

Emyr Roberts  
Natural Resources Wales  
Cambria House  
29 Newport Road  
Cardiff  
CF24 0TP

2 December 2016

Dear Emyr,

**Request for further information following the NRW scrutiny session**

Thank you, and Ms. McCrea, for your appearance before us on 2 November 2016.

We are also grateful for the papers you provided in advance of the meeting and the further information you provided on 11 November 2016.

After reflecting on this information, we have arrived at a number of conclusions. I set these out in this letter.

**Business case savings**

We are pleased to note the significant progress that has been made towards realising the cash savings that were set-out in the business case.

Whilst good progress is also being made in realising non-cash benefits, we would like to see further information about how these benefits are being quantified. Additionally, we would like to understand whether the rate at which cash savings have been realised has had an impact on the realisation of non-cash benefits.

I would be grateful if you could provide us with further information on how you are identifying and quantifying non-cash benefits and whether the profile of the cash savings has had an impact on their realisation.



## **Financial planning**

We acknowledge the difficulty you face in managing Natural Resources Wales ('NRW') on the basis of an annual budget. We support your suggestion that you should be provided with indicative figures for three or more years. It is something that we have raised with both the Finance Committee and the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs.

## **Staff survey**

It is regrettable that we have not seen an improvement in the staff survey results. Whilst we commend you again for the openness with which you have communicated the results of the survey, the issue of staff morale is becoming increasingly concerning.

You, and Ms. McCrea, set out steps that you are taking to improve the communication between the top of the organisation and staff at other levels. We hope that these steps prove successful.

We expect to see a significant improvement when the next staff survey results are published. We see this as an important measure of how the NRW executive team and Board are performing.

## **The condition of marine, terrestrial and freshwater Natura 2000 sites**

Whilst we acknowledge that work to improve and maintain the condition of protected sites is often complicated and, in many instances, requires partnership working with relevant authorities and interested partners across multiple sectors, we expect to see considerable improvement in this area evidenced by progress toward NRW's corporate target of 95% of international sites (SACs, SPAs and Ramsar) to achieve favourable condition.

We recognise the importance of the Life Natura 2000 Programme and the Prioritised Action Framework for Wales and will keenly observe how the



Prioritised Improvement and Thematic Action Plans are operationalised and delivered going forward.

During the evidence session we asked you why the condition of sites in Wales is worse than those in other parts of the UK. We were unclear from your answer why this is the case, and would appreciate it if you could clarify this for us.

We noted your response suggesting that this issue is challenging because many organisations have a role in relation to these sites, and that you have an action plan to improve the areas that you are responsible for.

However, your corporate target is for “95% of international sites (SACs, SPAs and Ramsar) to be in favourable condition by 2010 (Environment Strategy for Wales target)”, without reference to a specific target for the sites for which NRW alone is responsible. We would be grateful for details of how you are seeking to achieve your target in relation to those sites for which you are not responsible.

### **The State of Natural Resource Report (the SoNaRR)**

Whilst our consideration of the SoNaRR did not form part of our annual scrutiny of NRW, I wanted to thank you for facilitating the presentation of this report to the Committee and commend the NRW staff that were involved in the production of this crucial report. It represents a significant first step towards achieving the sustainable management of natural resources.

We understand that, as a consequence of the extremely ambitious timescale within which this first SoNaRR had to be produced, stakeholders were not involved to the extent that either you or they would have liked in other circumstances.

It is our understanding that NRW has every intention of properly engaging with stakeholders in the production of future SoNaRRs. To provide certainty



around this point, we would appreciate confirmation from you that this is the case.

We see scrutiny of Natural Resources Wales as a key element of our work and look forward to continuing to develop our approach as this Assembly progresses.

Should you wish to discuss any aspect of the Committee's work, I would be very happy to meet with you. I extend the same invitation to Ms. McCrae as Chair of NRW's Board.

This letter is copied to Ms. McCrae and the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Reckless', is centered within a light gray rectangular box.

Mark Reckless

Chair

