



Comisiwn Brenhinol
Henebion Cymru
Royal Commission on the Ancient
and Historical Monuments of Wales

Environment (Wales) Act 2016

Part 1 - Section 6

The Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty

Report and Forward Plan 2022-24

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn y Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.



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1. Name of public authority

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales

2. Introduction and context

Constitution

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales ('the Commission') was established by Royal Warrant in 1908 (as amended in 2000). As a Royal Commission, we have a particular constitutional function: we report ultimately to HM The Queen, who has the sole power to appoint Commissioners, who are appointed to the Board for their expertise in matters covered by the Warrant and are responsible to the Crown for the strategic oversight of the Commission and the delivery of the objectives for which the Commission was established, as set out in the Warrant.

Funding

The Commission has been sponsored by the Welsh Government since 1999; prior to that, funding came from the Welsh Office. Our core funding is supplemented by income from grants and from book and photographic sales. As a Welsh Government Sponsored Body, we act as a delivery agent for Welsh Ministers and our role is to fulfil our responsibilities set within the context of the Welsh Government's strategic aims. Working with the Commission and its Board, the Welsh Ministers set out what they expect in return for funding by means of a term-of-government Remit Letter. We respond to this by means of an Operational Plan accompanied by a set of Key Deliverables agreed with the Partnership Team in the Culture and Sport Division of Welsh Government.

Mission

Our mission is to help everyone understand, value and enjoy the historic environment of Wales in all its diversity.

UNDERSTAND – contributing to heritage protection and informing national policy: We help to ensure that our precious and irreplaceable heritage is protected and enhanced. We do this by informing national heritage management policy and responding to the range of threats that buildings,

archaeology, landscapes and maritime heritage face, including the climate emergency and the changing needs of society and the economy.

VALUE – contributing to Welsh identity: Our presentation of the Welsh historic environment enriches people’s perception of Wales, its culture and its language at home, amongst the Welsh diaspora and globally, helping to make Wales a better place to live, work, visit or invest.

ENJOY – enriching people’s lives: Our work educates, informs and entertains, enhancing people’s lives in Wales in all their diversity, contributing to cultural understanding, education, health and well-being and the tourism economy.

Purpose

The Commission’s main purpose, as set out in the Warrant and agreed by the Welsh Ministers, is to survey, record, interpret and provide information about the historic environment of Wales, including the seabed within territorial waters; maintain and enhance the National Monuments Record of Wales; provide archaeological information to the Ordnance Survey; and maintain oversight of regional historic environment records. It is within the “surveying, recording, interpreting and providing information about the historic environment of Wales” that our functions are most relevant to biodiversity.

Staffing

The Commission employs 33 specialist staff, including investigators who work in the field to record buildings, archaeological monuments and landscapes. We also have a dedicated team of records managers and public service staff who maintain the National Monuments Record of Wales, run the library and search room, answer queries and help visitors find the material they need from our vast collection of photographs, drawings, documents and digital data sets.

Accommodation

The Commission does not own its own office building or land. Instead, it is located within the National Library of Wales, from which it leases office, archive and library space. The Library is responsible for the building and its maintenance, as well as the provision of utilities such as water and electricity, so we have limited direct influence on biodiversity through our accommodation. However, the Library has its own biodiversity policy with which we comply.

Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

While the Commission is not on the list of public bodies included in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, it strongly supports the delivery of the Welsh Government’s strategic agenda, as expressed in its *Programme for Government*. The Commission feels a responsibility towards, and is committed to, the Act’s core principle to ‘improve the economic, social environmental and cultural well-being of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principles, aimed at achieving the well-being goals’. We contribute to the seven objectives of the Act through our core work and specific projects and programmes: <https://rcahmw.gov.uk/about-us/corporate-information/future-generations/delivering-the-well-being-of-future-generations-wales-act-2015/>

Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty

The Commission is classed as a ‘Group 1’ organisation, as set out in the Section 6 reporting guidance document, as we rent an office building and our functions are not directly connected to biodiversity and/or land management.

Governance arrangements

Delivery of the Section 6 duty (‘s6 duty’) is ultimately the responsibility of the Secretary (CEO) of the Commission, with the Governance and Risk Manager responsible for monitoring and reviewing the s6 duty.

In 2019 the Commission established the Future Generations Working Group, with representatives from across the organisation acting as green champions. This was followed, in April 2020, by the publication of our Environmental Policy Statement. An annual Environmental Action Plan sets out how the Commission is working towards, meets or monitors its commitments as set out in the Environmental Policy Statement. One of the commitments in the Policy Statement is “seeking to maintain and enhance biodiversity and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems”. We report quarterly on progress with the Environmental Action Plan to the Welsh Government Partnership Team.

3. Highlights, key outcomes and issues

Survey and Investigation

The area of our work in which biodiversity is most relevant is our survey and investigation of historical sites and buildings. This is where we carry out field research to collect information about the location, distribution and organisation of past human cultures. For any site on which we undertake survey work, we require permission from landowners and agencies (e.g., Cadw and Natural Resources Wales); it is at this point that consideration of biodiversity is at the forefront.

In our risk assessments of buildings for survey, we always consider protected species such as bats.

Protected sites

Some of the sites we investigate are specifically protected for their special wildlife and natural habitats. For that reason, our work there – for example in the Welsh coast zone and islands, such as Skomer, Bardsey, Puffin and Grassholm – takes place outside of the main bird breeding and seal pupping seasons.



Fieldwork on Grassholm Island has revealed evidence of an early settlement now overlain and surrounded by gannet nests. We have undertaken survey and excavation on the island, which has required close liaison with, and permission from, the RSPB. Our work takes place after the gannets have migrated in October.

These islands provide an important sanctuary for several species of sea birds such as the Puffin, Gannet, Manx Shearwater, Great Cormorant, Guillemot, Razorbill, Shag and Kittiwake. We work closely with organisations such as the RSPB and the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales to ensure any work we do has minimal impact.



Commission staff explaining the LiDAR survey of Skomer Island to staff and long-term volunteers of The Wildlife Trust for South and West Wales.

Improvements in technology

New survey technology (<https://rcahmw.gov.uk/about-us/our-recording-work/sharing-our-digital-past/>) allows us to have less impact on biodiversity and the natural environment. For example, airborne laser scanning or LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) survey, as it is also known, reduces the need for more invasive and feet-on-the-ground survey work and, due to flying height, does not have an impact on trees or vegetation during the data gathering stage.

Information sharing

Finally, information we capture and the results of our work are always shared with landowners. Often this contains useful information for the management of sites and biodiversity. For example, our aerial photography was used to help count gannet nests to assess population on Grassholm, and our survey data has helped map the spread of the colony.

CHERISH project

While the Commission has studied the archaeology of Skomer and Grassholm Islands for several years, our current coastal work is undertaken as part of our 6-year, European-funded climate change project [CHERISH](#) (Climate, Heritage and Environments of Reefs, Islands and Headlands). This project is led by the Royal Commission, in partnership with the Discovery Programme: Centre for Archaeology and Innovation Ireland, Aberystwyth University: Department of Geography and Earth Sciences and Geological Survey, Ireland.



Caerfai Promontory Fort in Pembrokeshire is a CHERISH study site. Here the team have undertaken a number of investigations, including Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) survey and excavation. This was done in full consultation with landowners and managers and took into consideration biodiversity, for example nesting Choughs.

The key objective of CHERISH is to increase knowledge and understanding of the impacts (past, present and near-future) of climate change, increased storminess and extreme weather events on the cultural heritage of reefs, islands and headlands of the Welsh and Irish regional seas.

The project targets data and management knowledge gaps, employing innovative techniques to discover, assess, map and monitor heritage assets on land and beneath the sea, widely disseminating the results and developing best practice for future climate change adaptation.

Marine consultation

In the marine environment key pressures include unsustainable human activity, climate change leading to the warming and acidification of the world's seas and oceans, and the introduction of invasive non-native species.

The Commission has a key role as a statutory consultee with Natural Resources Wales for Marine Licence applications. This allows us to feed back our long-term understanding of Wales's cultural heritage into the planning of marine-based projects such as Coastal Defence construction, Offshore Renewable Energy schemes or sustainable aquaculture farming.



An artist's impression of the Minesto Deep Green marine energy converters operating in the Holyhead Deep off Anglesey. © Minesto. 2018

In doing this, we can ensure that such projects – often commissioned as part of our adaptation to, and mitigation of, climate change – do not in turn adversely impact the finite, fragile resource that is Wales's cultural heritage.

4. Actions 2022–24

We have aligned our response to the Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales (NRAP) objectives 1, 4 and 6, as required for a ‘Group 1’ organisation.

In the next three years (2022–24), the Commission will meet its biodiversity duty through **six** areas for action:

Action 1: Make a strong commitment

- Make a commitment to biodiversity in our Operational Plan.
- Make a commitment to biodiversity in our Environmental Policy Statement.

Action 2: Engage and support our staff

- Ensure Survey and Investigation staff continue to embed biodiversity into their survey work.
- Promote the benefits of volunteering to all staff, particularly in the context of nature/green spaces, and encourage them to take up their five days paid Special Leave (pro rata) per annum to undertake volunteering activities.
- Encourage staff to take part in the annual Big Butterfly Count and the Big Garden Birdwatch.

Action 3: Further embed sustainable procurement

- Increase supplier awareness by adding a statement about sustainable procurement to our Purchase Orders.
- Continue to promote sustainable procurement to staff.

Action 4: Reduce, reuse and recycle resources

- Continue to review paper-heavy processes.
- Continue to minimise and work towards zero avoidable single-use plastics.

Action 5: Continue to raise awareness of climate change and the need for adaptation

- Act as lead partner in the CHERISH project.
- Deliver the Commission’s elements of the *Historic Environment and Climate Change in Wales: Sector Adaptation Plan*.
- Collaborate with relevant stakeholders to lead conversations around possible adaptations in the built environment.

Action 6: Build in biodiversity into the Pendinas Hillfort project bid

- Work with the Wildlife Trust to incorporate a biodiversity strand into the Pendinas Hillfort project bid to understand what it is about Pendinas that makes it such a good habitat for wildlife and how this can be enhanced.

5. Review of s6 duty

We will review the s6 duty every year, with progress against the actions monitored quarterly by the Future Generations Working Group.

6. Annex A: Biodiversity forward plan

	Lead(s)	Success Measure(s)
1. Make a strong commitment	Governance and Risk Manager	Commitments included in our Operational Plan and Environmental Policy Statement.
2. Engage and support our staff	Head of Knowledge and Understanding Governance and Risk Manager HR Manager	Increased staff awareness of biodiversity. Increased uptake of Special Leave to undertake volunteering activities.
3. Further embed sustainable procurement	Operations Manager	Increased supplier awareness. Increased staff awareness and confidence.
4. Reduce, reuse and recycle resources	Operations Manager	Increased staff awareness and confidence. Reduced usage.
5. Continue to raise awareness of climate change and the need for adaptation	Senior Investigator (Archaeology)	Increased collaboration and sharing of best practice. Increased knowledge to support decision making. Increased public awareness and understanding of climate change.
6. Build in biodiversity into the Pendinas Hillfort project bid	Senior Investigator (Aerial Survey)	Increased knowledge to support decision making. Increased public awareness and understanding of biodiversity.