



Audio file

Episode 2: Biodiversity Net Gain Update, Bannau Brycheiniog (Brecon Beacons) & G7 Climate and Environment Communique

Transcript

Speaker 1

Hello and welcome to the nature in a Nutshell podcast. This is the podcast which breaks down the latest ecology and environmental news. My name is Sophie and I'm the Marketing Officer at the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, also known as CIEEM, and I'm joined by my 2 colleagues and co-hosts again, Jason and Douglas, who will be explaining the big news items from the past month that are affecting people and nature.

Speaker 2

Hi, I'm Jason. I'm CIEEM's Head of Policy.

Speaker 3

And I'm Douglas. So I'm CIEEM's Policy Officer.

Speaker 1

First of all, I think all three of us would just like to say a massive thank you. We were blown away by the positive response to our first episode last month. So yeah, there's much more to come. And with that in mind, what are we covering in today's episode?

Speaker 3

OK, so this week we've got a deep dive into BNG courtesy of Jason, and then I'll be taking everyone through the initial G7 meetings and the new name change for the Brecon Beacons.

Speaker 1

As we mentioned in the first episode, this episode is primarily focusing on BNG because there's a big update with that. So Jason, I'm going to pass over to you.

Speaker 2

Yeah, so, BNG - Biodiversity Net Gain - at the time we were recording the last podcast, there have been some new updates from Government, so we said we'd do an update. So that's what we're doing now. There's still more information to come, but we'll give an update on some of the new information that's come out of Government and go from there.

So for those of you who aren't familiar with it, Biodiversity Net Gain is an approach that will become mandatory in England from November and it basically relates to any development. So if you're building houses, schools, roads, hospitals, shopping centres, whatever it is, it's going through the planning system, almost all of them will need to go through this Biodiversity Net Gain process, which involves putting back more nature than you have an impact on basically.



So when developers are planning their development after trying to avoid and reduce the impact, firstly, they'll then compensate for any residual losses and then put back even more. So it's one of the ways that we're trying to restore nature and put more nature back. So in England, we'll be using something called the Biodiversity Metric 4.0, so that's the latest version of this. And the way that it works is an Ecologist will go out and do a survey of the site and they will take the habitat type, the extent or the size of the habitat, the condition, the distinctiveness, plug that all into this metric and then you'll get a number out at the end and that will be your biodiversity units, and then you use that number to calculate 10%, which is the requirement that will come in in November. How you calculate that 10% and it'll give you that number and that's how you then work out how much you have to put back.

There is also a small size metric so Governments recognise that not all of these sites are going to be huge infrastructure developments, so there's going to be a simpler metric as well. We're still waiting for more details on that, but basically that small site metric is for sites that are less than a hectare, so fairly small.

And one of the things that we're really pleased about is that there are actually going to be very, very few exemptions from this process or almost everything that goes to the planning system will need to put back some nature basically. The exemptions are for anything under 25 square metres or a 5 metre linear feature, so that's pretty small.

And then we're really pleased that governments are now including nationally significant infrastructure project in the initial consultations that was going to be excluded. It's now included and that's brilliant because those big, big infrastructure projects really need to be the exemplars, the shining light of what's possible, they have all the resources and capacity to do this. They really need to set the example.

So at the moment BNG is going to be terrestrial and coastal, although there is marine Biodiversity Net Gain in development as well. The hope is that those will be seamless so that they will run into each other so that for example, if you have offshore wind cabling that power up onto the coast and up onto land will be 1 seamless process for developers to take that through the planning process rather than being different systems that create complications.

In creating the Net Gain, the positive biodiversity, it can either be done on site so where the development is on the footprint of the development, or off site. So there's both of those options. There will be a register for all the offsite gains that will be publicly available, so anyone can go and scrutinise that and then for the onsite gains, that's going to be recorded in the planning system.

Ideally you would have wanted this all in one system or one register where you could go and scrutinise it all together. But we recognise that taking stuff from the planning system, putting some else would be duplication. There's an additional admin burden there, so we sort of understand that.

And then the sites, once you create that net benefit, net positive for nature, they will need to be maintained and managed for 30 years. Beyond that 30 years, unfortunately, they're sort of up for grabs, you can build on them as you could develop or turn them into agriculture. Government is already working though on ways to try and maintain that biodiversity gain and make sure they stay



as biodiversity sites, so looking at things like carbon credits, payments for carbon sequestration or other ecosystem services.

And Government is open to the idea of what's called stacking and bundling. So it's taking the same piece of land and paying the landowner for multiple public benefits that they are creating. There are some concerns with that about double counting and double payments so we need to make sure there is additionality, that there's actually added benefits from that. But that's probably a good thing to try and keep those sites as biodiversity sites.

And as I mentioned at the beginning, so we're still waiting for some more details. We're expecting around six statutory instruments. So these are secondary legislation that come out of government with the final details before the approach becomes mandatory in November. So we are just waiting for those and I suppose the last little thing just to say about BNG is that it's not going to solve all of our problems, but it is going to form a piece of the jigsaw puzzle in helping us to restore nature, so this is more the planning, development will be more urban element of it and it's going to sit alongside things like ELMs, which is the Environmental Land Management Systems and that's the farming environment, how we're going to restore nature on farms and in the rural environment and then that will interlink with things like Local Nature Recovery strategies where local authorities plan out where they're going to put development and nature and how it all interlinks. So a piece of the puzzle, very welcome and we're looking forward to November.

Speaker 1

So if BNG is just for England then, what's happening in the devolved nations and Ireland?

06:31

Speaker 2

Scotland and Wales and Ireland - we'll talk a bit more about in a second, but Scotland and Wales are taking a different approach. They're taking a more qualitative approach. They're not going to be using a metric, so they're still developing their own approaches in Scotland and they're calling their approach Positive Effects for Biodiversity based on the 4th National Planning Framework, the NPF4, which requires all developments to contribute to enhancing biodiversity. And they've published some guidance called Developing With Nature, which supports local development applications and provides some examples of common enhancement measures for biodiversity to try and make that net positive contribution.

At the moment, that guidance is for on site, so within the development site. They are looking at off site options as well. One of the things to note though in Scotland, which has been interesting, is that some private sector companies are already in a voluntary basis, using the English metric, so we have actually written - as CIEEM, we've written some advice for local authorities in Scotland to help them through that because they haven't got that in policy in Scotland.

In Wales, their approach is called Net Benefits for Biodiversity and Wales is taking a bit of a different approach in that most of the approach in Wales for the environment, for climate is based on the Wales Environment Act, the wellbeing of future generations act. And that's very much a strategic big



picture ecosystem resilience, strategic landscape approach. And they've looked at the Defra metric and said well, that's too site based for us. We want something that's more strategic and bigger picture, so they're looking at a different system. I think they're hoping to plan to publish something later in the year on that. And we've actually helped them write some advice notes on biodiversity enhancements, so that should be out shortly as well. But their approach is much more in development.

And then in Ireland, so both North and South, it's looking really positive. We had the same Irish Conference on the 25th of April and we had a discussion panel there on nature positive approaches in Ireland and there's definitely an appetite in Ireland for an approach like Biodiversity Net Gain or a Scottish or Welsh approach, but something that puts back more nature and helps to restore nature there as well. Although I did find it interesting that even in Ireland, there are private companies already voluntarily, like in Scotland, using the Defra metric, and adapted Defra metric there to push this ahead anyway. So we'll be developing a briefing paper for Ireland on how this might go forward. So keep your eyes open for that.

Speaker 1

So now we're going to move on to the renaming of the Brecon Beacons. Over to you, Doug.

Speaker 3

Yeah, so this is something that might not initially have jumped out to people as being, I guess, an environmental issue or something that maybe would cover, but the Brecon Beacons has had a name change. This isn't a new name. This is an old name and the name that sort of will be on all the signage is Bannau Brycheiniog. So this is the original Welsh name. This has always been its Welsh name. This is how Welsh communities have always referred to it.

I mean, I think it's great. You know, this is sort of following a trend of Wales sort of reclaiming a lot of its Welsh identity, putting Welsh names in the face of things. So Snowden, I think last year, the year before was renamed or named it Yr Wyddfa, so going to its Welsh name. And so this is the sort of the thing that will appear on the signage or the documents. And it's a bit of a - it's not just a name change, it's a bit of a sort of a culture shift. It's a bit of an acknowledgement of some environmental issues, which I'll get to just in a little bit, but the sort of the name Bannau Brycheiniog translates as the Peaks of Brecon's Kingdom, who is a sort of a Welsh King hundreds of years ago who ruled in this sort of this general area.

And this isn't just a change to sort of instil a stronger Welsh identity, this really coincides with the sort of a new era for the protected area. And this has been amidst along a lot of the sort of, I say anger, or maybe controversy sort of surrounding it so that, I at least I've seen since this sort name change was announced. So for anyone who doesn't know, I've sort of, I've run through that. The Bannau Brycheiniog is a sort of protected area in the South of Wales or mid Wales, depending on who you ask. I would try and claim it for mid Wales, but my South-Walian friends would probably disagree with me. And it's a really famous tourist spot, so millions of people use it every year. I think the number's around 6 million at least people visit it every year, so it's a really, really big tour assassination. It's huge.



But it's not really where it should be. As a protected area, a lot of the time the nature inside the park is worse off than outside. So there's something sort of not right there in terms of how it's at least it's being managed and maybe how it's been historically. So the park has sort of several areas of notable environmental concern, there's been a 30% decline in farmland birds since the 1970s and 67% of the waterbodies within the Wye catchment. So that's one of the sort of major rivers that goes through the park. And 88% within the Usk catchment are failing their pollution targets. So that means there's sort of effluence, they're not sort of suitable for bathing at all. You shouldn't really go in them. They could be dangerous to your health. They're polluted, there's sewage, they're quite heavily eroded a lot of the time as well.

So there's some really big environmental issues and this name change is actually a recognition of this. So they're fully switching the game plan and they're focusing it all towards nature. So the new idea, the new management action plan for Bannau Brycheiniog, is to halt the decline in wildlife and biodiversity by 2030 and put environment at the absolute heart of the future for the national park. So the new approach is that if they're not dealing with the environment, what are they doing? The purpose of this park is for the environment. So one of their big sort of goals is to restore around 16,000 hectares of damaged peatland, plant more than 1,000,000 trees. So obviously this is great for the environment, but also this is really good for carbon goals. Peatland is a massive carbon sink. You know, really it draws it down. It traps it, it stops being released into the atmosphere. But when it's damaged, obviously, all that carbon is released up quickly, so not only is this a big environment goal, it's also a big climate goal, so this is really, really good and there's goals to sort of implement wildlife corridors, linking habitats and also push towards more sort of fruit and vegetable cultivation in the park, not phasing out traditional agriculture, but maybe going for a more hybrid approach.

So I think this is a real recognition from the Welsh Government that the park needs improvement, particularly on the environmental front that you know, you can read through the sort of new action plans. There was a fantastic video by Michael Sheens sort of you know, talking through the new changes and how the environment is the most important part. And this really is about making sure that nature is there for the future generations and that it's a fabric of the community. I think it's fantastic. I think it's a great name for it. It's always fun to pronounce. It's sort of historic. Yeah, I think it's an interesting and fantastic new phase for the park which I'm quite excited about.

Speaker 1

Douglas, take us through the new G7 commitments.

Speaker 3

I'm going to go from a sort of a more, I would say local approach and I'm going to zoom across to sort of the international stage. So this is about the upcoming G7 summit in Japan. So the sort of the G7, a quick run through, they're the largest, what's called advanced economies in the world. And they're all sort of liberal democracy. So that's the sort of the pocket they're in. And this includes Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the United States. And the EU also participates in all of the discussions that G7 do as a sort of invited guest, and each summit has a number of other guests, which they invite often dependent on the area. So for this year, I know that at least Vietnam and South Korea have been invited as well. So sort of, they pull in other countries as well. And prior



to the full G7 summit, which will take place in Hiroshima this year in May, ministers from various parts of each of the G7 governments have been convening for discussions, sort of in the lead up to make sure that they know where they're standing, the discussions go more smoothly and the last meeting that took place in Sapporo, Japan on the 15th, the 16th of April, was between the ministers of Climate, Energy and the Environment, and they met to discuss the phasing out of fossil fuels from each of the G7 nations, and obviously these are huge polluters. You know the big economies, they're historically big polluters, and also they're still current polluters. So it's really important that these countries, the ones that are on board and leading the way. At this sort of initial meeting, there was a formal agreement that was signed to phase out unabated fossil fuels and the actual sort of commitment is, they said, we underline our commitment in the context of a global effort to accelerate the phase out of unabated fossil fuels so as to achieve net zero in energy systems by 2050 at the latest.

So I think there's a couple of things that are probably quite important to pull out there. They are saying phase out unabated fossil fuels, and they're saying they're net zero by 2050 at the latest. So the positive of this is they're not saying you know by 2050, they're not saying that 2050 is sort of a soft goal. 2050 is at the latest, but for a lot of things that might be too long of a goal and maybe an earlier one is required, but 2050 is there at the very latest.

There's been a bit of pushback from some of the G7 nations. Japan was reported as having some disagreements prior to them signing, and that's particularly because they moved more towards fossil fuels following the Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, and this is similar to a number of countries. So there's been a sort of a quite a few discussions about, you know, coal being used as a almost a stopgap from nuclear back to renewables. Big issue is there's no concrete timeline for the phasing out of coal-fired power plants from by the G7 ministers. They're not, they've not said that by 2030, there will be no more coal-fired power plants. And particularly a lot of these nations have a huge amount, so you might have seen recently that Germany phased out all of their nuclear power plants. And they've got a huge amount of renewables. But for the stop gap before all the renewables come online, they're going to have to use coal. So the amount of pollutants they're putting out will actually increase. The US is still a huge user of coal power plants. They have lots and also in the UK we've had, you know, there's been lots of protests about opening up a new coal extraction point and all these sorts of things. So coal is still very much out there despite this thinking that maybe we've moved past it. And I think this is just really important to keep in mind when all these discussions are going ahead. And alongside this, the UK has also joined a sort of a nuclear energy alliance with the USA, Japan, France and Canada to phase Russia out of the global nuclear energy supply. So there's a couple of things going on there as well.

Speaker 2

It's really useful, a mixed message there, isn't it? One of the things that I did find positive that they strongly welcomed the COP 15 agreement so the Kunming Montreal, labelled Biodiversity Framework that was signed by pretty much all nations last November to halt the loss of nature by 2030 and make us nature positive by 2050, they strongly welcomed that. And one of the things in that agreement that really needs to happen is that the advanced nations and the developed nations



really need to take a lead. I'm pleased to see them strongly welcoming that and talking about nature positive economies. So we'll wait to see some more details on that, but I took that as a positive.

Speaker 3

Absolutely, I agree. I mean, it's just great to see the Biodiversity COPs being taken on the same level as the Climate COPs, you know, and really being hopefully put front at the front of the agenda. So I think, yeah, we'll see at the sort of the final G7 summit but I'm hoping that, like you said, that biodiversity in nature will actually be at the forefront of a lot of their discussions and their plans for the future.

Speaker 1

To finish up the episode then, we're going to share a couple of some positive environmental news stories that have grabbed our attention this month.

So the one that I'm bringing is the opening of the world's first rewilding centre in the Scottish Highlands. The Dundreggan Rewilding Centre is located on what used to be a deer stalking estate and it was used heavily for things like sheep grazing as well, but this is now being nursed back to health by the charity called Trees for Life. And so, since they've kind of taken over the estate, wildlife has already been seen returning to the estate, including some Golden Eagles. The rewilding centre includes a café, classrooms, a space for events and a whopping 40 bedrooms! Yeah, I think the story is worth sharing because it's a great example of getting the public involved in nature and the centre's rewilding journey.

Speaker 3

Definitely somewhere to go I think.

Speaker 2

So my little positive news item is a bit more global. So I was pleased to see that because so much of the news we see about coral reefs is pretty depressing, let's be honest, that scientists in the Galápagos Islands have found a new pristine deep water coral reef on a sea mount. And it's absolutely jam packed with life, still in great condition. And I suppose it shows us that nature still has some surprises for us. But it's also some hope. So the scientists that discover it hope they can learn some things from this reef and how it survived to help other reefs as climate change changes things like sea level and ocean temperatures to help those other reefs that we know are having, are being impacted by climate change. But the other thing that I thought was really great and positive from this was that this discovery is spurring on the creation of new marine protected areas along the Eastern Pacific. So off the coasts of Ecuador, Colombia, Panama and Costa Rica, they're creating a network of marine protected areas to try and protect these kinds of pristine places, so definitely a positive.

Speaker 3



It's always great to find new coral reefs and I think people often forget that we've got some in the UK actually. We've got some up in Scotland, some cold water, coral reefs. So I think hopefully maybe this will spark some more discovery of our own coral reefs so yeah, just great to hear really.

Speaker 1

Well, that concludes the episode. Thank you again for listening, and don't forget to subscribe and rate the podcast and we will see you all next month.

Speaker 2

Bye.

Speaker 3

Thank you very much.