

# Initial recommendations of the 30 by 30 Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures and Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas Expert Group for Wales

## Executive summary

The recognition and development of 'Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures' (OECMs) is pivotal to the global intention under the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) for at least 30 per cent of land, freshwater and seas to be conserved and managed for biodiversity by 2030. OECMs are important in Wales's response to this commitment alongside the Wales-specific intention to develop 'Nature Recovery Exemplar Areas' (NREAs).

As part of the Welsh Government's Biodiversity Deep Dive, this report outlines progress towards this commitment while reflecting the expert group's views. Our work had five themes which:

1. appraised definitions of OECMs and NREAs, considering how they would be applied in Wales under international guidance but within our legislative context.
2. assessed how different areas in Wales could become OECMs or NREAs.
3. asked what else was needed to both meet the 30 by 30 target and ensure biodiversity decline is halted and reversed.
4. considered the scope for pilots.
5. discussed how OECMs and NREAs might be funded.

OECMs are defined internationally as geographical units other than existing protected areas that are governed and managed to achieve the positive, sustained and long-term conservation of *in-situ* biodiversity with associated ecosystem functions, ecosystem services and other values such as cultural, spiritual and socio-economic.

The expert group was cognisant of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Guidance<sup>1</sup> which outlines the criteria for recognising potential OECMs. Specifically, candidate areas could deliver nature as a 'primary', 'secondary' or 'ancillary' objective if i) they are not already protected areas; ii) have the essential characteristics as geographical units with sustained governance and effective management for *in-situ* biodiversity conservation; iii) have long-term durability through legal or formal agreements with landowners and iv) have a reporting focus on conservation targets rather than sustainable use. Potential OECMs might become candidate OECMs once consented by the governance authority i.e., a government institution, individual, Indigenous government or organisation, not-for-profit organisation, corporation, communal group, or other body or

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<sup>1</sup> IUCN-WCPA Task Force on OECMs, (2019). Guidance on Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs). Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. Available at: <https://iucn.org/resources/publication/guidance-other-effective-area-based-conservation-measures-oecms>

combination of bodies acknowledged as having authority and responsibility for decision-making about the objectives and management of an site.

OECMs are not designations with legal protection, but rather are 'recognised' once they meet the criteria and demonstrate biodiversity outcomes. This implies a staged approach in which potential areas become candidates and eventually recognised OECMs.

OECMs can balance the opportunity to support wider nature recovery in Wales, for example through the emerging nature recovery targets against challenges that reflect i) the novelty of the concept; ii) uncertainty over how local groups, stakeholders and government bodies can identify OECMs; iii) the need to develop clear funding or policy mechanisms for OECMs to deliver biodiversity outcomes in the long term. OECMs have the opportunity to exemplify how local pressures on biodiversity can be reduced alongside positive management for nature without new legislation or protection

Mechanisms for identifying candidate OECMs could combine top-down strategy, bottom-up community initiatives or new recognition of the conservation value of existing areas. The [Nature Network Map](#) or previously identified [Resilient Ecological Networks](#) (RENs) might aid selection, while principles of 'additionality' could augment existing approaches to nature recovery. Whatever the process, it is important that OECMs become embedded in the Welsh response to GBF commitments that should deliver genuine biodiversity outcomes of high standards without becoming burdensome or undesirable.

The group examined several prospective areas, but early indications are that few would currently meet all the OECM guideline criteria. This implies the need for areas to progress towards OECM 'standards'.

We need urgent action to put in place mechanisms and safeguards to address the challenges to OECMs, thereby enabling potential areas to meet all the required criteria by 2030. These include long-term security of governance, positive management measures, resourcing, incentives for landowners to encourage participation, and appropriate monitoring methods. In this respect, OECMs represent a common focus across the Deep Dive groups.

The group supported the recognition of marine OECMs but noted that 50% of the seas around Wales are already protected through statutory designation. Effective management for biodiversity conservation is, therefore, the primary focus for delivering on 30 by 30 in the marine environment.

NREAs – focussed explicitly on nature recovery – are an overarching means of focusing action in OECMs, in protected areas or in the wider landscape to halt and reverse biodiversity loss in support of the 30 by 30 target. They are potential exemplar, demonstration or pilot areas to deliver long-term nature recovery at scale while linking to people and places through partnership action across sectors. They could be enabled by seed-corn funding with a longer-term aim of self-sustaining support blending public,

private and charitable funding in exemplary and innovative ways. NREAs are at the conceptual stage, however, and the expert group felt that whilst the idea is useful, care is needed not to conflate this option with the more formal and internationally recognised background to OECMs.

We identified an urgent need for secure investment in nature recovery, but typical methods of short-term funding awarded competitively are not compatible with the long-term certainty, recognition and collaborative action required for OECMs to provide effective management, governance and monitoring. With additional or new public funding unlikely, the group noted that funding strategies used in other countries including tax incentives, levies, management partnerships, payments for ecosystem services, conservation trust funds and case-by-case funding. In Wales, current examples of private investment for nature include carbon credits associated with the peatland code (RSPB in partnership with Hafren Dyfrdwy Lake Vyrnwy) and woodland creation/restoration (Wildlife Trust and Aviva).

Financing nature recovery is likely to remain a challenging area, however, and requires strategic development to unlock public and private finance to deliver for nature at a far greater scale and pace. OECMs could provide some quality assurance as resource frameworks develop.

The group makes five key recommendations at this initial stage:

- **Recommendation 1:** The OECM criteria (as per CBD Decision 14/8<sup>2</sup>) and the IUCN OECM guidance<sup>1</sup> forms the fundamental basis of a Welsh framework for the recognition of OECMs.
- **Recommendation 2:** In recognising OECMs, protected areas that have biodiversity conservation as a primary objective would be excluded from consideration because a key criterion in the recognition of OECMs is “Criteria A: Area is not currently recognised as a protected area.”
- **Recommendation 3:** A flexible framework should be developed that identifies and recognises OECMs to complement and leverage existing biodiversity effort. We propose a combined model incorporating i) a top-down approach to ensure OECMs are used to support delivery of resources where they are needed to develop functional and structurally viable ecological networks and ii) a bottom-up approach to empower landowners and local communities to aid nature recovery.
- **Recommendation 4:** OECM recognition cannot be undertaken in isolation, but needs to be part of, and complement, a wider transformative approach to support 30 by 30 and nature recovery in Wales.
- **Recommendation 5:** A series of NREAs should be established across Wales to pilot, establish, and showcase innovative and effective ways of delivering landscape scale nature recovery.

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<sup>2</sup> CBD, (2018). Decision Adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity. CBD/COP/DEC/14/8. Available at: <https://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-14/cop-14-dec-08-en.pdf>

The group proposes further work, focusing on six key workstreams: OECM recognition process and governance; monitoring and evaluation; resourcing; collaboration and engagement; implementation and NREAs.

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