

Senedd debate on NDF– Future Wales c19.00 hrs September 29th, 2020

The purpose of the debate was to provide all Members of the Senedd with an initial opportunity to comment on the latest NDF text (now styled as Future Wales Working Draft) published on 21st September following the consultation period ending in November 2019. The next stage will then follow when the CCERA (Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee) carries out its 60 working day formal scrutiny – leading to a Report which will then be considered by the Minister prior to the final issue of Future Wales in February 2021.

In real time the debate took from 19.10 to 20.00 (delayed only slightly by coronavirus topics). It can be viewed at [senedd.tv](https://www.senedd.tv) > latest meetings > Plenary 29 September. Scroll through from the start of proceedings to 05.37 hours duration to find the NDF: after that, individual contributions can be located by clicking on the images of the various Members.

CPRW had previously issued a bi-lingual Open Letter to all 60 Members on 15th September, drawing attention to its chief criticism of the NDF – that its proposals for generating 70% of Welsh electricity consumption from renewable energy (RE) by 2030 had ignored the growing and huge potential of marine and far-offshore sources and by focussing on land sites in 15 Priority Areas was unjustifiably pressurising the Welsh countryside. CPRW argued that *'This unjustifiable and outdated approach needs to be removed from the NDF and replaced with one that puts the emphasis on the marine sector and brownfield sites'*, and concluded that *'If changes on these lines have not been included, we urge you to suggest amendments in the Senedd to implement our concerns'*.

Introducing the NDF, the Minister for Housing and Local Government **Julie James** (Welsh Labour, Swansea West) stressed that the latest document was a working draft of Future Wales and as such had no formal status. She referred to the many changes since the 2nd consultation draft of 2019, specifically noting the re-drawing of the much criticised 3 Regions into 4 (thus creating a new mid-Wales region and a South-West region), and the reduced number of former Priority Areas for onshore renewables caused by the removal of their solar component - and having their new name of 'pre-Assessed Areas' (pAAs).

The first Amendment was introduced by **Caroline Jones** (Independent, South Wales -West) who spoke of the need to address the climate emergency, echoing CPRW's Open Letter by deploring that *'once again'* the focus had been on onshore wind rather than offshore and tidal renewables.

A second amendment from the Welsh Conservatives by **Janet Finch-Saunders** (Aberconwy) began by criticising the focus on NE Wales at the expense of the NW, but noting that rural areas were given insufficient emphasis and that the beauty of rural Wales must be afforded better protection. She questioned the presumption in favour of onshore wind projects and maintained that more attention should be given to marine energy sources.

Llyr Gruffydd (Plaid Cymru, North Wales and a member of the CCERA committee) spoke on a range of issues arising from the pandemic, but noted that while there should be a range of RE alternatives to Wylfa, only 5% of the pAAs were (said to be) developable.

Mike Hedges (Welsh Labour, Swansea East, and chair of the CCERA) spoke extensively (but rather indistinctly) and applauded the change from the 3-Region to the 4-Region structure.

Mandy Jones (Brexit Party, North Wales) spoke somewhat generally but did refer to onshore windfarms as '*blots on the landscape*'.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Welsh Labour and Welsh Co-operative, Ogmore) mentioned the post-Covid need to re-invigorate town centres, and nature-based solutions to flood management and coastal erosion, but emphasised the critical role of grid capacity and transmission to deal with future increases in RE.

Finally, **Rhun ap Iorwerth** (Plaid Cymru, Ynys Mon) welcomed the reduced pressure in the working draft from the largest wind turbines on Anglesey but maintained that the Welsh National Marine Plan should not be regarded as separate from Future Wales. The RE balance should change in favour of offshore technology and developments off the north coast should exploit the port facilities at Holyhead (rather than Mostyn).

Responding, the Minister repeated that decarbonising Wales was an essential core message of FW. However, the NDF (and FW) related only to onshore matters and that '*sister documents*' such as the WNMP should be viewed as '*part of a suite*'.

Voting results were essentially along Party lines. The first amendment failed to gather any support beyond that of the single Independent proposer, with 53 members against. Amendment Two secured 24 in favour with 30 against, while the Motion drew 29 in favour and 24 against.

The key significance of this debate for CPRW is the clear, welcome, and widespread expression in the debate of the matters conveyed to Members in our Open Letter.

The next stage will be to assemble a detailed response to the many changes in the Working Draft, and make further representations to the CCERA committee. It is as clear now as it was at the start of the process that the division of RE between onshore and offshore is a fatal flaw in the approach to the climate emergency. The uniquely detailed exposition of the subject in the NDF (and still in FW) is inconsistent with the declared general approach to all other topics, and has no counterpart in the National Marine Plan. We will continue to argue that the contribution of RE to the climate emergency should be subject to a unified, and not a divided process., with a single conjoined assessment in a new document relating to but independent of each of the potential sister documents.

Report by Geoff Sinclair, October 1st 2020