



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: MA-P/LG/3233/17
Mike Hedges AM
Chair - Climate Change, Environment
and Rural Affairs Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff
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18

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Dear Mike

When I attended the Committee on the 20 July, I agreed I would write to you regarding the paper from the UK Assessment Panel of the IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas on the *Future Landscapes: Delivering for Wales* report, referred to by Simon Thomas AM.

The IUCN in the UK has confirmed the status of this paper as a considered opinion from members of the UK Assessment Panel, to act as an advisory note or a briefing paper as required.

The paper concludes if the recommendations of the Future Landscapes report are acted upon "it would make it impossible for the Panel to continue to accord international recognition to Wales' National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty as 'protected areas'". The paper focuses almost exclusively on the absence of a reference to the Sandford Principle, or other primacy of nature conservation principle, to support this conclusion. Their interpretation of the Future Landscapes Wales proposition is that, without an explicit nature conservation safeguard, it would lead to a reduction in the protection given to nature by National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) designation. As a result the designation would fail to meet the IUCN protected area definition.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I can categorically confirm I will not bring forward any proposals for reform which would put the natural beauty and special qualities of AONBs and National Parks at risk. This is the position from which I will consider the responses to the consultation on '*Taking Forward Wales' Sustainable Management of Natural Resources*' and decide on my priorities for these areas. I have regularly made such a commitment but want to confirm again.

I will make a full statement on the way forward with designated landscapes once I have reviewed all the responses to the current consultation, which include aspects of the Future Landscapes proposition. The IUCN UK have been encouraged to respond.

However, I want to emphasise it is important to appreciate the current legislative context for designated landscapes in Wales. The analysis of Future Landscapes by the Panel appears limited to comparing its proposition to their appraisal of National Parks and AONBs for the *Putting Nature on the Map* report in 2014. There is no reference to the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, both of which mean the National Parks and AONBs in Wales now operate in a very different context. This context puts well-being and the sustainable management of natural resources central to what they do and the Future Landscapes proposition cannot be properly understood when divorced from these drivers.

The rationale for the establishment of National Parks and AONBs in England and Wales, and the associated statutory purposes, are not derived from the IUCN's focus on nature conservation and associated definition of protected areas. Instead, the designations stemmed from the wish to safeguard the natural beauty of these areas and, in the case of National Parks, the opportunity to promote their enjoyment. This includes, but is not limited to, their value for nature conservation. Therefore, it is inevitable when applying criteria which have a specific emphasis, there will need to be a judgement on the interpretation and weight to be applied to the purpose and effectiveness of the designation under scrutiny. Any suggestions or proposals to explore changes to purposes will also be affected in this way.

So, whilst I welcome the current recognition by IUCN, I also believe it should be a consideration and not a driver for how Wales decides it should best protect its landscapes.

Future Landscapes has provided the opportunity for all partners to reaffirm the importance of the Welsh landscapes, where safeguarding the special qualities of landscape should be paramount in decision making. I acknowledge the case for clarifying the Welsh Government's position on these issues. I intend to address this when I make a statement responding to the consultation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Regards' on the first line and 'Lesley' on the second line. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Lesley Griffiths AC/AM

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig
Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs