

APPG for Wetlands – Minutes of the AGM 2023

Thames Pavillion, 8th February at 6.30 pm

Attendees (MPs and Peers)

Siobhan Baillie MP (Chair)
Sally-Ann Hart MP (Officer)
Sir Oliver Heald MP (Officer)
The Earl of Leicester (Officer)
Lord Randall of Uxbridge (Officer)
Baroness Young of Old Scone (Officer)
Lord Blencathra
The Earl of Caithness
The Earl of Devon
Kerry McCarthy MP
Baroness McIntosh of Pickering
Alex Sobel MP

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
- Jessica Morden MP
- Lord Randall of Uxbridge
- Lord Teverson
- Baroness Young of Old Scone

Opening remarks from the Chair

- Mentioned the recent successful visit to WWT Slimbridge where Minister Harrison got an opportunity to see a range of wildlife and see what wetlands really look like as well as gain knowledge of the value of wetlands.
- Noted the successful visit of the APPG to London Wetlands Centre in June 2022.
- Highlighted that we have managed to achieve 45 members for the APPG.
- Noted the recent decision by the Government to make SuDS compulsory for all new developments, in part due to successful campaigning by the APPG.
- Explained her plan to push for a domestic wetlands team in Defra, which she had previously asked for in her address during the debate on climate and biodiversity earlier that day. Noted she has mentioned this to Minister Harrison who has said she will look into the resource needed to deliver it.

Presentations from outside speaker Tony Juniper, Chair, Natural England

- Reflected on his original inspiration for his passion about conservation and nature that sparked his career trajectory. Said that wetlands were the original inspiration when he

became aware of how vital they are for biodiversity, water quality etc. He described a lecture he attended about the economic value of wetlands as a 'revelation'.

- Said wetlands are essential for delivering the Environmental Improvement Plan and emphasised the need for urgent action now. Specifically highlighted the apex goal of 'thriving plants and wildlife', saying the driving force for wetlands here is the speed at which they can deliver multi-benefits compared to other habitats.
- Said we need restoration at scale, critically for water-based species.
- Spoke about the need for greater efforts to adapt to climate change, with wetlands playing a key part in water availability as well as protecting us from the impacts of flooding.
- Spoke of the successes at UN CBD COP15 and especially the commitment to protecting 30% of land, sea, and inland waters
- Spoke about Natural England's ambition to create a Nature Recovery Network that brings people together, pooling resources from a range of sectors/departments.
- Complimented the Blue Recovery Leaders Group of wetland-focused businesses led by WWT that he attended, emphasising the need to bring businesses along with us on this journey.
- Highlighted how critical it is to elevate the profile of wetlands in the coming year.

Discussion

Kerry McCarthy MP: spoke about Labour's Green Prosperity plan and the £28 billion a year they would spend to tackle climate change. Noted it is critical that nature-based solutions are part of this. Noted a better understanding of land use is needed to implement this. Noted also that offsetting will play a role.

Sarah Fowler, Chief Executive, WWT: highlighted three key statistics

1. 90%- the wetlands that have been lost in England in the last 500 years
2. 45%- the amount of people who do not know what a wetland is. WWT are working hard to tackle this through engaging the public.
3. 1%- who know who WWT are.

To tackle these issues she spoke about the need for widespread support- in towns, cities and rural communities. Said she hopes that we will now see a decade of delivery for wetlands. Minister Harrison is keen to see a debate on wetlands in the house so we are hoping this decade of delivery will kick off with this.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: spoke of the need for a more holistic way forward that looks at the whole of land use for biodiversity, agriculture and climate change. Noted she is looking to the upcoming land use framework to deliver this.

Said it is vital that wetlands are central to the land use framework, and we should work together to make sure that happens.

The best way to meet the government's EIP target for everyone to live within 15 minutes of greenspace is by creating city wetlands because by their very nature they are also accessible and you can control access through the use of water as a control mechanism i.e. a natural fence.

The Earl of Devon: spoke of the importance of access to nature and the central role that wetlands play in delivering this.

Lord Randall of Uxbridge: Suggested there should be an arms race between the parties to see who can set the best target for wetland restoration in the next election.

Lord Blencathra: asked about the 100,000 hectares of new wetlands target being advocated by the group and how we measure it and how we map the potential wetlands.

James Robinson, Director of Conservation, WWT: spoke about WWT's ongoing work to map the existing wetlands and layer existing data to estimate the potential for wetlands across the UK. This work will likely inform the 100,000 hectares work going forward.

Event concluded 9 pm