma, gan gynnwys in this area, including your own eich deddfwriaeth eich hunan, y legislation, the Well-being of Future Ddeddf Llesiant Cenedlaethau'r Generations (Wales) Act 2015, for Dyfodol (Cymru) 2015, er example—what are we looking at in enghraifft—beth yw ystyr rheoli terms of MPAs? What do they mean ardaloedd morol gwarchoddedig i chi, to you, and how are you, as a a'r ffordd sydd gyda chi fel Government, making sure that those Llywodraeth i wneud yn siŵr bod yr areas are appropriately managed, ardaloedd yma'n cael eu rheoli'n and to what purpose? briodol, ac i ba bwrpas?

[6] **The Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs (Lesley**

Griffiths): Obviously, we have got the two Acts that you refer to: the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, but I think, probably, we've always had those sort of principles at the very heart of the decisions we've taken in the marine environment. Obviously, the objective is to maintain and enhance the resilience of our ecosystems and the benefits they provide. The sea is highly mobile; it's a huge scale. I think it's really important that we work to ensure that we have the correct networks to protect our seas. Graham always says, 'There's no boundaries in the sea', so it is really important that we make our contribution, as I say, to be part of that healthy network. We need to make sure that we have sustainable use of our seas. That's really important. One of the reasons I wanted to bring forward the first national marine plan was to ensure that we have that sustainable use and effective management.

[7] **Simon Thomas:** Mae nifer o'r pethau rydych chi wedi sôn amdany'n nhw yn y fanna yn bethau y byddai pawb yn eu croesawu, rwy'n credu, ond maen nhw yn dueddol, weithiau, o weithio yn erbyn ei gilydd. Felly, mae pysgodfeydd yn gallu bod yn erbyn amcanion cadwriaethol o bryd i'w gilydd. Felly, erbyn hyn, gyda'r holl ardaloedd gyda gwahanol ddynodiadau, gwahanol statws iddyn nhw—ac rydym ni wedi gweld y map o foroedd Cymru, gyda'r holl wahanol lefelau yna o safleoedd—beth sydd wrth wraidd chi fel Llywodraeth yn ceisio cyrraedd fan hyn? Ai codi rhai o'r ardaloedd yma yn uwch o ran statws ffafriol, neu ai creu rhwydwaith o ardaloedd sydd yn gydlynus gyda'i gilydd ar gyfer pwrpas ecolegol? Beth yw eich prif gymhelliant chi wrth gynllunio'n forol?

Simon Thomas: Many things you have mentioned there, of course, are issues that a lot of people would welcome, of course, but they do tend, sometimes, to work against each other. So, for example, fisheries can sometimes be opposed to conservation issues, occasionally. So, by now, with all these different areas with the different designations that they have and the different status that they have—and we have seen the map of the Welsh seas with all the different levels of the sites there—what do you think is at the heart of your intention as a Government here? Are you trying to raise the favourable status of some of these areas, or are you trying to create a network of areas that are cohesive to an ecological end? What is your main motivation there, in planning?

[8] **Lesley Griffiths:** I think it's a bit of both; it's about getting the balance. You talk about fisheries and conservation, and my strapline right across the portfolio, really—the same in agriculture—is that it's the economy and it's

the environment, and it's about getting that balance between the two. So, it is really important that we do raise favourable areas, that we maintain the condition of favourable areas, and that we look if there's anywhere negative that needs to be improved. So, I think it is about getting that balance. I don't know if you want to say anything about the map.

[9] **Mr Rees:** Yes. So, one of the approaches that we have in Wales, which I think is starting to be copied in other parts of the UK, is to work much more collaboratively. So, we work very closely with all marine users in terms of developing measures. We have a number of stakeholder groups that help us to achieve that. In terms of the network and its contribution, that's really important in terms of our OSPAR commitments, and we have to maintain the network and make sure it's functioning effectively. There are a number of things that we're doing in relation to that. So, one of the things that we're doing currently is working with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, and all of the nature conservation authorities around the UK, to develop a consistent way to how we measure and monitor the marine protected areas. And that will mean, then, collaboratively, the whole UK network is being monitored in a consistent way, and we hope that that will start to bear fruit later this year.

[10] **Simon Thomas:** Just on that, then, Cabinet Secretary, with that monitoring going on, just from your point of view, in three, four, five years, what would you like to see happen in the areas? How would you know that you'd been successful? Are you going to measure it by iconic species or are you going to measure it by sustainable fisheries? What's your kind of measuring stick? Not that you can measure the seal with a measuring stick, but—*[Laughter.]*

[11] **Lesley Griffiths:** That's quite a difficult question, but I suppose it's about—. Going back to what I was saying about maintaining the favourable conditions and improving the areas that aren't favourable at the moment, I suppose that's how you would want to see it progress, obviously, and have more favourable conditions than we have now.

[12] **Simon Thomas:** Okay. Jenny Rathbone.

[13] **Jenny Rathbone:** It's obviously a lot more difficult to track what's going on in the sea than it is to track what's going on in the land, and we have all these overlapping different types of conservation zones—quite complicated for both the public, and indeed for Assembly Members to

understand exactly how we should take forward the management of our seas. The MPA steering group: several witnesses have told us that they've come down in favour of recommending seven management areas, each with a pot of about £50,000. Could you just tell us what your response is to that, because that looks like a coherent plan?

[14] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes. I support the recommendations that have come out of the steering group—Graham chairs it—and certainly, I think, they've looked at what the priorities are. They've worked with NRW to have a forward work programme, if you like, about what the priorities are from NRW's point of view. I also mentioned, or Graham mentioned, about the JNCC as well—working with them. So, yes, I absolutely support the work that the group does. I suppose you're the group that advises me the most of all the groups. We do have several groups in this part of the portfolio—

[15] **Simon Thomas:** We had noticed. [*Laughter.*]

[16] **Lesley Griffiths:** But I think the steering group, which has been in existence for about a year—

[17] **Mr Rees:** Two years.

[18] **Lesley Griffiths:** —two years now—yes, I've been in post a year—is probably the main group.

[19] **Jenny Rathbone:** Fine. So, do you think that their recommendation for seven management areas is a good one, or not something that you're planning to take on?

[20] **Mr Rees:** The group felt that would have been an ideal approach, but were concerned that, because the responsibility for looking after unprotected areas is shared across a number of management groups, the groups would not be able to find the funding to achieve that outcome. And also they were a bit concerned that maybe the appetite wasn't there across all of the management groups to move in that direction.

[21] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. But, at the end of the day, the Government must be the lead authority on this, and there's been some concern that the Government isn't giving sufficient—either dedicating sufficient resources to this important area, or giving sufficiently clear leadership. And I wondered how that—

[22] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, I think we are giving the leadership. I think it's a much more strategic approach that the group have brought forward, which—as I say, I do support and I respect their view. In relation to funding, well, you know, I've only got what I've got, and I have to make sure that I support every part of the portfolio, but I didn't think that the funding was a particular issue that had come out.

[23] **Mr Rees:** It was—

[24] **Lesley Griffiths:** A concern.

[25] **Mr Rees:** —the commitment amongst the other managing authorities to be able to put money into this. I think what the Minister then did was to write to all of them, in May this year, to remind them of their responsibilities and how important it is they do participate in this.

[26] **Jenny Rathbone:** Obviously, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 obliges people to think in an integrated and co-ordinated way. So, is it about resistance to pooling budgets? Because we've heard evidence of people working together quite effectively when we went to Milford Haven.

[27] **Lesley Griffiths:** You mean the relevant authorities pooling their budgets?

[28] **Jenny Rathbone:** Yes.

[29] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, we did bring forward a different approach to funding the relevant authorities because we didn't feel we understood enough of what the services were being delivered. So, we had a different approach to the way it was funded. I don't know if you've picked that up in your evidence, but I don't think pooling budgets was an issue.

[30] **Mr Rees:** No, it was more the appetite amongst all managing authorities to work in a consistent way. That was the concern of the group and what the group then recommended was that there may be more benefit in having a more strategic approach. So, Natural Resources Wales has developed some priority improvement plans, and there is a list of those which we, as a group, then wish to work through, because there may be an opportunity of applying multiple benefits across a range of sites, rather than

doing it in a local way. And that was the consideration of the group.

[31] **Lesley Griffiths:** I'd be happy to share the correspondence with Members, Chair, if that would be helpful.

[32] **Simon Thomas:** Yes, thank you, that would be.

[33] **Lesley Griffiths:** I wrote to all the relevant authorities.

[34] **Simon Thomas:** So that's—[*Inaudible.*—]the relevant authorities, yes?

[35] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, I wrote to them in May, just reminding them of what their responsibilities were.

[36] **Simon Thomas:** Okay.

[37] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. Well, that's very helpful, because, obviously, we have a challenging situation at the moment with limited resources, and, after 2018, we're going to be responsible for even larger areas of our seas. So, are you able to just tell us what staff resource your marine and fisheries division has to cover obviously a very large area of coastline?

[38] **Lesley Griffiths:** Again, we've all had reductions in our officials, but the marine and fisheries division, I think, have got 58 staff in it. I think that's, obviously, enough to do everything we want to do. However, if I could get more, obviously I will. You have to understand that my portfolio is probably the most affected portfolio in relation to Brexit. So, certainly, I have put in a plea for more officials, because, again, we don't know what legislation will be needed, for instance. And this obviously is an area that is, again, devolved to us, so whilst—. You can always do with more staff, obviously.

[39] **Jenny Rathbone:** One specific piece of evidence that was of concern was, in terms of regulation enforcement, you've got to have a presence to ensure that people aren't doing what they're not supposed to be doing. Mr Bullimore told us that the south Wales fisheries patrol vessel had dropped from a minimum of 100 days a year to 32 days in 2013 and 2014, and just 17 days in 2015, which I presume is the last available statistic. So, that does make it difficult to see how we are effectively controlling what goes on in our waters, otherwise pirates come in and steal our fisheries.

[40] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, two things around enforcement: I think 2015 is

the last year, and I thought we were third behind the navy and the Southern Inshore Fisheries and Conservation Authority.

10:45

[41] **Mr Fraser:** That's correct.

[42] **Lesley Griffiths:** So, we were third. So, I thought we were—

[43] **Mr Fraser:** So, in terms of overall figures for 2015, in terms of Welsh Government fisheries patrol vessels days at sea, the Welsh Government was only third to the Royal Navy, and their two river-class vessels that patrol UK waters, and the Southern IFCA in England. For 2015, that's 89 days at sea for 2015 overall.

[44] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay.

[45] **Lesley Griffiths:** And the other thing around enforcement—

[46] **David Melding:** What was the Welsh one in that? Was that 89, or was it 89 across—?

[47] **Mr Fraser:** Eighty-nine days at sea Welsh Government, the Royal Navy 250, and the Southern IFCA 104.

[48] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, after 2018, would you envisage more input from the Royal Navy? Because, obviously, we're going to be taking on responsibility for a larger area. We can't do that with two boats.

[49] **Lesley Griffiths:** No. One of the reasons I'm buying more boats is, obviously, technology has improved. I know you visited one of the enforcement vessels—

[50] **Simon Thomas:** We did, yes.

[51] **Lesley Griffiths:** —after my telling you to go along. You will have seen it was starting to reach the end of its working life, I think is a nice way of putting it. So, it was really important that we put funding into some new vessels, which we're doing. We're having the first one in the autumn—£6 million. Those conversations are taking place now in relation to working with the Royal Navy. So, if your question is, 'Would we envisage more?', 'yes', I

suppose is the short answer.

[52] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. Well, that's helpful. In terms of how you see us bringing together this very complex area, the latest buzzword seems to be 'ecologically-coherent networks', so that we are respecting the way in which the birds, and the habitat, and the fisheries all combine together. How do you see the Welsh national marine plan delivering that level of coherence?

[53] **Lesley Griffiths:** Obviously, we didn't have a national marine plan when I came into portfolio, and I think—because we are going to see increased activity in our seas, and when we do get the extra powers next year, I just thought it was really important to have that marine plan. You'll be aware—I think I said it in this committee first—that we were hoping, I'd hoped, to be in a position to go out to consultation around now. Certainly, the drafting has gone very well, the team have worked really hard, but we have got some difficulties with the UK Government in as much as they've not yet responded to Hendry, and that has to be part of the plan before we go out to consultation. When I wrote to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, I think March or April, I got a response saying that the Hendry review—their response—had been delayed, and they needed a period of time to look at it and I'd get a letter in due course. Well, to me, 'in due course' means nothing; I would never put 'in due course' to somebody, because what does it mean? So, I've now written back, after the general election—because, obviously, that general election also caused a bit of a hiatus—to ask when we can expect to receive a response. So, I'm awaiting that. It only went, I think, yesterday. So, I am awaiting a response, because I don't feel I can go out to consultation until we've got that information in as well, because it's really important that that plan—. To me, it's like planning permission on land, isn't it? We need that plan to be there with the technologies in it. And, obviously, the tidal lagoon is an important part of it.

[54] **Simon Thomas:** Just on that, you did tell Plenary—I recall you saying at the time—that you wanted Hendry and tidal lagoons to be part of your marine plan. I don't know what's happening on that, regardless of the concern of the committee, of course, around tidal lagoons as well, but, in effect, the UK Government is setting your timetable for consulting on the other aspects. Will there come a time when you think, with the new powers coming next year anyway, that you must move on this?

[55] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, absolutely. I wouldn't want to delay it. When I say 'summer'—we don't really have seasons now; I suppose you can get away

with it a little bit more. But, no, seriously, I would want to go, certainly, by September or October at the latest.

[56] **Simon Thomas:** Yes, because otherwise you won't be in a position to have anything for the new powers coming in and the other—

[57] **Lesley Griffiths:** No. And we have to have it; you're absolutely right. As I say, the drafting has gone really well; the team has worked really hard. So, there will come a point, and that was the reasoning for writing yesterday, actually, to try and get something in writing from—I'm trying to think who I wrote to—Greg Clark, to try and get something firm. Because, as you say, there will come a time when we won't be able to wait any longer.

[58] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. You mentioned increased activity. Is that as a result of us—. I mean, what sort of activity?

[59] **Lesley Griffiths:** The increased activity—well, in relation to new technologies, like tidal lagoon, for instance. So, there will be increased activity in that respect.

[60] **Jenny Rathbone:** Fine. Okay. Thank you.

[61] **Simon Thomas:** Okay. Huw, did you want to come in on this?

[62] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Just briefly, following up on Jenny—the increased activity, absolutely, we're going to see it. We know already, regardless of what's happening in any post June 23 referendum result and so on, that we still have specific responsibilities out there. Can you give us some idea what resource within your central division is put to marine conservation, as opposed to fisheries enforcement? Is there something you can share with us on—

[63] **Lesley Griffiths:** From within my department? My officials?

[64] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Yes. Within Welsh Government, but also within your marine planning division directorate as well.

[65] **Lesley Griffiths:** Just to conservation? Probably not. No, I wouldn't be able to split it down like that, because there's too many—. You work on too many different aspects, really.

[66] **Mr Rees:** Yes. You went to see the vessels, and you saw some of the fishery officers there. They also enforce marine licensing, which is about maintaining an effective environment. So, it's very difficult. We're all engaged in it in some way or other.

[67] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** So, within marine and fisheries division, everybody's engaged in marine conservation in one way or the other—that would be your argument.

[68] **Lesley Griffiths:** Probably.

[69] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** There is no split of responsibilities.

[70] **Mr Rees:** No.

[71] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Do you have divisions within the division? Sorry, I should declare something of a tangential interest as well to committee. One of my family members began working on Monday for Natural Resources Wales on a 15-month contract. But that's not why I'm asking. I'm asking because of this interesting facet of whether you see fisheries enforcement and marine wrapped up together and there's no discernible difference within your central organisation, or there are people working on specific areas to do with marine conservation. It'd be helpful for committee to understand.

[72] **Lesley Griffiths:** I would say that most of you do marine conservation—

[73] **Mr Rees:** We do, yes.

[74] **Lesley Griffiths:** —as part of your day job.

[75] **Mr Rees:** It's all about sustainable management of natural resources.

[76] **Lesley Griffiths:** I wouldn't be able to split it.

[77] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Interesting. Interesting. Okay.

[78] **Simon Thomas:** Sian Gwenllian.

[79] **Sian Gwenllian:** Just a really basic question that maybe a member of the public would be asking at this point. We're looking as if we're having more and more designations around Wales at the same time as we're trying

to develop the tidal lagoons and windfarms up in north Wales, et cetera. What is your vision in that respect? I think we need to just establish what the strategic approach is at the really top level—conservation versus developing—in the sea?

[80] **Lesley Griffiths:** I'd go back to what I was saying—it's about a balance. So, I probably get as much correspondence from the environmental side as fishermen, for instance. So, it's really about making sure you have that balance, and the strategic vision would be to have a sustainable, healthy sea. That, to me, would be—. And going back to the question—

[81] **Simon Thomas:** But isn't that what the marine plan—[*Inaudible.*]? Your marine plan's got to have that strategic vision, doesn't it?

[82] **Lesley Griffiths:** Absolutely. And to go back to what Simon was asking—

[83] **Sian Gwenllian:** I'm not sure if we've actually got that at the moment. We're talking below, the levels below all of that. And I think, from the public's point of view, they need to see what is going on now with our sea.

[84] **Lesley Griffiths:** And that's the reason for wanting that national marine plan. I wanted it quite quickly, but, like a lot of things, it takes time.

[85] **Simon Thomas:** Vikki Howells, please.

[86] **Vikki Howells:** Diolch. The 2015 marine evidence report for Wales pointed to deficiencies in MPA-related evidence, and that's certainly something that many of our witnesses have come back to when we've been taking evidence here over the last few months. Could you advise us what work is being done within Welsh Government to address those deficiencies?

[87] **Lesley Griffiths:** We do a great deal of monitoring, et cetera. If I needed specific science, evidence, we would commission it. So, I'm not quite sure about the criticism of deficiencies. So, for instance, the Bangor University evidence that was done into scallop dredging—. So, when I came to make a decision—. I mean, I hadn't started that evidence, it was started before I came into portfolio, but that's the type of thing that we would do to fill gaps, if we felt there was a gap or a deficiency.

[88] **Vikki Howells:** I think one of the things that some of our witnesses

were talking about was perhaps a lack of sharing of evidence as well. I don't know whether you'd agree with that, or think that work could be done maybe to improve that.

[89] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, again, it's not just about the work that we would commission. We work very closely with NRW and with the JNCC. So, we do share the evidence, or certainly they've shared it with us and I'm sure if asked, we would share ours with them. But it's not about working in isolation; it's about working in partnership. For instance, we've worked with NRW and the JNCC looking at a consistent UK marine biodiversity monitoring plan. So, we do share information.

[90] **Vikki Howells:** Okay, thank you. You mentioned there about the scallop dredging in Cardigan bay. I wonder whether you could furnish us with a little bit more information about that, particularly around how the reopening of that area fits with the principles of the well-being of future generations Act.

[91] **Lesley Griffiths:** I think it's fully in line with the well-being of future generations Act, because it's about the way we work, it's about engaging with stakeholders and it's about the benefit to Wales. And again, I go back to: you have to balance the social, the economic and the environmental sides of it all.

[92] Again, it's about supporting our coastal communities in Wales. I know it was a decision where you weren't going to please everybody. I had a huge amount of correspondence. I think, within the fisheries section, this was probably the biggest postbag I had. Even Assembly Members—and I'm not looking at anybody—had very different views, but I took the decision, as I always try to, on a scientific and evidence base. I had long conversations with the scientists from Bangor and I felt that that was the right decision. However, we've got to be very careful how we monitor it. We're not going to let a huge, increased number of vessels in, and we will be monitoring it very, very carefully.

[93] **Simon Thomas:** Just on that, because, in effect, that's being worked up now by a stakeholder group, isn't it, of how that will happen—the regulation, the monitoring and all that. How could we, as a committee, be informed about how that group is also looking at the principles that Vikki Howells asked you about? Would we be able to see minutes and conclusions of the group and so forth? Is that something that we—

[94] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes. We've got the scallop task and finish group and I'd be very happy to share—. It's really important that we work in a transparent way and I'd be very happy to share that with the committee.

[95] **Simon Thomas:** And when do you expect them to come to a conclusion about how this scallop fishery will be reopened?

[96] **Lesley Griffiths:** Presumably by the autumn—sorry, I'm looking at the wrong person. By the autumn?

[97] **Mr Fraser:** We'll be expecting, sometime later this summer, output from the group. I think the key thing is that we've encouraged cross-sector input into that group and that's very important. So, it largely comes down to the group in terms of their consideration of the right technical measures that might be appropriate in these circumstances, to come forward so that we can consider those. And then we'll need to think about bringing forward a statutory instrument, which, obviously, would be scrutinised here.

[98] **Simon Thomas:** Yes, but if you could furnish the committee with the group's deliberations in advance of that, because that would, in turn, inform the Assembly when the statutory instrument comes before—

[99] **Lesley Griffiths:** I'm sure that's not going to be restricted, so I'll be very happy to do that.

[100] **Simon Thomas:** Okay. Diolch yn fawr. Can we turn to David Melding, please?

[101] **David Melding:** Thank you, Chair. I'd just like to ask a very general question about resources. It's simply this, really: do you think that NRW has enough resources to meet its MPA duties?

[102] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, I do, because obviously, it's part of their statutory responsibility. I think the budget for NRW is around £63 million and obviously, it's their statutory responsibilities that they need to fulfil first.

[103] **David Melding:** We have heard from a number of quite authoritative witnesses that the key problem is that they don't, and in particular, that site condition reporting is haphazard and is not as coherent and comprehensive as it needs to be. NRW have said themselves that this area has been a big

challenge and a big difficulty. Is that the usual sort of special pleading that Ministers have to put up with or are we in a more definite situation here where we all have to ask ourselves whether there is enough resource going? And, the implication of that, obviously, is that it's got to be moved from somewhere else, potentially.

[104] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes. I hope it would be the former. I'm meeting with NRW today, actually. I meet with them monthly and I'd be very happy to specifically ask that question. But, as you can imagine, it is a plea quite often. And don't get me wrong, I know that we—. I'm not going to go into the politics around the finances. We all know it's a very difficult time. I think I actually increased their budget a little bit this year, but it might have been on the capital side, not on the revenue side. But I think, perhaps, that's a bit of a plea.

11:00

[105] **David Melding:** Because, you know, I think—I'd expect you to say, 'Well, we live in constrained times, financially.' As a Minister, I don't suppose you get presented with terribly easy choices. But, in addition to that—and that pressure, obviously, is across the public sector—a lot of people have said to us that the problem with MPAs is that designating them doesn't mean you deliver them, and that there's historically been under-resourcing in this area, and that's part of the challenge. That does lead one to conclude, I would say, possibly, that we do need to ask that question of whether we're just giving them enough.

[106] **Lesley Griffiths:** But I go back to what I was saying: it is their statutory responsibility, and they have some non-statutory responsibilities. I would expect them to fulfil their statutory responsibilities first. But, as I say, I am very happy to ask that specific question later today, and I'll let you know the response. You've taken evidence, obviously, from NRW. I've seen the written evidence that you've had. As I say, I will take that up with them, but—

[107] **Simon Thomas:** I think it was in the written evidence—

[108] **Lesley Griffiths:** It was in the written evidence, yes; I read it.

[109] **David Melding:** To develop this point about the relevant authority groups, which I'll now refer to by the acronym RAGs, we visited one in Pembrokeshire, and that was the same day, I think, that we went on to the

enforcement vessel and it was very interesting. But I think a lot of us around this table, over the years, have been pleading for people to work together—joint working, collaboration and all the rest of it. We were sat around a table, and there was an obvious example of this working. The key was there was a designated site officer, and that person—she was able to get all the key players together. When you work effectively together, you don't add effort, you multiply it; that's the wonder, really, of multi-agency working—you get a multiplication effect. But NRW has withdrawn the funding from RAG officers, and that does seem to be a really curious way to respond to best practice in the field.

[110] **Lesley Griffiths:** I know NRW did change the way they gave out funding. I referred to it in an earlier answer. So, they used to give core funding and then they adjusted it to give it on project-based activity. Now, I know some of the RAGs didn't adjust their bids and didn't get the funding, so we'll have to see if that works in a better way, because I think it is really important that we do know what they're delivering, and I don't think we did when it was just given for core funding. Is that core funding spent on offices, for instance, when they could, perhaps, use an office in a local authority? If you went to Pembroke, they probably were in the local authority offices—

[111] **David Melding:** They were.

[112] **Lesley Griffiths:** So, I think that needs to be looked at.

[113] **David Melding:** That's all about monitoring and evaluation, isn't it, when the core decision is whether you fund these posts, frankly, and that's a strategic matter. Has NRW surprised you by making the strategic decision not to fund them?

[114] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, I go back: it was their decision to target resources towards project-based activity because they felt they weren't getting the information that they needed or that the services were being delivered because they were given it in core funding. So, again, we'll have to look at it and continue to monitor it. I don't know if you want to add anything.

[115] **Mr Rees:** I think that was part of the reason why you wrote to them, Minister; you wrote to all the relevant authorities—because Welsh Government's a competent authority and local authorities and ports are relevant authorities. And the point's just been made here that if they work

together, they can actually have one officer who covers a whole range of things. They do that very successfully. That's why I think it's important that they're aware of their roles and responsibilities, and the Minister's made that clear to them.

[116] **David Melding:** To take you on to the work the MPA steering group has done, we understand—we've touched upon this, but I'll try to cover areas that we've not discussed. We are told they indicated a firm preference for seven management areas, each with a site officer, and that costing is roughly £50,000 per officer, so in the order of £350,000. That doesn't seem to me a vast amount to really get all the joined-upness and the delivery end of what we're trying to do here if not completely sorted, then well on the way to that. It's curious that your response has been—. So, we've had very clear evidence that that was emphatically the view. Then we get from the evidence from Welsh Government that, 'Oh, it's much more wishy-washy than that'. They indicated a vague hope that this could happen, but of course they realised that resources were such that it was—I think in your evidence you said, and I quote—

[117] 'too challenging for the management authorities concerned'.

[118] Now, you know—it's Sir Humphrey triumphant there in that language, I think. I have to tell you: frankly, that is not what we have heard. We have heard that they absolutely told you that what you needed to do was to fund seven management areas. Are we misinformed? Was there a tin ear in terms of the Welsh Government listening to what the MPA steering group said?

[119] **Mr Rees:** The Welsh Government is one of the management authorities, alongside all of the others. What we did as a group was we identified an optimum approach, which was the seven areas. We broke the costs down into a cost per management authority and when that was presented to the group, the group's view was that that was not achievable. So we changed tack and went for a more strategic approach to keep the group together and to look at ways in which we could do work across a range of sites to improve those sites.

[120] **Simon Thomas:** So, just for clarity, are you saying that Welsh Government was prepared to put its bit of money in and it was the other authorities that weren't?

[121] **Mr Rees:** We listed out for all of the relevant authorities that would

have been involved what the costs were likely to be, and the members of the group, who represented a number of those relevant authorities, felt that the resources wouldn't be there to cover it.

[122] **Lesley Griffiths:** So, that was the advice that I received.

[123] **David Melding:** Well, I think we need to return to this to see if there was a firmer view from the MPA.

[124] **Simon Thomas:** They didn't simply ask you to fund it.

[125] **Lesley Griffiths:** I wasn't asked—

[126] **Mr Rees:** There's always a request for Welsh Government to fund a range of things. At the end of the day, in that group, we are all jointly responsible for the management of MPAs.

[127] **David Melding:** And in that joint responsibility, do all the players that need to make a contribution—or at least so many that it overwhelmingly secures the objective—do they all have to agree, or is it on majority decision? I mean, how does it operate? Presumably some of them were quite happy to sign a modest cheque.

[128] **Mr Rees:** No, very few members of the group were content to recommend that to all of the local authorities, port authorities et cetera around Wales as an approach, because they felt the resources wouldn't be there to pick it up.

[129] **David Melding:** Okay. Well, that's a clear response and we can pursue and seek to verify that.

[130] **Simon Thomas:** Just on this, Huw Irranca-Davies.

[131] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Yes, very briefly, and staying with David's line of questioning. It sounds like a philosophical question, but it's actually a political and policy question: anticipating that the demands on both conservation and fisheries and the socioeconomic benefits that you want to deliver are going to grow and grow and grow, accepting that what you say is absolutely evidence out there in the field, which is that it needs to be driven by partnerships, do you foresee a point at which you're going to have to say—you as a Cabinet Secretary, and others—'Frankly, everyone, you're

going to need to dip in to contribute to this in a more substantial way; to do the fisheries, the conservation, the dredging, the recreation, the local and regional economic benefits that accrue from this, we're going to need to get serious about it'?

[132] **Lesley Griffiths:** 'Yes' is the short answer.

[133] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Because we're dancing around it.

[134] **Lesley Griffiths:** So, the current financial position meant that it didn't happen, for the reasons that Graham's just outlined. But as we go forward, as we get more powers next year, as we get the national marine plan in place, you're absolutely right; we're going to have to look at it, and it will be a political choice. I put significant extra funding into this part of the portfolio's budget this year. Mainly it was because I recognised straightaway that we needed new vessels, for instance. I think that decision that the previous Minister—I'm not criticising Carl at all, but he had made the decision not to replace. But it comes to a point—and you will have seen that—where it's clearly nearing the end of its working life, so you have to make those decisions. So, £6 million there could have perhaps gone into something else, but next year we'll have to look at it.

[135] **Simon Thomas:** Just for the record, because there was an exchange there around the relevant authority, Pembrokeshire, which we visited, my understanding is that's actually hosted by the port authority, not by the local authority.

[136] **David Melding:** Oh, yes. They were in someone else's building, weren't they? They didn't have a magnificent—*[Inaudible.]*

[137] **Simon Thomas:** They were using all the resources that they could find.

[138] **Lesley Griffiths:** Which is good.

[139] **Simon Thomas:** A gaf i droi at Sian Gwenllian? Diolch yn fawr. **Simon Thomas:** I'll turn to Sian Gwenllian now. Thank you.

[140] **Sian Gwenllian:** Ychydig o gwestiynau ynglŷn ag ymgysylltu efo rhanddeiliaid, sydd yn hollbwysig yn y maes yma fel ym mhob maes, wrth **Sian Gwenllian:** Just a few questions about engaging with stakeholders, which is vital in this area as it is in every area, of course. Do you feel

gwrs. A ydych chi yn teimlo bod yr that the engagement is effective, and ymgysylltu yn effeithiol, ac ydy'r does the model of engagement that's model ymgysylltu sy'n cael ei being used lead to a culture of ddefnyddio yn arwain at ddiwylliant o effective communication? gyfathrebu effeithiol?

[141] **Lesley Griffiths:** I think we've got some very good stakeholders within the fishing industry in Wales, and certainly you'll be aware—. I've spoken to you at length about the stakeholder group that we've brought together following the decision to leave the EU. Obviously, the fisheries stakeholder members were very keen to come forward and join that group. Is it effective? I suppose that then relies on those people who attend the stakeholder groups going back and disseminating the information to their network. And is that good enough? I would say 'perhaps no'; there needs to be a bit more improvement in the communications because sometimes I'll get correspondence and I'll think, 'Well, you should know that from your stakeholder group involvement.' So, I think that is an area that could perhaps be improved, and a bit more openness and transparency.

[142] **Sian Gwenllian:** Rwy'n falch Sian Gwenllian: I'm pleased that you eich bod chi'n cydnabod hynny. Mae acknowledge that. There is one yna un mater penodol o gwmpas specific area around the steering grŵp llywio yr ardaloedd morol group in terms of the MPAs, because gwarchoddedig, oherwydd nid yw'r the papers aren't published on the papurau yn cael eu cyhoeddi ar wefan Government's website. In a letter to y Llywodraeth. Mewn llythyr atom ni us recently, you have confirmed that yn ddiweddar, rydych chi wedi they are not published. In the spirit cadarnhau nad ydyn nhw yn cael eu that you want to get in terms of more cyhoeddi. Onid yn yr ysbryd yma yr transparency, wouldn't it be good for ydych yn dymuno ei gael o fwy o these to be published? For example, dryloywder y byddai hi yn fendithiol the discussion we've just had now in i'r rhain gael eu cyhoeddi? Er terms of the seven areas, and that enghraifft, y drafodaeth rydym there is a difference of opinion within newydd ei chael rŵan ynglŷn â'r saith the group, and the discussion around ardal, a bod yna wahaniaeth barn o the funding, if the minutes were fewn y grŵp, a'r drafodaeth am yr there on the website for us all to see, arian, pe bai'r cofnodion yna ar y it would be much more transparent wefan i ni gyd eu gweld, byddai'n and we could see what was going on, llawer fwy tryloyw ac mi fedrem ni and what the tensions were, and so weld beth oedd yn mynd ymlaen, a forth. beth oedd y tensiynau, ac yn y blaen.

[143] **Lesley Griffiths:** Absolutely, I agree with you, and when I wrote to you I looked into if there were any reasons why they couldn't be published. I personally can't see any reason for them to be restricted, so I think it's perfectly sensible for you to be able to have that information, and for the public to be able to have that information. I couldn't see any reasons why it couldn't happen.

[144] **Mr Rees:** It's just that it's a group of managing authorities coming together to have a discussion and have a meeting. There is a relevant authority officer who comes into the group and advises the group on the work of relevant authority groups, and feeds that back as well and represents their views in the group. But there isn't any reason why we couldn't publish them.

[145] **Sian Gwenllian:** Okay. I think that would be useful.

[146] Symud ymlaen wedyn at yr ymgysylltu efo'r cyhoedd yn gyffredinol. Mi wnes i gyffwrdd ar hynny reit ar y cychwyn. Nid wyf yn meddwl bod pobl yn deall beth yw pwrpas y parthau gwahanol yma. Nid yw pobl yn deall y gwahanol ddyletswyddau sydd gan wahanol barthau, ac nid ydynt yn sicr yn deall y cysylltiad rhwng cadwraeth a datblygu. Felly, beth fedrwch chi wneud i wella hynny? A ydych chi'n derbyn hynny i ddechrau—bod yna le i wella o ran sut y mae'r cyhoedd yn cael eu haddysgu am bwrpas yr ardaloedd?

Moving on, then, to engaging with the public more generally. I touched on that at the outset. I don't think that people understand the purpose of these different zones. People don't understand the different duties that different zones have, and they certainly don't understand the link between conservation and development. Therefore, what can you do to improve that situation? Do you accept that, to begin with—that there is room to improve how the public is educated about the purpose of these areas?

[147] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, of course; I think there is always more you can do, isn't there? And if somebody is interested in it, then they'll probably go and find that information, but until that time then perhaps they wouldn't. One of the opportunities that I do think we have is that next year is the Year of the Sea. So, I know officials are already working across the department with economy and infrastructure officials to see what more we can do there to show that it is a really positive thing, and to make people more aware of

the benefits, if you like, of it or of them.

11:15

[148] **Sian Gwenllian:** Ac rydw i'n cymryd mai cyhoeddi y cynllun morwrol pan ddaw hwnnw—ac mae gwir angen hwnnw ar frys, buaswn i'n dweud—mi fydd hwnnw'n cynnig cyfleon hefyd i gael y drafodaeth yma i egluro'r strategaeth a'r weledigaeth sydd gennych chi ynglŷn â chadwraeth a datblygu yn mynd law yn llaw.

Sian Gwenllian: And I take it that publishing the marine plan when it comes—and we really do need that urgently, I would say—that that will offer opportunities as well to have this discussion and to explain the strategy and vision that you have for conservation and development hand in hand.

[149] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, absolutely. When we go out to consultation, you always find—I think, in this department particularly—that the number of consultation responses is very high. I've had a few consultations recently, more on the agricultural side, and we've had a significant response to those consultations. Hopefully, when we do go out to consultation—and I do share your view that we need to do it as soon as possible—we'll get a significant number of responses back. That will generate, if we get the communications right—I go back to what I was saying, that we need to make sure that the comms side of things is right. I think, when we go out to consultation, that will raise the issue in the minds of the public.

[150] **Sian Gwenllian:** Fel efo pob ymgynghoriad, rydych chi'n mynd i gael lot o'r grwpiau diddordeb yn cymryd rhan. Nid ydy hynny o angenrheidrwydd yn golygu bod y cyhoedd yn cymryd rhan yn yr ymgynghoriad.

Sian Gwenllian: As with every consultation, you're going to have lots of interest groups taking part. That does not necessarily mean that the public is going to take part in the consultation.

[151] **Lesley Griffiths:** No, but you can only have it out there and encourage people, and I think as elected representatives we all have a role in making sure our constituents are aware of it. Quite often with these consultations—. I'm very keen on 12 weeks because you get criticised if you don't do it for 12 weeks, particularly if a part of it would be over the summer. You need to make sure that you give everybody the opportunity to do it, and most people do it at the end. Certainly on the TB eradication we had very, very few

responses and then, suddenly, you get this influx, so, I do hope that—. Obviously you'll get your interested groups, of course you will, and you'll get two sides of the argument, and probably three and four sides of the argument as well, but I think it would be great if we could reach out to the public, as you say, the ordinary member of the public who perhaps hasn't got a vested interest or is just interested in marine life. So, hopefully, if we get the comms right, we'll make sure that members of the public are aware of it. Because it's a really—I think it's fantastic. You know, to have that first national marine plan for Wales is really exciting.

[152] **Simon Thomas:** Ocê, diolch yn fawr. Jayne Bryant. **Simon Thomas:** Okay, thank you. Jayne Bryant.

[153] **Jayne Bryant:** With Brexit on the horizon and the significant implications that will bring, do you intend to continue to seek to achieve or maintain the good environmental status by 2020, which is required, as you know, by the EU marine strategy framework directive?

[154] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, we have agreed in principle to continue our work. And you will have heard me say in other parts of the portfolio that we don't expect to see any drop in environmental standards, and the same goes for this part of the portfolio as well.

[155] **Jayne Bryant:** That's good to hear, and I'm sure lots of people are very glad that you've put that on record again today. Many witnesses that we had were concerned around the uncertainty over the next few years. What work has your department done to assess the likely implications and the impact of leaving the EU on Welsh MPAs?

[156] **Lesley Griffiths:** Well, that work is already under way and we're harmonising designation and management as part of the designation process. It's really important that we have those conversations and, again, I go back to the ministerial stakeholder group. So, within that stakeholder group, again, it was really important that people didn't work in silos, and marine and fisheries are part of that. I think we've got a stakeholder group on 3 July, and at the last one we decided that we are going to start working not in silos, but in our little areas, to come together, so there is a designated one for marine and fisheries.

[157] **Mr Rees:** Yes, there's coast and seas.

[158] **Lesley Griffiths:** Coast and seas, that's right. So, they'll be reporting into the main stakeholder event on 3 July. But, again, this is an area that's devolved to Wales; there'll be no grabbing back of powers by the UK Government. I'm very firm on that.

[159] **Jayne Bryant:** Brilliant, thank you.

[160] **Simon Thomas:** Just on that point, considering that we have just spent two months in an unnecessary general election, some of us would say, which hasn't allowed us to debate these issues. You now have Mr Gove as your correspondent, Cabinet Secretary. Have you already contacted him at all around these issues, and what are you—? We're looking at the marine protected areas here, but I'm interested to know because you said very clearly there would be no roll-back on devolution in environment. What is the process now that you're taking forward about ensuring that this happens? Because there is talk that there may not be the great reform Bill, as pitched, or that alternative methods may come forward, in a different parliament. Are you at all aware of how this might happen as a process now?

[161] **Lesley Griffiths:** Right. So, colleagues will be aware that we have monthly ministerial meetings around these issues—we've got them in the diary. We go around the four countries, and, next week, we were hosting, and I had an e-mail on Monday morning to tell me that the meeting had been pulled.

[162] **Simon Thomas:** Right. From Whitehall, this is?

[163] **Lesley Griffiths:** From DEFRA. It had been pulled, along with the July meeting, because it didn't fit in with the Minister's, well, presumably the Cabinet Secretary and Ministers' diaries. I just think that's a very unfortunate way of dealing with it, particularly as I was the host next week, and just to receive an e-mail telling me it was out. So, officials have been speaking. Yesterday, we were hoping to try and reinstate it. As of just coming into committee, I haven't heard anything. So, I'm in the process, when I go from here, I will be writing to Mr Gove about that, because I think it's really important. Those monthly ministerial meetings were just a good way of being able to thrash out all these issues. I was hoping that senior officials—. The last one we had was in April and I was hoping we would have the senior official one in May. Again, that was pulled. Obviously, we didn't have one in June, because we were having one next week; that's now been pulled. You know, it's very unfortunate. We've lost significant time.

[164] **Simon Thomas:** So, at the moment, you won't have had one for four months.

[165] **Lesley Griffiths:** We had one in April.

[166] **Simon Thomas:** Yes, but if the June and July ones have gone, then it's—

[167] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes. We put dates in for June, July and September. And the June and July, unfortunately, at the moment—. But we're hoping that we can get that reinstated. But certainly it's a great shame, because we were making real headway in that and it was very good to be able to go back to stakeholders and explain. And I think they put real importance on the ministerial meetings. I have to say they worked very well. We didn't always agree, of course, but it was a good forum for doing it.

[168] **Simon Thomas:** But unless you meet as the four nations, then you're not going to be able to agree how this environmental protection is preserved when we leave the European Union, and the methods for doing that. You simply can't agree it unless you meet.

[169] **Lesley Griffiths:** No, absolutely. And, obviously, we've got the situation in Northern Ireland at the moment. I think the Permanent Secretary came to the last meeting that we had. So, I just think it's very unfortunate. I'm afraid that's the current position, but I am hoping—. Obviously, we don't know when the Queen's Speech is going to be; it could be that the Ministers from DEFRA felt that they couldn't come to Cardiff next week because they didn't know when the Queen's Speech was. But, we really need that. We just need another date, and we can all be flexible and make sure that we get that date. Even if we all can't get together in a room, there's technology that means we can video.

[170] **Simon Thomas:** If you get a date, are you prepared to just inform the committee that you have a meeting, so we know that that's happening?

[171] **Lesley Griffiths:** Of course.

[172] **Simon Thomas:** Okay. It's your questions, anyway, Huw.

[173] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Thank you, Chair. Your questions were pertinent,

because they do flow into the sort of dialogue that I'm seeking to examine here in my questions, particularly with senior officials. I can sort of understand that a new Secretary of State in post may need a couple of weeks—to just get landed with a portfolio, 'Here it is, 30 areas.' But, however, time is pressing, because of what I want to get on to. Can I just clarify? Did you just tell the Chair that the senior officials meeting will also not be able to take place?

[174] **Lesley Griffiths:** No, it didn't. When we had our ministerial meeting in April, the election had been called, I think, the week before. Was the election called on the eighteenth? I think it was the week after. I think it was on the eighteenth. So, there should have been a ministerial meeting in May, but that was obviously pulled because of the election. I had hoped that the senior official meeting would be held in May, but it wasn't—instead of the ministerial meeting. But, the senior officials still meet.

[175] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** The senior officials are still meeting. That's great; okay.

[176] **Lesley Griffiths:** Or talking, anyway.

[177] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** In that case, could I ask to drill down a little bit on a couple of specific issues? Some of our marine protected areas, particularly European marine sites, are transposed already into English and Welsh law, like the special areas of conservation and the special protection areas. There are others that aren't. What is your current thinking on how we protect those other European marine sites that do not currently fall within the law of England and Wales?

[178] **Lesley Griffiths:** As I say, it's very early days, really, but we are starting to have those discussions. Again, it depends on the great repeal Bill, really, because we just don't know what's going to be happening in relation to that now.

[179] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** I understand that you can't give us your thinking on that, but have you got an idea when you might be able to relay to the committee what is your thinking, going forward, and what discussions you've had with the UK Government on this as well, because it does, of course, tie into the nature of the repeal Bill, and it does tie into some of the wider tussle going on about where powers lie and so on, but ultimately, these are existing European protected areas and they are exposed if they are not transposed in

one way or the other into either Welsh law, made in Wales, or England and Wales law? Have you got an idea—is that work that will be going through over the summer, and you'll be able to report back to the committee—?

[180] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, we'll be happy to report back. These are the things that we discuss at ministerial meetings. As I was saying, it would be a great shame if we can't keep them going, because when we put the dates in the diary back in, probably, February, we didn't know there was going to be a snap general election and we have unfortunately had that very long hiatus. But, as I was saying, we really need to pick up as quickly as possible because there are so—I mean, I've got 7,000 pieces of legislation and regulations in my portfolio, which are in agriculture and marine and fisheries.

[181] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** In the absence of those meetings, because I'm going to lead on to another question, drilling down into some of the detail as well, do you or some of your officials have some idea of the way that you would like it to go in making sure that those European marine protected sites that are not currently within law are protected within the Welsh waters? Have you got an idea of what you will be pitching to Mr Gove or his Ministers?

[182] **Lesley Griffiths:** Do you want to—?

[183] **Mr Rees:** It's all hinging on the great repeal Bill, but our hope is that they would be saved as part of that process. So, there will be no change in terms of the designation.

[184] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Right, okay—

[185] **Lesley Griffiths:** But then if they're not, obviously we'd have to create our own legislation.

[186] **Simon Thomas:** If I can just say, Huw—before he was appointed, Mr Gove said that he wanted to roll back on the habitats directive and roll back on this environmental legislation. Have you had any indication from the current Government that they are going to either preserve, because the original intention was to transpose everything across, or have you had any indication at all of a change of tack—?

[187] **Lesley Griffiths:** When you say 'the current Government', you mean literally—

[188] **Simon Thomas:** I mean the one that is literally being appointed, yes.

[189] **Lesley Griffiths:** No, because I haven't had any discussions with them.

[190] **Simon Thomas:** I appreciate it's not—. There we are.

[191] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** But you've made clear yourself—

[192] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes, to the previous Government.

[193] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** —that as far as you're concerned, there will be no diminution of the standing of the current protected statuses of these areas. Enforcement is another issue; management of them is another issue.

[194] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes.

[195] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Right, okay. So, when you go into your discussions at senior official level or between yourself and Mr Gove and so on, you'll be saying, 'This is what we should be having'.

[196] **Lesley Griffiths:** Yes.

[197] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Okay, that's great. The other thing related to that, then, is the future reporting and accountability mechanisms, which of course are currently under the article 17 reporting obligation under the EU habitats directive, but what are your or your officials' initial thoughts on that going forward?

[198] **Lesley Griffiths:** Again, the great repeal Bill is where the details will be, but we will obviously continue to have our reporting duties to OSPAR. That will continue and I think we're due to have a report in relation to this next year.

[199] **Mr Rees:** Yes, next year.

[200] **Lesley Griffiths:** So, I'll be able to give you some more detail then.

[201] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** They are really helpful answers, in some ways in the fact that you can't be more elucidating with your answers because of where we are, but I think it would be in the committee's benefit, Chair, that, as soon as those discussions are under way, you helpfully clarify for us what

the parameters are and what's been agreed and what's been discussed.

[202] Just a broader question to ask in finishing off, which is this aspect now that we're all talking about in terms of the challenges and the opportunities arising from the decision to leave the EU in whatever shape that withdrawal may be. Are you doing that scoping? What do you see at the moment as Cabinet Secretary? Let's start with the opportunities: do you see opportunities here?

[203] **Lesley Griffiths:** I try. I do try to see opportunities. I think it's really important to recognise that, with any challenges, there are always opportunities and that's why we did initiate that engagement process. I have to say that we've done it in Wales in a way that hasn't been done in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. They're catching us up now, but I think that the engagement that we undertook in that stakeholder group and now within the workshops has enabled us to start looking and scoping, you know, the opportunities. So, that's ongoing work. So, we've now started being much more—. And this is what we wanted to do at the ministerial meetings as well—we'd go and we'd talk, and we've asked for papers to come on different areas. And I honestly can't remember from April what the next topic was supposed to be, but, certainly, marine and fisheries will be an area where—. You know, we just want the best possible outcomes—

11:30

[204] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Absolutely.

[205] **Lesley Griffiths:** —for our coastal communities.

[206] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** But do you have any idea, you and your officials, or the scoping group at the moment, if you were to say to them, 'Well, tell us what the top one, two, three opportunities are here potentially? What are you telling us now is there in our sights if we can make it work?'

[207] **Mr Rees:** There are clear opportunities, in terms of Wales being a small country, of joining things up and making things much easier for people to understand, easier for people to navigate through if they were looking to do various things. So, those opportunities exist, and the current legislation, you know, whilst being very comprehensive, is designed for a much larger scale. So, we have those opportunities moving forward, and to try and integrate it better with the marine plan.

[208] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Right, okay. And beyond the challenges that have been already rehearsed, are there any other challenges that you would want to make the committee aware of? Whether it's in—*[Interruption.]* No, sorry; I won't lead you, no. Are there any other—? No. Could I lead you, then? *[Laughter.]* Collaboration on data, research, sharing of information, all of those things, but also the wider international obligations that go beyond what we've been talking about today—do we have any threats there?

[209] **Mr Rees:** The biggest challenge will be funding, because a lot of the European designations and, you know, in terms of fisheries as well, there is a lot of funding that is provided to support a lot of that activity.

[210] **Lesley Griffiths:** But it's okay, because we were told we're not going to lose a penny, so it's fine. We're going to hold them to that.

[211] **Mr Rees:** So, in terms of international obligations, OSPAR, we're still without, then we assume that we will become a coastal state as part of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea post exit, and then anyone operating within our waters will have to abide by our laws and we would probably end up with some sort of negotiating arrangement with other coastal states in terms of what we do.

[212] **Simon Thomas:** We will have to conclude there.

[213] Diolch yn fawr am y Thank you very much for your dystiolaeth, a diolch i'r Ysgrifennydd evidence, and thank you to the Cabinet ac i Mr Fraser a Mr Rees am Cabinet Secretary and to Mr Fraser ddod i mewn. Wrth gwrs, bydd yna and Mr Rees for coming in. Of drawsgriafiad ar gyfer cywirdeb yn course, we will send you a transcript cael ei gylchredeg hefyd. to check the accuracy.

[214] A gaf i awgrymu i'r Aelodau, Can I suggest to Members that, as we gan ein bod ni'n newid pwnc yn are changing subject significantly eithaf sylweddol, ein bod ni jest yn now, we take literally a five-minute cymryd pum munud, yn llythrennol— break, please—so, at 22 minutes to so, 22 funud i hanner dydd—i ddod midday—to come back and discuss yn ôl a thrafod coedwigaeth? Ocê. So, our next topic: forestry? Okay. So, pum munud. five minutes.

Gohiriwyd y cyfarfod rhwng 11:33 a 11:37.

The meeting adjourned between 11:33 and 11:37.

**Ymchwiliad i Bolisi Coedwigaeth a Choetiroedd yng Nghymru:
Tystiolaeth Lafar gan Gynrychiolwyr y Diwydiant
Inquiry into Forestry and Woodland Policy in Wales:
Oral Evidence from Industry Representatives**

[215] **Simon Thomas:** Welcome back to the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee. We move on to our inquiry on woodland and forestry policy in Wales and welcome our witnesses for this morning. If, at the outset, I could just ask you to just state your name and organisation or responsibilities for the record. Thank you very much. We'll start with Mr Edwards.

[216] **Mr Edwards:** If I start, yes. My name is David Edwards and I'm district manager for Tilhill Forestry for Wales. We currently manage approximately 20,000 hectares of mostly commercial forestry in Wales.

[217] **Mr Bishop:** Martin Bishop, Confederation of Forest Industries, the UK organisation representing the whole of the wood/forestry supply chain—sawmills, processors, owners, right the way through—and I'm the national manager.

[218] **Mr MacLeod:** I'm Hamish MacLeod of BSW Timber. We have a sawmill in Newbridge in Powys and we employ 150 people there. I'm based in Scotland but I do cover the whole of the UK in my role.

[219] **Simon Thomas:** You're all welcome and we have a series of questions for you. It may well be that you have similar things to say in reply to some of these questions, so, in order for us to make progress, if somebody's already said something, then don't feel obliged to have to repeat it, if I can put it that way.

[220] If I can start just generally with a question for yourselves, operating in the commercial sector here in Wales, what is your general outlook for the future of the commercial forestry sector if we maintain the current planting and restocking rates that are being predicted at the moment? Perhaps, Martin Bishop, it might be good, please, to start with you on that.

[221] **Mr Bishop:** Yes. I think the short-term outlook is fairly positive. The

markets are good. There's strong demand for all types of forestry products. We could easily process and sell an enormous amount more—that's the simple answer. We know, longer term, that increased demand is going to be there. There's plenty of organisations—the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, WWF, and those sorts of organisations—who predict the long-term demand for timber and wood products is going to rise—double or treble. So, we really do know that the outlook is positive for the sector. The thing we must address, really, is the catastrophic decline in the availability forecast. We can only make what we make if we have a source to do it. What you make, what you cut from the timber, is an academic question, if we haven't got the timber there to cut anything. So, we think there's a very positive outlooks for the sector.

[222] **Simon Thomas:** So, the sector itself is geared up and viable, and ready to take the input. Is there, from the Welsh perspective—you take timber from all over the UK and import as well, I imagine—a time in the future when you see a real decline in the availability of commercial timber in Wales?

[223] **Mr MacLeod:** Perhaps I can answer that question. I think we have this vision that, when you invest in a sawmill, although the payback might be something like seven to 10 years financially, you expect really to be running it for 20 to 25 years. And so we see a decline in the availability of raw material in about 15 years in Wales. That's really made us think twice about further investments at Newbridge. We have six other mills in the UK where, with the supply situation, although it does tail off, we have a longer horizon to work with. So, we're really concerned about the time horizon in Newbridge. I guess what we're trying to do just now is just invest in operational improvements and do some value added. But I think anything in terms of actually increasing the capacity of the line is really out of the question now in Wales.

[224] **Simon Thomas:** I think that's an important time just to ask, with the overview across the UK, whether you see the different examples of different policies elsewhere being more effective in bringing forward commercial woodland, and, particularly, you mentioned the tail-off is different in different parts of the UK. Perhaps just to tell the committee a little more about how that pans out in different parts of the UK, and, perhaps, whether there is anyone who's doing very well in ensuring that there's an ongoing supply.

[225] **Mr MacLeod:** I think we see in Scotland, where we have four mills, that

the prospect of that tail-off, if you like, is more like 25 years, and it's not quite so pronounced. Although the state forestry—the forestry commission—is fairly steady, private sector woodlands are coming to maturity over a longer period of time. So, that will sort of cover the gaps. But, the Scottish Government, like Wales, has had targets in place for woodland creation, and in the last couple of years, they've actually started to meet those targets. So, we've actually got some progress there, and so some confidence, if you like, that the tail-off will ultimately be met.

[226] **Mr Bishop:** We're in a time frame where we can do something about it. The diagram that we put into our submissions gives us the timescales. With improved tree breeding and things like that, now we can actually start to look at getting some returns in as little as 15 years sometimes. So, what we call the rotation, which is the time from planting to the time of eventual full harvest, would normally be 40 to 50 years, with some, particularly the improved Sitkas, coming through in 30 years, with some sort of income before that. So, we are in a position where we can mitigate this. It's not a disaster that's a complete write-off, but we do have to act fairly quickly.

[227] **Simon Thomas:** So, would it be fair to say that you're sounding a warning, from your perspective, about the availability of commercial wood in Wales?

[228] **Mr Bishop:** Yes, very much so.

[229] **Mr Edwards:** To give you an example, I work for Tilhill. We're a GB-wide company, and my colleagues in Scotland talk about planting, as a company, thousands of hectares per year. In Wales, I'm talking about planting tens of hectares of new forest per year.

[230] **Mr Bishop:** I think the aspiration in Scotland is 15,000 hectares per year. And they're fairly confident they will achieve that.

[231] **Simon Thomas:** Jenny.

[232] **Jenny Rathbone:** Picking that up, Mr Edwards, why aren't you planting more, given that all the evidence is that we're going to need more?

[233] **Mr Edwards:** I reckon that the biggest obstacle to new planting in Wales is regulation. That's the one thing that holds us back more than anything else. The land is potentially available for inward investors or

farmers to plant. The problem we have is with regulation and, more recently, the financial limits that have been put on our grant funding for new planting as well. That's limited new planting.

[234] **Jenny Rathbone:** Sticking with regulation. Regulations exist in Scotland too. What's so different about Wales?

11:45

[235] **Mr Edwards:** The regulations in Wales seem to be enforced in a more rigorous way. There's much more of a will in Scotland to enable planting, whereas in Wales it's much more about the reasons not to plant. So, there isn't that enabling culture, if you like, to encourage planting. We have a woodland opportunities map that you may well have heard of, but, again, that doesn't encourage planting in the areas where we want to be able to plant. The ideal ground for establishing new commercial forest is on the marginal agricultural ground, not the best agricultural ground, not on the unplantable land. It's that middle ground that we're looking to be able to plant.

[236] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, do we need to change the regulations or change the attitudes?

[237] **Mr Edwards:** I think to change the attitude to regulation would be a key start.

[238] **Jenny Rathbone:** Well, if we have regulations, we need to enforce them. Are you saying the regulations are—?

[239] **Mr Edwards:** Well, there's enforcing regulations and there's how the regulations are interpreted, as well. I think that's an issue for us. One of the ways I often think about it is we talk about, 'To make an omelette, you have to crack some eggs', and the problem is that we're not able to make those judgments about which eggs can be cracked to get that outcome that we're looking for in terms of more forest land planted.

[240] **Mr Bishop:** There's a lot of, I would say, conflicting regulation and legislation, but there's a lot of different legislation that you have to take account of, and many of them overlap a little bit and make life extremely difficult. Most of them—the habitats risk assessment, environmental protection ones, EPA, the EIA ones—they all talk about, 'You must

demonstrate you don't have a significant impact'. And that word is crucial, 'significant', because it doesn't mean any impact, because, whatever you do, if you're going to change land use, you're going to have some impact on something. But it's who interprets the word 'significant', and it's being interpreted as having any impact. So, I think we have to make some choices, really. That's what we want. We want some direction on some choices about what we actually want. There are going to be winners, and there are going to be losers.

[241] **Simon Thomas:** Just to say, we'll have some more specific questions on regulation coming up later. Jenny.

[242] **Jenny Rathbone:** Clearly, we aren't at the moment meeting our own objectives in terms of our climate change strategy. How realistic is it for us to replace imports, which is obviously the vast majority of the source of wood in the UK? If we want to use more wood, we've either got to import more or we've got to plant more.

[243] **Mr Bishop:** There's already a market to go at with imports. It's an interesting—. Many different products are imported and it could be timber products, it could be pulpwood products, it could be right up to chairs and tables. But, even in the sawn wood market, we still import a substantial amount. The UK mills are competing admirably with imports on price. The European organisation of sawmills has actually said that the UK's a very good place to base sawmills, and they say that the sawmill capacity is world-class in the UK, that they are capable of competing. What we need is the resource to be able to allow them to compete. It is literally all about the resource. When we talk to the processors, they could all double or treble capacity if they had a resource there to do it. It's all about the resource in our opinion.

[244] **Jenny Rathbone:** How much is this down to regulation, or is it just the long-term UK disease of failing to invest for the long term?

[245] **Mr MacLeod:** I think the sawmilling industry has actually invested—and in our own company invested over £100 million in the last six or seven years in different facilities. So, the processing sector's not afraid to invest in capacity and to modernise. As Martin says, we have a world-class level of technology within the sector in the UK, and we are able to compete on a like-for-like basis with our products, whether that's into construction or whether it's into pallets or fencing or garden products and so on. We're pretty innovative as well in terms of developing, and, if you actually look at the

scale of growth of the industry from around about an 8 per cent market penetration 30 years ago to, now, a 38 per cent market penetration, it's been an exceptionally successful sector. Whether it can go much further, well, that's really dependent, again, on the resource of raw material coming from the woodlands.

[246] **Mr Bishop:** I think the figure, just on Wales, is something in the region of £45.5 million that has been invested in processing capacity over the last eight years.

[247] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. But if we were to adopt the wood first policy in constructing new homes, which you advocated in your manifesto in 2016—Confor did—what impact would that have in terms of prices? If we had that, we'd then increase demand, and at the moment we don't have the raw material. Or we do at the moment, but we won't have in the future—is that the message?

[248] **Mr MacLeod:** Ultimately, timber competes with steel, concrete, brick, block and other building materials. So, if you look at the entire house as it's being constructed, whether it's out of timber or out of brick, traditionally, if you look at the whole life cycle of that home, the timber cost is a very, very small proportion of the total cost of actually running a home for 50 years. So, I think timber can actually be very competitive against other materials. So, where there are wood encouragement policies—and there have been in certain local authorities throughout the UK—they've actually seen some real growth in market penetration in that. In Wales, it's about 30 per cent, I think, of homes that are timber framed, for example. In Scotland, it's 75 per cent. In England, it's less than 20 per cent. So, there's still quite a long way to go in terms of market penetration for construction grade timbers.

[249] **Jenny Rathbone:** So, what are the barriers to that? Is it the need to change Government policy?

[250] **Mr MacLeod:** There's sort of a cultural barrier. I think that's the first thing. If you look at other European countries, timber is always the first choice in terms of building, whereas, in the UK, generally speaking, it's, 'Well, we'll use timber if there's nothing else.' But I think, nowadays, we've actually got the opportunity to really push it, particularly in carbon sequestration as well, because you're locking up the carbon within the timber within the house, so it's a very good use in terms of mitigation as well.

[251] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. There are strong climate change reasons for building with timber, obviously, and we can agree on that. What are we going to do to turn that corner?

[252] **Mr Bishop:** The demand is for all timber products, not just construction—it's construction, fencing, pallet. Everything that moves around, everything that comes onto building sites comes on pallets, so there's a huge demand across the board. What we want to see is that we want to displace imports, but we don't want to lose the existing business that we've already got. We don't want to simply replace one product with another product. We want to expand the whole sector, so that we can still produce all the fencing materials and pallet materials, for which there is the demand. All we're trying to do is to produce what the customer wants. Forgive us for producing what customers want. What we want to do is to do some more—do extra on top of that. We don't want to lose what we've got to another market.

[253] **Mr MacLeod:** A lot of it is about communication as well, and educating—educating architects and specifiers. I'm speaking at a conference tomorrow in Llandrindod Wells on Woodbuild Wales, and that has basically brought together a number of local authorities and housing associations and so on, and a good cross-section of presentations from the sector, from universities, from academia and so on. I think that's the sort of event that we need to actually be using to promote timber into construction. It's a good story to tell, and there are some really good cases as well where we've actually demonstrated you can build affordable homes from timber.

[254] **Jenny Rathbone:** I absolutely agree with that, but how are we going to crack the supply problem that we otherwise may have, in an uncertain world, because at the moment we import it all—most of it? How are we going to ensure that we've got the security of supply if we're going to use more wood?

[255] **Mr Bishop:** Plant more trees.

[256] **Mr MacLeod:** Plant more trees.

[257] **Mr Edwards:** Plant more trees, yes.

[258] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay, so—

[259] **Mr MacLeod:** Unanimous. [*Laughter.*]

[260] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay, but how—

[261] **Huw Irranca–Davies:** That's it.

[262] **Jenny Rathbone:** That's it, fine. We agree on that, so what's the problem? Why isn't private industry saying, 'We need more trees, so let's get out there and do it.' Is it because they're resistant to doing something that doesn't reap benefits for 25 years?

[263] **Mr MacLeod:** Well, I think there's a number of reasons. This situation existed in Scotland about 10 years ago, and, slowly but surely, we've got through a whole raft of changes there, culminating in the Cabinet Secretary for forestry and economy—they link the two portfolios in Scotland—commissioning a report on the regulation from James McKinnon, who is a retired chief planning officer for Scotland, and he came up with a number of recommendations, which actually give a bit more certainty to potential investors. It's the certainty, I think, that's actually lacking here. So, as David says, there are people here prepared to make investments, but if they think it's going to take them two to three years then they will actually move somewhere else to make that investment. I think if we can actually create that sort of environment here in Wales then there will be a willingness to actually come forward with land and plant it with trees, and then that will give the knock-on effect as it gives the processors the confidence to say, 'Right, okay, well we've got something to pass on to future generations here'.

[264] **Mr Edwards:** The problem is, from the certainty point of view of inward investors—and it's the same for existing land owners as well—that a forest on any scale is going to take you at least two or three years to get through the process. The problem we have in Wales is the outcome of that process is uncertain. In Scotland, it can take two or three years and hundreds of thousands of pounds to invest in the process of getting approval for planting, but at least they have a decent idea that at the end they know what they're going to get out of it. One of the issues that we have in Wales is nobody has yet gone through the full environmental impact assessment process to produce an environmental statement, which costs, as I say, £150,000 to £300,000, depending on the circumstances. Nobody is prepared to spend that sort of money when they've got no certainty of what they're going to get out of it at the end. And that's one of the big differences

between Scotland and Wales currently.

[265] **Jenny Rathbone:** Okay. Well—

[266] **Mr Bishop:** Perhaps it would be—. Could we show members of the committee the process? It would be good to take you somewhere to a woodland manager, sit you down in front of the computer screen, and show you the process that they have to go through to plant trees. It's very complex.

[267] **Simon Thomas:** Members of the committee have undertaken their own visits to several—. And I think one was to a sawmill, I believe—yes.

[268] **Mr Bishop:** Yes, there have been several to sawmills, but to a woodland management planner, who actually has to plan this, to show you the process of going through it—.

[269] **Jenny Rathbone:** But it's also down to attitude, to what type of—and how we do it, because, obviously, there are people who argue that we should have a continuous coverage approach, where, you know, we immediately take down trees and put up new ones, and that we don't necessarily have vast swathes of one particular type of tree all in one place. So, is that an attitude problem?

[270] **Mr Bishop:** You need both, in my estimation. You need commercial forestry, which, in general, will have to be a single species because of management costs, and you need native broadleaveds to do other things, and you get other benefits from those trees. I'm not going to sit here and say you need one or t'other; we need both, and I'm very, very firm on that. I would be a strong advocate of that. In the business of forest diversification, for instance, which is what most of the grant schemes have been pushing towards, we look at diversification at a forest scale, not at an individual coupe scale. So, what we envisage is that you would have blocks of a single species in a forest and you would have different blocks of different species at different ages. So, you have a mosaic approach of that, and that's manageable. That means that you have blocks that are cost effective to manage, but they're not the vast monocultures that we planted in the 1960s.

[271] **Mr Edwards:** And interconnected as well.

[272] **Mr Bishop:** They're interconnected. And it's a whole different way of

looking at it. If you have a completely diverse forest of different species right next to each other, which is what an ancient woodland or native woodland is, you're not going to manage that for commerciality; that's going to be different benefits. So, we do need both. We do need both. Continuous cover, that applies—. You know, continuous cover is a method of managing. It works. Nobody says it doesn't work. It is good for some objectives; it is not good for other objectives. The exponents of either clear felling or continuous cover will tell you that their management system is the best and others are rubbish. I'm sorry, you need both. You will need a cross-section of both in order to get this diverse forest mix.

[273] **Simon Thomas:** This is a good place to bring in Huw Irranca-Davies's line of questioning.

[274] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Thank you, and I should say thank you to Hamish and his colleagues for hosting me at BSW, it was—. Sorry for spending so much time with you and drilling deep into your operations, but could I just return to the woodland opportunities map? Just a quick run through the three of you: is the woodland opportunities map, Hamish, fit for purpose?

[275] **Mr MacLeod:** No.

[276] **Mr Bishop:** No. It's very good—you know, it's a good start; let's put it that way.

[277] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Good start. Okay, well that's fine.

[278] **Mr Bishop:** I think what it's—

[279] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** I'll come back, I'll come back.

[280] **Mr Edwards:** No.

[281] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Okay. So, now, if you were given free rein, and the Cabinet Secretary said, 'Come in, tell me what we can do to change it'? Would you rip it up, or are there improvements? Go on.

12:00

[282] **Mr Bishop:** It is a Glastir woodland opportunities map. It shows—. It's got a political element to it, so there are levels in that geographic

information system that score highly in places where there's poverty, pollution, and people, because that's where Welsh Government want to see Glastir money spent—RDP money. That's fine, that's great, but that will mean that, actually, the M4 corridor and A55 corridor will score higher than a place in mid Wales, because of those political aspirations. And they all know the cost of land in these northern and southern regions, and the availability is low. So, it's not fit for purpose because of what it is. A Glastir woodland opportunities map, and there are many layers in that map, is a good thing. It's got lots of information in there. What it just needs is, if you like, to almost take the scoring system out from there just to look at opportunities. I did note that others have given evidence to say that it was a very top-down approach, and I would say, 'No, it isn't'. It was compiled by Welsh Government, of course it was, but all the information in those layers is supplied from non-governmental organisations, NRW, and those sort of people. So, in that respect, it's a bottom-up approach. It just needs—. What I think it needs is it needs to have a constraints map, where, if it's an acid-sensitive area, or, you know, there are genuine constraints, those stay in. Other layers could be taken in and taken out. If you've got a community forest you want, well, you want to put a layer in that gives you a high scoring where there are communities. If you wanted a commercial forest you would put a higher scoring layer in where the land is available. So, it's about revamping that, using the information that's in there, because there's a lot of good stuff in there.

[283] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Okay. So, that's absolutely clear that you would not rip it up and start again. There's a basis there, it needs to be refined—possibly other aims and objectives need to be put into it, and pinned into it, quite heavily. So, your argument would be that what is needed is a fundamental review and refresh of that. Could I ask what involvement did the commercial forestry sector have, if at all, within the development of those original mapping opportunities?

[284] **Mr Bishop:** It was about the time that I actually came in, so I didn't have a huge amount of input in there myself, but—.

[285] **Mr Edwards:** I think the short answer is we didn't have much input into it. A lot of the layers that are in there that make up the opportunities map are all the reasons why not to plant trees. What's not in there are layers as to why to plant trees, or to have a presumption in favour of trees. One of the other problems we have with the opportunities map is it's quite broad brush. So, if we're looking to appraise a piece of land as to whether it's going to

score high or low, apart from, as Martin says, that it's along the north coast or the M4 corridor, the issue is that we can't drill down to an individual farm scale and actually determine what it is that would make it score high or low, and we've struggled to get that information out of Welsh Government. We've had to resort to freedom of information requests to get that level of detail, which is a concern.

[286] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Okay. One supplementary question: you mentioned there Tir Gofal. Now, what are your thoughts on Tir Gofal?

[287] **Simon Thomas:** Or Glastir now.

[288] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Sorry, Glastir, I mean. Sorry, I'm out-of-date there: Glastir. I'm showing my age. [*Laughter.*] Glastir.

[289] **Mr Edwards:** Glastir is the current system, or process, that's in place for grant funding of forestry. The only grant funding that's available to forestry just now is for woodland creation, which we've been talking about, and also there's another grant scheme for planting larch sites, as part of the process of dealing with phytophthora ramorum or larch disease, but there's no general grants under Glastir, or anything else, for normal woodland management.

[290] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Okay. And are you looking for grants, or are you actually looking for a smarter regulatory structure and better mapping?

[291] **Mr Edwards:** I would prefer a smarter regulatory structure. I think grants are good for woodland creation, but in terms of ongoing management—some of my colleagues might shoot me for this, but, generally, forestry is getting by without grants in terms of growing commercial crops that the processors want and delivering all the other multiple benefits that come along with commercial forestry.

[292] **Mr Bishop:** I'd probably think about two issues with it: we could learn scale. I think most of the stuff that's been planted has been small scale and, in order to be viable to achieve anything you want to achieve, be it biodiversity, be it water management, be it commercial forestry, it's got to operate to scale. A corner of a farmer's field is just not going to do anything for anybody.

[293] If we get scale, then everybody will get something of what they want.

I've talked quite a lot to RSPB and wildlife trusts about this. If you had a 100-acre forest being planted, 25 per cent of that at least would be of biodiversity, native broadleaveds, all sorts of stuff. So, out of that forest, everybody would get a bit of what they want. Whereas if you have a small forest—half a hectare or a hectare here and there—nobody's getting anything out of that. So, I think scale is important. We need to think bigger. The reason we've done small scale is because it's easier to give permissions for small scale; bigger ones are much more complicated for the regulator to do.

[294] The other thing is that the process is just far too complicated, too slow. It costs a lot to get schemes through. We heard only yesterday, I think in rounds 1 or 2 of Glastir woodland creation that only 3 per cent of round 2 applications have actually been sent out and approved yet, and we've already had round 3, and round 4 is—you know, it's really slow. So, that needs—. It needs funding. I would make a plea for funding for the regulator, Rural Payments Wales—we've got to fund the departments that do this.

[295] It's interesting—I think apparently the Welsh Government are now funding some other consultees to forestry to enable them to give some better information quicker. You ought to be funding the people who are facilitating it as well. It's a big plea. It's complicated because we've separated the functions as well. Again, what we were hearing yesterday—you apply to Welsh Government, Welsh Government do a little bit of a first screening, they send it to NRW, presumably by carrier pigeon, NRW do the verifications of it, they send it back to RPW for the contract—you know, it's just—. Separating the functions really has not helped.

[296] **Huw Irranca-Davies:** Okay. Fine.

[297] **Simon Thomas:** I should at the start have alerted you that translation facilities are there if people ask questions in Welsh.

[298] Sian, a oedd gen ti gwestiwn? Sian, did you have a question?

[299] **Sian Gwenllian:** Ie. Roeddwn i jest eisiau mynd ar ôl rhywbeth rydych chi wedi'i ateb yn rhannol. Pam es i i weld melin yn yr ardal sydd yn gwasanaethu Pen Llŷn i gyd, beth roedden nhw'n ei ddweud wrthyf i oedd y bydden nhw'n gallu dyblu eu
Sian Gwenllian: Yes. I just wanted to ask about something that you've partly answered already. When I went to see a mill in the area that serves Pen Llŷn, they told me that they could double their product, but they thought that it was very frustrating

cynnyrch, ond eu bod nhw'n ei gweld hi'n rhwystredig iawn bod yna lot o ffermydd o gwmpas fyddai wedi gallu neilltuo rhan o'u tir ar gyfer tyfu'r coed, ond bod ganddyn nhw ddim diddordeb oherwydd bod y grantiau ddim yn mynd â nhw i fanna—nid oedd yna *incentive* ariannol i fynd â nhw i fanna. Ond beth rydych chi'n ei ddweud rwan ydy, hyd yn oed petai hynny'n digwydd yn rhywle fel Llŷn, er enghraifft, mae eisiau i fwy na jest hynny ddigwydd ac nad yw newid Glastir neu newid y cynllun grantiau i amaethwyr, sydd yn bosib, wrth inni ddod o Ewrop—. Mae modd efallai i ddyfeisio system sydd yn rhoi mwy o bwyslais efallai ar—bod yna *incentive* yna i ffermwyr dyfu coed. Ond beth rydych chi'n ei ddweud ydy bod hynny yn ei hun ddim yn mynd i fod yn ddigon.

that there were a lot of farms around that would have been able to earmark some of their land for growing those trees, but they weren't interested in that because the grants didn't take them in that direction—there was no financial incentive to do so. But what you're saying now is that, even if that did happen somewhere like Pen Llŷn, then we'd need more than just for that to happen and that changing Glastir or changing the grant scheme for farmers, which is possible, perhaps, as we leave Europe—. Maybe a new system could be developed that puts more emphasis on an incentive for farmers to grow trees. But what you're saying is that that in itself is not going to be enough.

[300] **Mr Bishop:** The regulatory stuff will be key, for sure, but, in the past, we've had both a difficult regulatory regime and perhaps a disincentive, through lack of financial incentives, for the farmer to do it. We're in a different place now. Firstly, the support for the farming sector through CAP and that sort—that could disappear, we don't know, and forestry has—. Through demand, prices have increased dramatically; we are now able to compete. There have been several cases in the north of England and Scotland where quite substantial farms have come up for sale and it's been the forestry sector that have been the top bidders on those throughout because the economics stack up now.

[301] I would draw your attention to the UK forest market report. This is about investment. So, this is people who own land buying forests and the land as well—not particularly landowners—but they're desperate to buy land to put into forestry. It's been doing over 10 per cent return on investment for quite a number of years. Pension companies are very interested in all of this. So, they really think that the economic aspects add up. What we then have to do is to get the regulatory part right as well.

[302] **Mr Edwards:** Incentives are important to farmers because they've got to cover that period from where you plant the trees until you start to get an income. That's likely to be a minimum of 15 years to 20 years. So, actually getting that pump-priming is where the incentive is really important in order to get that planting started.

[303] **Mr Bishop:** The current Glastir woodland creation schemes do that: there are 12 years' worth of payments in there for farmers. Then you say, 'Well, how much further do you go than that?' I don't know. How much do we support that sector? That, I feel, is the target area that we ought to be looking at. Historically, the forestry has been pushed up to the margins—up on to the hill lands and up on to the difficult sides, and actually most of that's the controversial land. Lots of the biodiversity is up there: the fritillary butterflies and the peat bogs and all that sort of stuff. The process of getting permission in the more controversial areas is very difficult. If we start to target the agricultural land, which has already improved grassland, theoretically, we should have a lot less aggravation in getting permissions to do it. That would bring the cost of getting these schemes through. So, I think there's a big opportunity now to look at that.

[304] **Mr Edwards:** There's definitely an opportunity for diversification for farmers in the upcoming climate.

[305] **Simon Thomas:** Can we turn to some of the questions around the regulation around that with Vikki Howells?

[306] **Vikki Howells:** Diolch. So, the Welsh Government has recently decided not to raise the threshold for mandatory environmental impact assessments for afforestation projects in non-sensitive areas. Could I ask you what your views are on that please?

[307] **Mr Edwards:** First, I think it's disappointing that they haven't done it because they've done in England and they've done it in Scotland. If we had a higher threshold, then that would certainly encourage the process of application and speed it up, because it's the EIA determination that delays projects just now. One of the other things in terms of an inward investor's point of view is that, if they know that they're not going to have to go through an EIA process, then there's the opportunity to bid on that land when it becomes available. One of the problems is that, if you don't know whether you're going to have to go through the full EIA process at the time

of acquisition, when you're buying the land, why take that risk and invest? Because you might find that you can buy the land and then you can't do anything with it from a forestry point of view.

[308] **Mr Bishop:** The feedback that I'm getting from people is that it's a significant barrier because of the uncertainty. We would argue that in many areas, yes, an EIA is a good thing to do—in some of those more difficult, controversial areas. But if we're starting to look at already improved agricultural land, they didn't need an EIA to change their use of it; surely forestry would be seen as an improvement on that, so why have an EIA on that sort of land?

[309] **Vikki Howells:** You talked about the importance of scale earlier as well, Martin. Do you think that this decision will deter larger-scale afforestation projects?

[310] **Mr Bishop:** I think it will deter medium scale—let's put it that way. I think, possibly, the larger scale, because they do have the scale of funds to look at this sort of stuff, will get over it. But if you've got a medium-sized scale, those are the ones that will not come forward.

[311] **Mr Edwards:** I think the problem is that the large-scale investors have already taken the view that Wales is closed for business for woodland creation and they've gone to Scotland. The inward investors that we're finding are individuals rather than the institutions, so these might be people who are buying 20, 30, 40, 50 or 100 hectares. We've had examples last year where we had three inward investors that all bought farmland with a view to planting it and they didn't get accepted into the grant scheme. One of them has now been accepted through the reserve process, but that sends out the wrong message to people wanting to buy land to plant it with trees.

[312] The other thing about the EIA is that the environmental protection in terms of the grant process is already there, beyond the EIA phase, because to actually go through the Glastir application process, the priority habitats are protected in terms of what can be grant funded and what can't. So, there are two levels of protection, and by raising the threshold of the EIAs, you don't actually threaten the environmental protection side of things.

12:15

[313] **Simon Thomas:** There's another protection available—that's what

you're saying.

[314] **Mr Edwards:** Yes.

[315] **Vikki Howells:** And just quickly, then, on the note of environmental issues, Bangor University has been doing some work around life-cycle assessment and I just wondered what your thoughts were around that. Do you think that a life-cycle assessment should be undertaken to help us understand the full impact of forest management and end products on climate change mitigation?

[316] **Mr Bishop:** Any information that helps us is going to be good. Interestingly, there's quite a lot already out there. If you look at life-cycle analysis products, most of the construction sector will have to have what they call an environmental product declaration, so that they know where the product is and they can compare concrete versus steel and the environmental impact of producing that.

[317] Wood for Good, which is our sister organisation that we part fund, produce all of this sort of stuff. This is one I just happened to print off on softwood—massive amounts of information. It takes into account forest management and haulage, the energy use of the sawmill, the water use of the product and end-of-life disposal—all of that is in this sort of document and there's plenty of that out there. It doesn't particularly do timber any good because it does miss out—and it's a hugely complicated document which is beyond my pay grade—but as I understand it, it doesn't take into account product substitution or carbon storage in product. That's partly because of, presumably, lobbying by concrete and steel, because they didn't want that into these life-cycle assessments. But there's a huge amount of work being done. It's there—it's all out there to do, if you want it; it's there.

[318] **Mr MacLeod:** We're just about to roll this out as a sector and I've been involved with that project over the last three years to gather the data together and to do the full analysis. As Martin said, we now have an EPD for our sawn timber as well. Okay, great, we've got that, but how can we use this to our competitive advantage? I think in large scale, particularly in public procurement and civil engineering projects, people are actually starting to ask for the EPD for the various products that go into building large and massive buildings. So, I think we'll have an advantage there where we now can say, 'This is the value of the timber.' We started off with the negative number in the tree, in that we've sucked out the carbon dioxide from the

atmosphere. So, we start with a negative number in the product input, and so we're adding to it in terms of embodied energy and so on and processing and distribution. We still end up with a very competitive figure at the end of the day.

[319] **Mr Edwards:** Timber is the greenest of products. It really is.

[320] **Vikki Howells:** Thank you.

[321] **Simon Thomas:** Jayne Bryant.

[322] **Jayne Bryant:** Diolch. I'm just going to move on to the future workforce for our forestries. Both the Royal Forestry Society and the woodland strategy advisory panel are concerned at the lack of young people enrolled in forestry-related education and training. Do you agree and how do you think that we should be tackling that?

[323] **Mr Edwards:** Both Martin and I sit on the woodland strategy advisory panel, so we would very much concur with that. There's been a general decline in people coming into the forest industry for the last 20 years or so. There's an ageing workforce. As a company, what we're finding is that we're taking on graduates as potential managers, whereas 15 years ago, we would have taken on people who had a full forestry degree, where they'd spent three years or four years at university studying forestry. We are now finding that we're taking on people who have done forestry as part of their course or even taking on graduates who haven't done any forestry at all and then we're training them as part of the graduate training programme that we have.

[324] Then, if you're going down to the people who are actually physically doing the work on the ground, again, there's an ageing population and it's about trying to encourage people to come in and do the work. Tree planting is not a particularly attractive job. Some of the operations that go on now, in terms of the sophistication of the harvesting machinery and whatever—that can be quite an exciting job for individuals. So, there is a need to constantly work on encouraging people to come into the industry. One of the issues in terms of the way that the labour force is organised is that it tends to be on a subcontract basis. So, you have quite a lot of small contractor companies and it's quite difficult for them to take on apprentices, literally due to the size of the organisation. If you're a harvesting contractor, you're reluctant to take on somebody to train them up, only then to lose them. If you're only employing four or five people and your one good operator leaves to a competitor, that's

quite difficult. How do you address that? I'm not sure.

[325] **Jayne Bryant:** Do you think young people know what opportunities exist— what job opportunities exist—in this field at all? How do we get that message across to people?

[326] **Mr Edwards:** It is hard to get that message across. The Royal Forestry Society—they do quite a lot to try and educate, if you like, the school pupils and young graduates in terms of what the opportunities are. The Institute of Chartered Foresters, which I'm currently the president of—they do quite a lot of work in terms of trying to encourage, but it is an uphill struggle. It just isn't out there.

[327] **Jayne Bryant:** I went on a visit to Wentwood forest, which is near where I live, and it was interesting to see some of the work that they'd been doing with schools and young people. But I think there's still a lot more that could be done, because people who live near that area don't actually know some of the things that are going on—whether that's people who perhaps could use the woods or actually work in those job opportunities. I do think we're missing a bit of a trick.

[328] **Mr Bishop:** It's partly our fault, because not many people join the forestry sector to stand on a soapbox and shout about it. I certainly didn't. So, we've got to get that message out there. Confor runs a fairly large biennial forestry show and we always take school parties around that show. That's good, and we've got to do a lot more of that, for sure. But the education authorities, the universities—. Bangor used to be a real centre of excellence for forestry and they've gone much more into environmental courses and actually they're coming back now into the forestry courses. So, it's about a message from the whole sector: 'Environment, yes, that's been great, that's been good, forestry has been not the way to go.' But it's also about, as David said, how complicated it is. We heard yesterday that even NRW are going to find it difficult to get their restock programme back on schedule because the amount of people to plant trees is just not there, and all you need is a spade. Yes, we can train people up and we can get this done quite quickly, but it's a willingness to do that. You get out on a Welsh hillside, it's pouring with rain—it's not the most attractive.

[329] **Jayne Bryant:** But some people find it a nice, relaxing job, being outside.

[330] **Mr Bishop:** Some do, yes.

[331] **Jayne Bryant:** Hard work, but it's quite nice.

[332] **Mr Bishop:** When you get to the other section of it, which is the more harvesting section, for instance, a lot of the harvesting companies are one-man operator, one-man owner. Harvesting machines can cost up to £0.5 million, and most of them have actually mortgaged their house to buy that machine. So, actually, they couldn't take on another one because they've already mortgaged up to their limit. That's a problem. But the opportunity is there. I often say to people that the first human hand to touch a bit of wood is when the carpenter nails it into a house. Up to that point, it is almost exclusively done by computer programmers, engineers—right through from the harvesters to the saw mills. It really is a very, very high-tech sector.

[333] **Mr Edwards:** Apart from when it's planted.

[334] **Mr Bishop:** Planting's the basic thing, yes.

[335] **Jayne Bryant:** Planting's the start.

[336] **Simon Thomas:** Jayne, because we've run out of time, can I move on to David's questions?

[337] **Jayne Bryant:** Yes, of course you can. No problem.

[338] **Simon Thomas:** We need to wrap up by half past, if that's okay. I invite David Melding.

[339] **David Melding:** I'd just like your views on the general standard of the management of woodlands. Would you say that's adequate or is it an area that could be improved?

[340] **Mr Edwards:** Well, the woodlands that we manage are managed to very high standards, as I'm sure you'd expect me to say. There is a basic standard that we operate to across the UK and that's the UK forest standard. That's what's agreed as good practice across the board and, certainly, that's the minimum standard that we would look to manage woodlands. There is then a higher standard, which is the woodland assurance standard, and many of the commercial forests in Wales and the NRW estate—the Welsh Government estate—are managed to the UK woodland assurance standard, which is a

higher standard still.

[341] **David Melding:** And if we take the basic standard as being the minimum, then, in terms of commercial forestry, how is that actually implemented and monitored as a standard?

[342] **Mr Edwards:** In terms of monitoring, there is no active monitoring from a third party, unlike with the UKWAS, where there is—. There's independent third-party auditing of UKWAS estates. So, the control, if you like, is in terms of when the regulator gets involved. So, currently, if you want to fell trees you have to apply for a felling licence. So, that's when the regulator becomes directly involved in what you're doing in terms of managing your forest. So, they would be overseeing that what you're applying for in terms of a felling licence, and what you're going to do in terms of restocking that site, meet the UK forestry standard as a minimum standard. So, that's the way they—*[Inaudible.]*

[343] **David Melding:** That strikes me as evaluating rather than monitoring because, all right, there's a test at the end, but there isn't one as you're going on in this 15 or 20-year cycle, then.

[344] **Mr Edwards:** Yes, but the intervention into the forest is when you need the permissions, which is when there's the opportunity for the regulator to come and see what you've done. Up until that point, you've planted, so you're covered by regulation and compliance with the UKFS standard at the time of planting, and then you're into this growing phase until you have the first intervention.

[345] **David Melding:** So, if you take either the higher or lower standard—or perhaps the higher one—does it have any biodiversity standard?

[346] **Mr Edwards:** Absolutely.

[347] **David Melding:** So, if you're not monitoring those, how do you know you're being successful?

[348] **Mr Edwards:** Well, in terms of the higher standard, you are monitored.

[349] **David Melding:** Oh, I see.

[350] **Mr Edwards:** You're regularly audited. In terms of the UKFS, what you

plant is obviously monitored at the time of planting, but if that's left to become unmanaged, then there is currently no intervention, no.

[351] **David Melding:** So, is that where the sector is going to stay, or do you think—? You know, you've talked about wanting to expand, and perhaps one of the reassurances you could give people is that even at the lower standard there would be more monitoring, particularly around—and perhaps improving that standard a bit so there's more biodiversity, for instance.

[352] **Mr MacLeod:** One of the pull-throughs is product certification at the end of the day. So, when we actually send goods out from our mills, they are certified according to Forestry Stewardship Council, which is based on, predicated on, this higher standard that David was talking about—UKWAS. So, to retain our chain of custody, and to retain our FSC certification, we have to ensure that our suppliers meet that. So, there is a commercial prerogative on people to actually manage their woodlands if they're actually in that commercial supply chain.

[353] **Mr Bishop:** Another one is the UK timber regulations, which is a EU regulation. It puts an onus on processors to make sure that what they're buying from a woodland is not illegal felling or anything else. There's a whole process they have to go through there. The other way of looking at this is that most of the managers—. It's a figure I can't really pin down, but it's about 70 per cent of the forests in Wales that are managed by agents—probably fewer than 25 people—and all of those agents are members of the Institute of Chartered Foresters, of which David is president. That organisation is a chartered organisation. It has terms, it has references, codes of conduct, public liability, insurance—lots of things that most of these managers would want to do the right thing in their forest management.

[354] **Mr Edwards:** Your forest is a valuable asset, so it makes sense for people to want to manage it.

[355] **David Melding:** Okay. I've got a couple of other questions, but given the time is up, perhaps we'll follow those up.

[356] **Simon Thomas:** Yes. We do have to bring this session to an end, but there are one or two questions that haven't been put—perhaps they've been covered tangentially, but not specifically put. If we can write to you, is that okay? If you can respond to us on that, that would be very helpful. In which case, I'd just like to thank you for your evidence this morning. Diolch yn fawr

iawn i chi. We will send a transcript so you can check for veracity, but that's the formal conclusion, then. Diolch yn fawr. Thank you.

[357] **Mr Bishop:** Are you happy for me to leave these for you?

[358] **Simon Thomas:** Yes, please do, and the clerking team will take them. Diolch.

12:29

Papurau i'w Nodi Papers to Note

[359] **Simon Thomas:** Mae gennym ni, jest fel pwyllgor, un peth i'w wneud o hyd yn gyhoeddus, sef eich bod chi'n nodi llythyr oddi wrth Lywodraeth Cymru ar ddifa moch daear, sy'n esbonio'r broses, a hefyd llythyr gan Lywodraeth Cymru ynghylch y grŵp llywio ar reoli ardaloedd morol gwarchoddedig. Cawsom gyfle i holi'r Ysgrifennydd Cabinet am hynny gynnu fach. Pawb yn hapus i nodi'r rheini?

Simon Thomas: As a committee we just have one other thing we need to do in public, which is for you to note papers from the Welsh Government on badger removal, and also a letter from the Welsh Government on the MPA management steering group. We did have an opportunity, of course, to discuss the issue with the Cabinet Secretary earlier. Everyone happy to note those?

[360] Okay. Thank you.

[361] Mae'r sesiwn yn dod i ben, felly. That brings our session to a close, therefore.

*Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 12:30.
The meeting ended at 12:30.*