

# **APPG for Wetlands Inaugural Meeting Minutes**

Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2021 15:00-14:30

## **Attendees (MPs and Peers)**

Siobhan Baillie MP  
Lord Cameron of Dillington  
The Earl of Devon  
Andrew Griffith MP  
Sir Oliver Heald MP  
Sally-Ann Hart MP  
The Earl of Leicester  
Lord Randall of Uxbridge

## **Opening remarks from the Chair, Siobhan Baillie MP**

- Welcomed attendees to the meeting and to the group and noted it was fantastic to get it established.
- Thanked all involved in establishing the group
- Noted the contribution wetlands can make to solving our problems and especially to helping address climate change, the topic of the meeting
- Noted the amazing wetlands in her own constituency of Stroud, including WWT Slimbridge Wetland Centre

## **Election of Officers**

Chair – Siobhan Baillie (unanimously elected)

Officers (unanimously elected):

- Baroness Bennett of Manor Castle
- Lord Cameron of Dillington
- Sally-Ann Hart MP
- Sir Oliver Heald MP
- The Earl of Leicester
- Lord Randall of Uxbridge
- Lord Teverson
- Baroness Young of Old Scone

## **Remarks from Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, Jo Churchill**

- Congratulated the group on getting underway and for bringing together those who are real advocates for wetlands. Noted she was sure the group will be vital in advancing this crucial topic and making sure we are having a conversation around protecting wetlands.
- Noted that the science is clear by the middle of the century we need to have reduced emissions to as close to zero as possible and that the government has recently published its Net zero strategy. It includes nature based solutions like trees/peat/coastal wetlands, which will be critical to meeting net zero and will help us adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- Noted the government have boosted the Nature for Climate Fund by £124M to fund peat restoration and woodland creation.

- Remarked that the UK overseas territories and crown dependencies are home to incredible wetlands and we are home to the largest number of Ramsar sites globally and that we therefore have the opportunity and responsibility to protect and enhance wetlands around the globe.
- Noted the meeting's focus was blue carbon and that she was excited about the potential for blue carbon, as well as how important blue carbon habitats will be for biodiversity and flood defences. Also noted wetlands are a cost effective solution for flood risk and provide improved access to recreation opportunities. Further noted the benefits wetlands provide for people's wellbeing.
- Noted that in the UK our network of Marine Protected Areas covers the majority of saltmarsh and seagrass. Noted the government is now making sure that they are effectively protected going forward. Also noted the government are looking at Highly Protected Marine Areas, which will include blue carbon habitats.
- Noted the Environment Agency is bringing together stakeholders to restore saltmarsh, seagrass and oyster beds, and have published maps showing where restoration is possible and will soon be publishing restoration guidebooks.
- Noted the Investment Readiness Fund is funding the development of a saltmarsh carbon code, which could help facilitate private investment.
- Noted coastal wetlands have huge potential but that there are still some gaps in the evidence base and we need to fill those. Until this is done, the Minister noted, we can't include blue carbon in the Greenhouse Gas Inventory. Noted the government are working with others to deliver this at pace.
- Noted the government are always very keen to talk to stakeholders with ideas and proposals.
- Told the group Minister Rebecca Pow is keen to visit Slimbridge Wetland Centre and that she would also like to visit.
- In response to a question from the Chair about the saltmarsh carbon code, the Minister responded that we need a carbon code and we need to make sure we've got the evidence base to deliver good policy on blue carbon.

### **Presentations from outside speakers**

*Please see presentation slides for further information*

#### **Dr Rachel Dunk; Principal Lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University**

This presentation introduced blue carbon to the audience, summarised the potential of blue carbon as a whole and then delved into the opportunities provided by saltmarsh and the evidence on the amount of carbon being stored at WWT Steart Marshes in Somerset.

#### **Dr James Robinson, Director of Conservation, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust**

This presentation put this evidence into a UK delivery context including summarising the opportunities provided by the Government's Net Zero strategy; some of the issues that will need to be overcome; and what is needed to see the goal of 22,000ha of saltmarsh creation realised. This includes inclusion of saltmarsh in NDCs and the Greenhouse Gas Inventory and a supportive financial and policy framework to enable a private market supporting the creation of blue carbon habitats. This could include government support for the Saltmarsh Carbon Code currently being developed and widening the brief of the Natural Infrastructure Bank to include natural capital projects.

#### **Jerker Tamelander, Director, Science and Policy at the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar)**

This presentation introduced the Convention on Wetlands to the audience and the work the Secretariat of the Convention on Wetlands is doing on blue carbon. It also put the UK into a more international context; and covered policy progress on blue carbon at the international level, including at COP26.

### **Questions**

#### **Sally-Ann Hart MP**

- Noted she is very proud to have Rye harbour, a Ramsar site in her constituency.
- Noted Rachel Dunk gave fantastic evidence about blue carbon and Lord Deben as Chair of the Climate Change Committee has agreed to look at including blue carbon in the Greenhouse Gas Inventory. Asked to have the data on Steart Marshes to share with Lord Deben.
- Noted cutting emissions is tricky and increasing sequestration is actually easier as it has less effect on people's lives.
- Rachel Dunk replied: noted there were lots of people in the meeting who are actively working on collaborating and collating the UK evidence base on blue carbon. Noted they are trying to get UK level evidence on a much firmer footing. Noted the Steart data is pretty new and is not included in assessments to date but she is working hard with WWT to feed it in.
- It was agreed that the Chair would send Lord Deben the relevant information on behalf of the APPG

#### **Richard Benwell (CEO of Wildlife and Countryside Link)**

- Noted sometimes we are at risk of thinking until you can count something it doesn't exist and that there is real urgency to act now before blue carbon can be counted. Asked what sources of public money there are to get investing now before we can account for it.
- Noted we do need to account for it but there's always a risk with carbon offsetting that you end up green washing. Asked how the proposed carbon code will contribute to negative emissions.
- Noted Ramsar sites don't enjoy the same level of protection in the UK as some countries. Asked whether with the nature green paper coming up this is the perfect time to upgrade.
- Jerker Tamelander responded: there is wide variation in protection status of Ramsar sites. Some contracting parties protect them in law. However, sometimes wise use of wetlands is possible, so there is an opportunity cost to absolute protection. Noted the difficulty is how to limit certain uses of the wetlands. Noted sometimes public funding is better than private funding as private funding doesn't want to cover development costs.
- James Robinson responded: we need both public and private financing. Noted we need the right verification systems and right governance to ensure against greenwashing and that we are in a place to do this really well. Noted there are great managed realignment sites for storing blue carbon and large amounts of private finance can be driven by legislation.

### **Closing remarks from the Chair**

- Thanked all for attending and wished them luck if they were attending COP26