

## **Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)**

### **Submission to the Public Accounts Committee of the Senedd**

### **Barriers to the successful Implementation of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015**

#### **Introduction to CIEEM**

1. The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) is the leading membership organisation supporting professional ecologists and environmental managers in the United Kingdom and Ireland. CIEEM was established in 1991 and has over 6,000 members (over 400 in Wales) drawn from local authorities, government agencies, industry, environmental consultancy, teaching/research, and environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (eNGOs).
2. The Chartered Institute has led the way in defining and raising the standards of ecological and environmental management practice with regard to biodiversity protection and enhancement. It promotes knowledge sharing through events and publications, skills development through its comprehensive training and development programme and best practice through the dissemination of technical guidance for the profession and related disciplines.
3. This response was coordinated by our Wales Policy Group. We welcome the opportunity to participate in this consultation and we would be happy to provide further information on this topic. Please contact Jason Reeves (CIEEM Head of Policy and Communications) at [JasonReeves@cieem.net](mailto:JasonReeves@cieem.net) with any queries.

#### **Awareness and understanding of the Act and its implications**

4. The second wellbeing goal 'A Resilient Wales' reads: "*A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change).*"
5. Where the duty upon Local Authorities is to set and publish well-being objectives that are designed to maximise its contribution to achieving each of these goals, there is a concern that in some cases there is a focus on social and economic resilience, and an absence of consideration of ecosystem resilience.

6. The intention of the ecosystem resilience goal is to promote the maintenance and enhancement of the natural environment so that it can support social, economic and ecological resilience. However, the first half of the goal is sometimes ignored, and the objectives that are set consider only how social and economic resilience will be achieved, by means other than maintaining and enhancing the natural environment.
7. This has been recognised as an issue by the FG Commissioner, i.e. *"The Commissioner's current analysis is that the well-being objectives and steps relating to the 'environment' set by many public bodies do not always reflect the true definition of the Resilient Wales goal, which is focussed on maintaining and enhancing 'a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems'. Commonly, they focus on areas such as recycling, flooding, cleanliness, fly-tipping and reducing emissions. While these are important areas, it demonstrates a lack of progress in helping achieve nature recovery and healthy, resilient ecosystems."*  
[\(https://www.futuregenerations.wales/a-resilient-wales/\)](https://www.futuregenerations.wales/a-resilient-wales/).
8. Subsequently, a series of resources have been put forward, to encourage Public Bodies to consider practical measures for better maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and ecosystems. Therefore, the FG Commissioner's approach seems to be to suggest positive, proactive measures to encourage compliance with this element of the WBFGA, rather than to hold public bodies to account for not interpreting it properly.
9. We do not disagree with this approach, but full and successful implementation of Section 3 of the WBFG Act should be supported by more stringent actions and recommendations by the Auditor General where the Resilience Goal has been incorrectly interpreted as above, and also by The FG Commissioner in the Future Generations Reports.
10. Some of our other concerns are to do with the language employed, the understanding of the Act and its implications. For example, references to 'biodiversity' and 'ecosystems' are transcribed into the broad term 'resilience', and the term 'wellbeing' is not defined clearly. Without a clearer definition of these terms, it is difficult to see how a Local Government Ecologist or other public body could act with consistency.
11. Anecdotally, there does seem to be a better (or at least an increasing) understanding of ecosystem resilience, as required by the Environment Act. However, we do not believe this element of the WBFGA is well-defined, nor have the links to social and economic resilience been demonstrated. More specific guidance on how this, and the ecosystem approach and natural capital assessments, should be delivered would be beneficial.
12. Members have reported working on schemes where the WBFGA has been considered to varying degrees. This has largely been driven by the client and the profile of the scheme, rather than consistently being considered across projects. In terms of assessments to demonstrate delivery, these have usually been high level

and descriptive, and sometimes appearing to be a tick box exercise rather than adequately considering the impacts on the key elements which contribute to sustainable development. This could be improved with guidance on this and specific targets/goals. Furthermore, there often appears to be a lack of consideration to long-term effects.

13. Members further report that private clients are incorporating the principles of the WBFGA into their company strategies, however there is little evidence of implementation of the Act in practice, and lack of resources to drive this. Further support and guidance for these companies would be beneficial.
14. Following on from the point made in paragraph 7 above, we have concerns that the broad nature of the WBFGA does not provide a clear route for practical ecological implementation. The relevance of biodiversity and ecology to the wellbeing goals (particularly the resilient Wales goal) is considered to be rather underplayed and other aspects of the wellbeing goals are given a lot more emphasis, when really the natural environment and functioning ecosystems need to be the starting point.
15. We are concerned at the number of non-committal phrases in the Act. For example:
  - a. Section 5 para 2: *“a public body must take account of the”* the needs of the future against needs of the present. What precisely does ‘take account of’ mean? How is that translated into action of any kind?
  - b. Section 11 para 2: *“the Welsh Ministers must take account of any action taken by the United Nations in relation to the UN (climate change et.al).”* Used throughout this section, but no definition of what it actually means ‘to take account of’. Does it mean act on the recommendations, or merely consider them?
  - c. Section 16 part 79/para 1: *“The Welsh Ministers must, in the exercise of their functions, make appropriate arrangements to promote sustainable development.”* What are ‘appropriate arrangements’?
  - d. Part 37 ‘Assessment of Wellbeing’. Seeing as the language is so vague up to this point, this becomes an attempt to qualify an abstract. The Environment is frequently referred to, but in Section 38 Preparation of Assessments part 2 (what the board must take account of), there is no mention of biodiversity beyond the UN Climate Change report.
  - e. Beyond this point in the Act there is little reference to action, and beyond the UN Climate Change objectives, no environmental or ecological cross-referencing.

### **The resources available to public bodies to implement the Act and how effectively they have been deployed**

16. Local Planning Authorities need to be better funded and resourced in relation to biodiversity and ecology. LPAs are under-resourced and over-stretched, and therefore trying to assist in implementing the WBFGA on top of everything else must be a challenge.

17. Further resourcing is also needed to translate the Act into on-the-ground delivery.

**How to ensure that the Act is implemented successfully in the future**

18. The Act needs adequate enforcement mechanisms to ensure delivery on the ground.

19. There needs to be better emphasis on the ecosystem and biodiversity aspects of the Act.