

## Jobs for a green and just recovery

July 2020

### Context

In 2019, the Welsh Government announced that Wales, like the rest of the UK and the world, is in the grip of a climate and nature emergency. In January and February 2020, Wales was hit by severe flooding that impacted on people's homes and livelihoods, destroyed crops and damaged the wider environment. From the end of February 2020, we became aware of the growing global threat from Covid-19, a new virus that scientists have linked to the destruction of the natural world. Action to slow the spread of this virus has caused significant challenges for our communities and economy.

As Wales comes out of lockdown we are adjusting to a different way of life. In addition to the ongoing public health crisis, the nature and climate emergency, which was at the forefront of public attention after the floods in February, is the greatest long-term threat to our health and economic stability. The majority of people want the environment to be prioritised as part of an economic recovery from Covid-19<sup>1</sup>.

**Nature, and the resources and services it provides, is the foundation of our social and economic well-being.** It needs to be at the heart of our recovery if we want an economic system which does not continue to cause significant damage to our planet and people, and is also resilient to the inevitable shocks we will continue to face due to damage already caused. A green and just recovery for Wales will be crucial in realising the ambitions of the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. It will create the structural changes needed to allow people and nature to recover together and be resilient to future challenges. We assume retaining and creating jobs will be a key fiscal stimulus for the economic recovery. We therefore need to focus on the sorts of jobs, skills and investment that we need for a sustainable future. We refer to these as green or blue jobs, depending on whether they are primarily terrestrial or marine focused.

### What do we mean by green/blue jobs?

Green jobs have been defined differently over the last 20 years, as jobs that:

- protect or enhance the environment, or make environmental improvements;
- rely on natural resources; or
- rely on a high quality environment (e.g. tourism).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk/two-thirds-britons-believe-climate-change-serious-coronavirus-and-majority-want-climate-prioritised>

Members of WEL consider that green or blue jobs are those that have a role in restoring, protecting and maintaining the environment. These jobs cover a wide range of sectors, from nature conservation to land management; sustainable renewable energy generation to sustainable transport; pollution control and waste management/recycling to sustainable tourism. However, it is important to understand that **green/blue jobs are only truly sustainable if they are carried out in ways that protect and enhance the environment.**

When governments talk about green/blue economic growth, they often focus on renewables, forestry or construction as the main sectors with potential for growth. It is important to understand that jobs in these sectors are only sustainable and green by definition if they do not trade off one environmentally positive impact (e.g. climate change mitigation) for a negative impact on ecosystems and biodiversity, through poor siting or design. For example, Wales has positioned itself as a potential testbed for a wide range of marine renewable energy projects. Several of these have great potential to support the fight against climate change, but struggle to demonstrate that they are unlikely to have a devastating effect on local biodiversity and ecosystem resilience. Under this definition, jobs related to these projects must not be considered/included as green/blue by government until they are able to satisfy regulators that they will not create unacceptably negative trade-offs for nature.

Similarly, agricultural and forestry jobs have the potential to be green jobs, as long as they are carried out using sustainable practices that **work with nature, not against it.** The drive for carbon sequestration must not result in a return to large monoculture conifer plantations, which have negatively impacted upon the diversity of native species, and have historically contributed to freshwater acidification and pesticide pollution. Intensive farming practices that rely on high inputs of fertilizer, widespread use of pesticides and which produce excess amounts of slurry and manure, must also be changed. **We want to see sustainable and nature friendly farming become the norm, and for forestry operations to include a wide mosaic of habitats and adhere to the highest environmental standards.**

WEL doesn't want to see green/blue jobs siloed into a small "environment" sector of employment. If we are to see a shift to a low carbon, restorative, circular economy in Wales, one which tackles the climate and nature crisis, rather than exacerbates it, we need to see the wider economy shifting to more green practice. **A widespread switch to sustainable practices in many sectors** – such as construction, transport and utilities – **can make green jobs the mainstream.** For example, reducing employees' need to travel to work by increasing opportunities for home working, use of videoconferencing and the development of local co-working hubs could significantly reduce traffic congestion and the need for new road schemes, whilst boosting local economies. Linking up manufacturers within an area so that waste products from individual businesses are collected and used by other businesses could reduce waste, greenhouse gas emissions and the need for raw materials. **We need to embed systems thinking and circular economy principles at the heart of business.**

WEL's view is that green/blue jobs must tackle both the climate and the nature emergencies, and must not contribute to the unsustainable use of natural resources or increase pollution. Investment in the sector which enables job creation must meet the principles and tests set out in our paper, *Principles and Tests for a Green and Just Recovery*.<sup>2</sup>

As a brief overview, we consider that green/blue jobs fall into the following broad categories and types:

### **Jobs that protect, restore and enhance the environment**

These jobs include:

- Marine and terrestrial nature conservation jobs, such as nature reserve/designated site officers, ecologists, community woodland management, habitat creation project staff, ecological and environmental monitoring and research jobs;
- Environmental policy and advocacy work;
- Environmental education and community engagement work;
- Environmental protection jobs (e.g. Natural Resources Wales, local authority ecologists, certain water company jobs or environmental lawyers);
- Jobs provided by a wide range of NGOs, including traditional environmental NGO staff and other third sector organisations that have a role in protecting the environment. These roles are many and varied, from those that work in fundraising, comms or campaigning, to practical regeneration and community project staff, to support staff such as IT, finance or cleaners.

### **Jobs that rely on sustainable use/management of natural resources**

These jobs include:

- Sustainable land management jobs (e.g. organic or nature friendly farming, sustainable forestry undertaken to UK Woodland Assurance Scheme standard, agro-ecology and sustainable land management advisers);
- Sustainable fishing and fisheries management jobs;
- Well-designed sustainable renewable energy developments, particularly community-owned generation;
- Sustainable tourism operators, such as environmentally friendly outdoor activity centres, visitor centres, accommodation or wildlife tours.

### **Jobs that focus on making traditional services and operations more sustainable**

These jobs include:

- Energy efficiency jobs – across domestic and business sectors;
- Development of closed loop systems in manufacturing/industry;
- Recycling/composting/upcycling operations;

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.waleslink.org/sites/default/files/principles\\_and\\_tests\\_for\\_a\\_green\\_and\\_just\\_recovery.docx.pdf](https://www.waleslink.org/sites/default/files/principles_and_tests_for_a_green_and_just_recovery.docx.pdf)

- Manufacturers of low carbon, energy efficient, re-usable or natural products as alternatives to standard products across all sectors, from electric vehicles and low-energy lighting to single-use plastic free products and provision of high speed broadband and other communications technology;
- Reverse logistics (collection of waste products for repurposing/upgrading/repair);
- Provision of low-carbon public transport;
- Appliance repair jobs and those involved in running local Repair Cafés.

## How can green jobs contribute to a green and just recovery?

In June 2020, Vivid Economics published a short report for WWF UK, following on from their more comprehensive report on required investment to reach net zero. At the time of publishing, they stated that their review of global government investment responses to Covid-19 showed that *“only 11% of government spending is going towards businesses with a track record of positive environmental performance and programs that pursue environmental goals.”* Both of their reports have showed that investment in sustainable jobs and sectors can bring significant benefits to the UK economy.

**We believe that green and blue jobs should be what the International Labour Organisation refers to as ‘decent jobs’.** We do not believe that that the economy of Wales is best served by simply looking for an explosion of cheap rural labour. The Covid crisis, and the impacts of Brexit, have exposed the difficulties associated with seasonal farm workers and there is currently a big push to match UK workers that are unemployed due to the crisis with seasonable fruit and vegetable picking jobs. Brexit, and future immigration rules may perpetuate this difficulty. Simply matching UK unemployed workers into these jobs is proving impractical for a number of reasons, including low pay and poor living conditions for seasonal workers, the lack of agricultural experience of many UK workers, the physical nature of the work and the location of those that are unemployed compared with the locations where labour is needed. The UK and Welsh Governments will need to tackle these issues – particularly the issues of pay and conditions – if they want to attract the UK workforce to these sorts of jobs.

### **Skilled and inspiring jobs**

WEL believes that jobs in nature conservation (both marine and terrestrial), local environmental quality and regeneration, and sustainable land and marine management (including sustainable farming, fishing and forestry) represent a sector with the potential and need to grow, and that can provide career progression with jobs at different levels of skill and qualification. For example, nature conservation provides jobs that are desirable, inspiring and which vary in skill level, from habitat creation to ecological monitoring, and specialist management for vulnerable species. Likewise, jobs in local environmental monitoring, high quality provision and maintenance of access and active travel routes, and provision of environmental advice are just as important as those in renewable energy or recycling and waste management.

If we are to tackle the nature and climate emergency **we need far more people trained to look after our environment**, provide environmental advice and guidance, work on large-scale habitat creation and management, and to create and maintain our recreation and active travel routes. We also need a skilled workforce that understands the interdependencies and impacts of different activities, and we know that there is currently a shortage of skills and capacity in a wide range of necessary areas, such as those required to deliver a new sustainable farming scheme or to provide effective marine or river monitoring. More easily accessible training opportunities and paid Real Living Wage internships will be crucial to encouraging and enabling more people to take up green/blue job opportunities. There is also a need to invest in green apprenticeships in truly sustainable industries to enable skill development and entry into what have been highly competitive work areas. This could also enable more practical routes into what have traditionally been seen as very academic careers, and should be promoted to all sectors of society.

### **Jobs that support the local economy**

Green/blue jobs have the potential to support local economies, as they are not dependent on the usual urban economic centres. **Creating decent job opportunities all across Wales, including to smaller, rural and/or remote communities will bring many benefits**, including a reduction in the need to travel (reducing emissions from transport), strengthening local communities and giving people in Wales more choice about where they live and the type of work they do.

Many 'green' jobs can form part of the Foundational Economy, particularly in the energy, food system, tourism and waste sectors. A focus on foundational sectors will not only embed sustainable opportunities but will create resilience to future external shocks. The environment has not played much of a role in the narrative for Foundational Economy, so WWF Cymru recently produced a report on how it should fit with emerging concepts and policy on Foundational Economy<sup>3</sup>.

In some areas, existing jobs will become obsolete as they are replaced by green/blue jobs. In others, mainstream jobs in what we refer to as 'brown' industries, will be made more sustainable by changes in practice and the adoption of new, low carbon, nature-friendly technologies. A transition to a Circular Economy model alone has the potential to create 30,000 local/regional jobs in Wales.<sup>4</sup> Crucially, there are many opportunities for job creation in our rural and coastal areas, filling gaps in skilled areas, such as marine ecological monitoring or dedicated land management advice, that have been consistently under-invested in.

### **Investing in the future**

Investment by government and private investors should be future-proofed by assessing the number and types of decent, skilled, long-term jobs supported and how this will support overall economic

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wwf.org.uk/media/55611>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Wales\\_and\\_the\\_Circular\\_Economy\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](https://www.wrap.org.uk/sites/files/wrap/Wales_and_the_Circular_Economy_Final_Report.pdf)  
<https://gov.wales/our-route-becoming-circular-economy-nation>

activity in Wales. We want to see leadership from the Welsh Government in identifying the jobs and sectors that we need for a sustainable future, being confident enough to stop investing in polluting sectors and **make all future jobs green jobs**, because they either proactively protect or enhance the environment as a direct function of that job, or are environmentally positive or neutral in the way work is carried out. As a starting point, the Welsh Government should ensure that its Economic Contract with the businesses it invests in contains a commitment to protecting and/or restoring nature, as well as to decarbonisation. It should also think carefully about what kind of economic growth this contract encourages.

Wales Environment Link (WEL) is a network of environmental, countryside and heritage Non-Governmental Organisations in Wales. WEL is a respected intermediary body connecting the government and the environmental NGO sector. Our vision is a thriving Welsh environment for future generations.

This paper represents the consensus view of a group of WEL members working in this specialist area. Members may also produce information individually in order to raise more detailed issues that are important to their particular organisation.



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