



## Of Boundaries, Wobble, and Knowing When the Line Has Been Crossed

Risk appetite, risk tolerance, and judgement under uncertainty.

The three women were never formally introduced. People just knew who they were. Introductions usually mean you have a choice, but with them, it was clear there never really was one. They didn't just manage risk. They understood it. As Dame Anwen often said, that was a completely different thing. She always knew where the line was.

They stood at the edge of the old woods. The woods were useful, giving fuel, shelter, and sometimes answers. But they also held things that fixed one problem and caused another. Dame Anwen rested her hand on her staff and looked at the trees.

"This," she said, tapping the ground before them, "is how far we are prepared to go."

Pore Amyas looked down. "It looks like mud."

"It is mud," said Dame Anwen. "We expect mud."

This was what people now call risk appetite, though Dame Anwen would never use that term. Appetite wasn't about hunger or bravado. It was about intent. It was a clear, deliberate choice that said:

*We will enter the wood, under these conditions, for this purpose.*

**ISO 31000** would describe it as the amount and type of risk an organisation is willing to pursue or retain in pursuit of its objectives.

Dame Anwen described it as “***The trouble you choose, before the trouble chooses you.***”

Appetite wasn't about staying out of the woods. It was about knowing your reasons for going in and being honest about what you were willing to accept in return.

Pore Amyas knew how much unsteadiness she could handle. She stepped forward. Her boot sank a little. She adjusted, felt the ground shift again, paused, checked her footing, and kept going.

“That,” she said, “is how much give I'm prepared to tolerate.”

Tolerance wasn't about ambition. It was about being realistic. Plans never go exactly right. Conditions change. People adjust. Pressure builds up. Sometimes, fate steps in.

Risk tolerance was the acceptable variation around objectives. Or, as Pore Amyas put it “How far off course we'll allow before we stop pretending everything's fine.”

*Tolerance was always more limited than appetite. Appetite pointed the way. Tolerance let you know when things were starting to go off track.*

If Pore Amyas hesitated, it meant the line was near. If she winced, it meant the line had already been crossed.

Doctour Karinne insisted it be written down. Doctour Karinne cleared her throat.

“And this will be recorded,” she said.

Pore Amyas sighed. “Of course it will.”

Writing down risks wasn't the same as managing them. But if you didn't record them, you could forget why choices were made. That's how mistakes end up happening again.

**ISO 31000** is clear that risk information exists to support decision-making, not simply to exist.

Doctour Karinne was equally clear about something else.

“***Documentation,***” she said as she adjusted her glasses, “***is not action.***” She didn't threaten anyone. She kept records. People didn't fear her for being harsh, but for being exact.

## The mistake people keep making

Someone always asked the same question.

“Why not just have one rule?”

Dame Anwen’s look made it clear this was how people started treating puddles and cliffs as if they were the same. Different risks acted in different ways:

- some bruised
- some scarred
- some changed trajectories
- some ended stories altogether

**ISO 31000** would call this context. The women called it:

***“Knowing when courage turns into foolishness.”***

Trying to sum all this up in one rule or number made things look neat. But neatness isn’t the same as wisdom.

## When conditions change, decisions must change too

Later, the wind shifted. The wood sounded different now.

Pore Amyas tilted her head. “Storm coming.”

“So appetite changes?” someone asked.

“No,” said Dame Anwen. “The decision changes.”

*It wasn’t the boundary that changed, but the conditions that tested it. Some rules stayed firm:*

- no harm to people
- no bargains with smiling strangers
- no risks that could not be explained honestly afterwards

But tolerance became stricter. There were fewer options. Choices became clearer.

**ISO 31000** describes this as dynamic and responsive risk management.

Dame Anwen called it: ***“Paying attention while there’s still time.”***

## What appetite and tolerance are really for

They turned back before the rain came. It wasn't out of fear. It was because they had made a decision. That was what mattered.

Risk appetite was not bravado.

Risk tolerance was not control.

They existed so that:

- decisions were deliberate
- boundaries were visible
- escalation was legitimate
- and no one had to pretend surprise later

ISO 31000 would say risk management enables informed decision-making under uncertainty.

Pore Amyas would say: ***“If you don't know what you'll do when things go wrong, you're not managing risk. You're hoping.”***

## And the moral, since people expect one

Risk appetite isn't just a number. Risk tolerance isn't just a color. They set boundaries for judgment, but don't replace it.

Dame Anwen tapped her staff once, firmly.

***“It's not about avoiding the wood.***

***It's about knowing why you're in it,***

***and recognising when it's time to turn back.”***

Doctour Karinne wrote that down. Pore Amyas checked the sky, and between them, the decision stood.

## Final note

Changing how people experience risk often matters more than how precisely it's measured. Changing language, stories, and framing costs little, but can shift behavior much more than another dashboard ever could.

***The goal is not to eliminate uncertainty, it is to make it clear enough to decide.***