

Questionnaire

Coal Authority Triennial Review

Introduction

All Government departments are required to review all their Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) at least every three years. As announced by Michael Fallon on 9 October 2013 the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) has agreed with the Cabinet Office, which oversees this process, that the Coal Authority will be reviewed this year.

The first stage of a review is to consider, with input from stakeholders, the continuing need for the NDPB's functions and the form in which they are delivered.

Functions of the Committee

The Coal Authority owns the vast majority of the coal in Great Britain, as well as former coal mines. It is an NDPB sponsored by DECC and was established by Parliament in the Coal Industry Act 1994 to undertake specific statutory responsibilities associated with:

- licensing coal mining operations in Britain;
- handling subsidence damage claims which are not the responsibility of licensed coalmine operators;
- managing property and historic liability issues, such as surface hazards and treatment of minewater discharges; and
- providing public access to information on past and present coal mining operations.

Full details of the Authority's work can be found on their website - <http://coal.decc.gov.uk>

Your views

We are seeking your views as key stakeholders of the Authority and your responses will form part of the evidence base for the Review. Please therefore be as open and honest as you can be and illustrate your responses with evidence or examples wherever possible. There is no word limit, but please keep your views concise where possible.

So that we know what particular work of the Authority you are referring to please be specific and spell out all acronyms.

Please let us know your views under the following sections. Not all sections will be relevant to every stakeholder and if you feel you are unable to comment in some areas simply put 'Not applicable' or you can leave the box blank. It is not necessary to be limited by answering the specific question asked - rather, these are best seen as prompts to ensure all relevant aspects are covered.

We will publish an anonymised summary of the responses to the questionnaire as part of the final report and may make reference to the area of industry referred to but not to specific organisations or individuals.

Role of the Authority

The Authority has four key roles:

- licensing;
- subsidence damage claims;
- public safety; and
- mining information.

Please state in which areas you have interaction with the Authority

Managing the exploitation of a key natural resource in Wales
Management of minewater discharges and other environmental hazards
Utilising mining information for our operations

How relevant and important is the Authority's work in this area?

Natural resources management: The Coal Authority's control of the coal reserves of Wales is an important aspect of our Natural Resource Planning. The management of the extraction of coal, coal bed methane or underground coal gasification can have a significant impact on the environment of Wales. We work with the Authority to ensure sustainability and to minimise the potential negative effects.

Abandoned mines are the most significant pressures on the quality of the Welsh water environment, presenting a significant barrier to the achievement of Good Ecological Status because of discharges of metals including hazardous substances such as cadmium. The Authority is internationally recognised for its expertise in minewater treatment. That expertise has resulted in a significant improvement in the quality of the Welsh environment with eleven minewater treatment plants protecting over 100km of our rivers, reducing the risk of flooding and creating new habitats. To achieve our targets we consider that the work of the Coal Authority in this field must continue and would ideally be expanded.

Mining information is a component of our forest design and operational plans, allowing us to suitably assess safety and environmental risks.

Do you feel that the Authority could do more in this area of work? Could it make better use of its resources/knowledge?

Abandoned mines, particularly metal mines, remain a significant pressure affecting the quality of the Welsh environment. The Authority's expertise in minewater and other hazard management at coal mines is already being accessed to advise our approach to tackling metal mine pollution. As we develop a programme of metal mine treatment we consider that the Authority is best placed to deliver the significant programme of works necessary to restore and enhance our rivers and groundwaters. The continued support from, and increased resourcing by DECC will allow the Authority to expand further into this field.

Mining information is comprehensive for coal mines but less so for the metal mining areas of Wales and this poses a risk to our operations. Expanding the Authority's remit for all mining information would ensure consistency and a single resource.

Do you feel the Authority has a clear idea of its direction in this area for the next 5 to 10 years?

We will continue to work closely with the Authority to direct its environment programme which has already been aligned to the cycles of river basin planning required for the Water Framework Directive to 2027

How do you feel the Authority could do things differently in this area?

The Authority's work can make a significant contribution to sustainable natural resource management in Wales. The extraction and burning of coal has an environmental impact but also contributes to economic vitality. Land on former colliery sites, some in the control of the Authority, could be used to contribute to Wales's aim to expand the woodland estate in Wales by 100,000 hectares. This could have multiple benefits including: improving carbon storage, providing a timber resource and valuable new habitats, reducing the impacts of climate change and regenerating disadvantaged areas socially and economically.

There is still significant scope for innovative treatment of minewaters, coal and metal, in locations where environmental sensitivity, access or urbanisation make the usual treatment methods difficult. The Authority conducts a significant programme of research in this area which could be expanded with opportunities for research sites which are available in Wales. We are working with Welsh Universities to develop a centre of excellence for developing methods to manage abandoned mine pollution.

Overall, what do you feel is the impact of the Authority and do you feel it has its intended effect?

The environmental benefits of the Authority's minewater treatment programme are significant and sustainable, improving not only the ecological quality of our rivers but contributing to the economic vitality and the health and wellbeing of communities in otherwise disadvantaged areas..

Alternative ways of delivering the functions of the Committee

As part of all Triennial Reviews potential alternative models for delivering the functions must be considered. What do you see as the benefits and risks of delivering the functions of the Authority in these alternative ways? In particular, do you view any of these methods of delivery as beneficial, and why?

These are:

Deliver Models	Comments
Abolish	The functions of the Authority are essential for resource management and environmental protection in Wales and we could not support this option.
Move out of Central Government (e.g. to voluntary or private sector)	We do not consider either the voluntary or private sector suitable for the statutory regulatory role of the Authority. The minewater management and treatment programme requires the continuity and long term planning suited to the public sector
Bring in-house (e.g. to an existing part of the Department of Energy and Climate Change)	Maintaining the Authority's status as an NDPB has the advantage accessibility for devolved administrations and their public sector organisations.
Merge with another body	<p>The functions of the Authority are not devolved to Wales. The needs of sustainable natural resource management may make a merger with NRW in Wales a possibility but our preference would be to continue to work with the Authority for the benefit of the Welsh environment.</p> <p>We do not consider that a split of the Authority to merge with devolved organisations would have benefit as the pool of expertise developed would likely be diluted and diverted and would probably be too small to be viable.</p> <p>The merging of some functions of the Authority where there is overlap with local authorities or others, particularly for mineral licencing and mining information could be beneficial, providing a consistent national approach. This is more an expansion of the Authority's role than a merger.</p>
Delivery by a new Executive	We do not consider this option would bring benefit

Agency	
Continued delivery by an NDPB	This is our preferred option and we would continue to work in partnership with the Authority for the benefit of the Welsh environment

Any other comments

Do you have any other comments regarding the Authority that you would like us to be aware of in the context of this Triennial Review?

Though we are a new organisation in Wales, our legacy bodies have worked successfully with the Authority since it was vested in 1994 to restore and enhance the Welsh environment. We will maintain our relationship and improve it to realise the benefits that integrated natural resource management can bring.

About you and your organisation

You may complete and return this sheet anonymously if you wish. If you do not include your details below, this document will be saved anonymously and not linked to you in any way. However, we would really appreciate it if you could let us know which organisation you are responding on behalf of or at least how your work interacts with the Authority.

Your Contact Details	
Name	Dave Johnston
Organisation	Natural Resources Wales
Role within organisation	Water Framework Directive Senior Advisor
How your work interacts with the Authority	
Address	Ty Cambria, 29 Newport Road, Cardiff, CF24 0TP
Telephone number	02920466166
E-mail address	Dave.johnston@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk
Length time dealing with the Authority	Since 1994