Cyswllt Amgylchedd Cymru | Wales Environment Link

Manifesto | May 2021





Restore nature and tackle climate change for the benefit of our people, our environment and our future resilience



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Introduction

We live in a different Wales to the one where the Fifth Assembly started in May 2016. Brexit and the Covid-19 outbreak have created new challenges, as well as shining a spotlight on the urgent issues that we have yet to resolve. Now, more than ever, Wales needs to lead the way in taking bold action to restore nature and tackle climate change for the benefit of our people, our environment and our future resilience.

There will be no future government in Wales which will not experience some form of emergency event due to our changing climate. Prior to the Covid pandemic, the UK saw record-breaking rainfall and peak river flows which led to flooding and many people losing their homes and businesses. Historical 'hundred-year' floods are now predicted to occur every one to thirty years. In tandem with floods, global temperatures rise and plants and wildlife going extinct will create an insurmountable crisis that society won't be able to overcome.

The next Welsh Government needs to see this as an opportunity to enact transformational change, which is supported and encouraged by Welsh citizens. We need a green and blue recovery, of our land and our seas, and this can only happen as a cross-government and cross-societal change. We need to invest adequate funding into directly tackling environmental challenges and whilst ensuring that nature's needs and the health of our planet are fully considered in policy decisions across all government areas.

In Wales specifically, **none of our ecosystems have been found to be resilient** and many of our species are on the brink of extinction. We have to take urgent action now and this Senedd term may be the last opportunity to prioritise our environment in the way our future generations need us to.

Wales Environment Link is calling for the next Welsh Government to prioritise a green and just recovery, in line with the principles that we have set out, ensuring that economic growth and environmental growth are synonymous. **Our economy needs to be green and sustainable, focused on retaining resource through a circular economy and optimising the population's welfare through a wellbeing economy**. A future where: green and blue jobs are prioritised; industries which pollute or damage nature are discouraged by our leaders; green and blue spaces are prioritised for wellbeing; active travel invested in and flexible working options are promoted by all sectors.

Front cover image
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In line with this, we call on the Welsh Government to deliver the following:

- A sustainable land management system that helps restore nature and the environment and which is based on the principle of paying farmers and other land managers public money for delivering public goods.
- Recovering our oceans to deliver resilient seas rich in wildlife, which in turn will support coastal communities and businesses.
- Create an environmental governance body and embed principles from EU Directives, alongside statutory nature targets.
- End plastic pollution by creating a circular economy.
- Embed eco-literacy in our education settings and promote green prescriptions in the NHS, whilst encouraging greater public access to nature-rich spaces in both urban and rural areas.

Below we expand on our **five key asks** and ask political parties to make these a priority in the next Senedd term, as our last chance to tackle the climate and ecological crises and to ensure the health, wellbeing and resilience of a future Wales.

Key asks

1 | Sustainable Farming and Land Management Bill

Mounting evidence shows that both nature and the wider environment are being negatively impacted by unsustainable farming practices across Wales.
The pandemic has also highlighted our dependence on a vulnerable global food system. Our departure from the EU provides us with an unique opportunity to put in place new policies that will use public money to help farmers and other land managers to restore biodiversity and the ecosystems nature creates, mitigate climate change and maintain our capacity to produce food and other commodities for this and future generations.

WEL wants to see a Sustainable Farming and Land Management Bill as an urgent priority for the 6th term of the Senedd, and which we fully transition to by 2025.
This is the time to replace the EU's outdated and environmentally damaging Common Agricultural Policy with a bespoke system for Welsh farmers and land managers that uses public money to reward them for restoring nature and tackling climate change and which promotes sustainable, just and diverse production and supply chains for food and other commodities. We also want to see Wales secure adequate funding for this based on need and not the Barnett Formula.

Biodiversity needs to be at the heart of future land management. **WEL's Sustainable Land Management Vision outlines some of the public goods that can be restored and sustained through this approach**, including but is not limited to: enhancing biodiversity by managing and creating habitats for wildlife, including the strategic planting of trees, ensuring and maintaining paths for public use and maintaining high water quality and air quality levels.



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Sustainable land management system that helps restore nature and the environment


© Liz Smith


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To ensure our natural resources are restored and managed sustainably, **urgent action is needed to protect and restore our environment from damaging actions, including agricultural pollution**. The Welsh Government must urgently introduce effective measures, including regulations, which prevent pollutants – such as slurry and manufactured chemicals (fertilizers, pesticides/herbicides) – entering our atmosphere where it impacts rare species of plants and fungi, and our rivers where it devastates our fish populations and other wildlife. We also need to see Local Authorities properly take into account the cumulative impact of intensive farming, including poultry units, which are having an increasing detrimental impact on water and air quality.

We want to see policies that enable new and restored ecological networks, that include well-managed protected sites, across Wales. This includes managing and connecting hedges, grasslands and forests for biodiversity. Any future Welsh Government must maintain the commitment to the National Forest, which is a fantastic opportunity to create a new nature recovery network, with public access and enjoyment as an integral part of it. We also need an adequately funded Nature Recovery Action Plan that prioritises our most at-risk species and hastens action to reverse their decline. Without resilient ecological networks across Wales, our wildlife will continue to decline.

We want Wales to maintain and strengthen our environmental, animal welfare and food safety standards, with no regression from what we had before.
We need to ensure future trade deals do not compromise Wales' and the UK's environmental protections, animal welfare or food standards; we urge for a trade policy which addresses and responds to the climate and ecological crises.

We need new and restored ecological networks


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2 | Ambitious recovery of Welsh seas

Wales' seas are a third larger than the land area of Wales and over 60% of Wales' population lives and works on the coast. Yet, despite this, the Welsh Government's own assessments show that Welsh seas are not in a good state and legislative requirements to protect our marine ecosystems have been missed. We urge the incoming Welsh Government to reinvigorate the work on Sustainable Marine Management and commit to enhancing its and Natural Resources Wales' capacity, technical expertise and funding in this area, which has been repeatedly under-resourced.

The marine environment is subject to a range of pressures. These range from marine litter to at-sea development and extraction of natural resources, as well as **marine pollution and climate change**. Progress on addressing these pressures in Wales has been insufficient; nearly 50% of protected wildlife in our seas is in poor condition, and some of the key Welsh fisheries do not have appropriate management measures in place.

Marine litter is also a mounting problem, with the 2019 Great British Beach Clean volunteers collecting an average 162 pieces of plastic per 100m stretch. This is **despite broad public support to take urgent action on plastic and to tackle plastic pollution at every point**. The Welsh Government and others have failed to meet commitments on marine conservation, including the requirement to achieve Good Environmental Status of our seas by 2020 under the Marine Strategy Regulations in 2010. We can no longer justify the status quo, we need to recover our seas, if we are to fully implement a green and blue recovery.

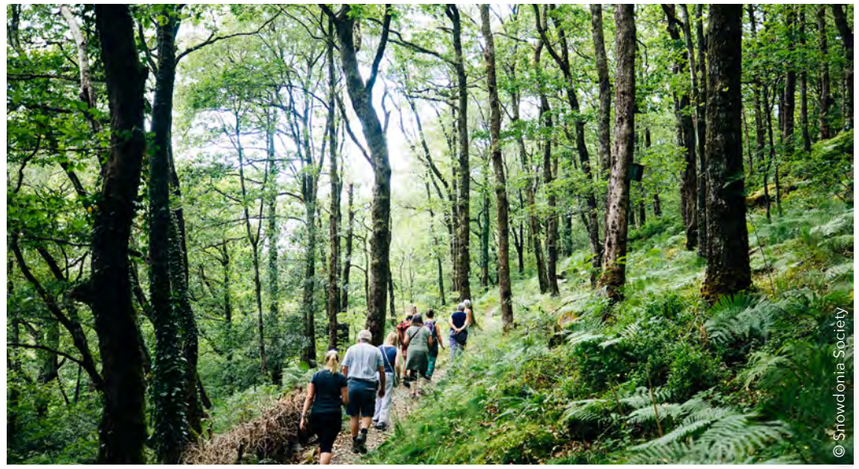
The following areas highlight key opportunities for the Welsh Government to reverse this and to become leaders on sustainable marine management:

- Delivery of an ambitious network of well-managed Marine Protected Areas is vital. This should include the designation of Marine Conservation Zones, as well as fully protected sites and protected areas for mobile species. We recommend at least 10% of Welsh waters should be fully protected by 2030, at the latest. In addition, long-awaited management measures for fisheries in Marine Protected Areas should be consulted upon. A commitment to a dedicated funding pot for Marine Protected Areas, with levels of funding parity to that of land management, would also be a very welcome step forward.
- Marine evidence is a constraint on the delivery of marine conservation. To address this, we urge the new Government to produce a **funded action plan to deliver the Marine Evidence Strategy**, particularly around the section on living within environmental limits.
- Future **fisheries legislation and policies should take an ecosystem-based approach**. This should include recognising and minimising the impact of all


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Future fisheries legislation needs to take an ecosystem -based approach


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fisheries (including non-Welsh fisheries) in the Welsh zone, for which the Welsh Government has increased responsibility post-Brexit.

- **Future Marine Policy must recognise the links to effective water management practices**. We need to adopt a 'source to sea' approach to river and fisheries management which recognises that the health of our oceans is synonymous with the health of our rivers.
- The development of a **Seabird Recovery Strategy** should be brought forward to address the fact that the summary of progress on the Marine Strategy classes birds as in a 'declining situation since 2012'.
- **Address urgent issues facing marine mammals in Welsh waters**, through the introduction of effective and rapid targeted actions and measures, at the associated sites. A **marine climate team** is needed in the Welsh Government to ensure marine considerations are effectively included and developed in the Government's climate change strategies and plans. This should include work to protect **blue carbon habitats**.
- We want to see **marine renewables tested and deployed in Wales sensitively and in harmony with wildlife**. Testing of new developments needs to take place at an appropriate scale and over an appropriate timeframe to enable learning, monitoring and swift responses to any adverse effects. A marine development plan would ensure this is done strategically.

3 | Post-transition environmental governance and principles

Leaving the European Union has had significant consequences for environmental governance in Wales. While we previously utilised a world leading pan-European governance regime, we now need to take steps to deliver our own checks and balances to ensure environmental principles and protections are strengthened; complaints mechanisms and the strengths of remedies are undiminished; and joint efforts to overcome environmental decline are retained.

We need statutory nature targets in Wales

WEL members have been working closely with the Welsh Government on new Environmental Governance & Principles legislation for several years and have consistently called for its urgent introduction to the Senedd to **avoid a serious regression in our governance system and citizens' rights at the end of the Transition Period**.

Wales is now likely to have far more limited 'interim arrangements' to be in place from January 2021 until a new independent environmental protection body for Wales is fully operational. The next Welsh Government must not permit these 'interim arrangements' to persist for any longer than is absolutely necessary. WEL is calling for a new and independent Environmental Governance body for Wales to be fully operational in the first 12 months of the next Senedd – inclusive of appropriate cross-border arrangements when it comes to complaints, compliance and resolutions of environmental incidents.

We also need to rectify the loss of the environmental principles that have only existed in our EU legislation and not in Wales. The 'polluter pays' principle and the 'rectification at source' principle need to be included and, for the sake of clarity, to see all six principles clearly articulated and explicitly represented in Welsh primary legislation.

Welsh citizens, after 31st December 2020, lost many existing rights and protections that a lot of the public would not have even known existed. The ability to complain, without significant costs or difficulty, to the EU Commission about environmental pollution and breaches of regulatory limits was ground-breaking and we **must ensure an appropriate replacement is accelerated as a priority by the next Welsh Government**. The loss of these governance arrangements means citizens cannot challenge the UK or Welsh Governments that fail to implement their own policies and legislation on environmental protection. This is a social justice issue and we cannot have de-regulation allowing further damage to the Welsh environment.

We want to see Wales restore nature and fully value it throughout government and its decision-making processes. To do so, **we are calling for a series of statutory nature targets to ensure direction and the priority of enhancing nature across government policies**. In the same way that carbon targets can drive carbon reduction, we would expect biodiversity targets to help Welsh Government fully value and prioritise nature.

This may involve reviewing our existing protections and amending previous legislation. The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and the Environment Act embedded sustainable development principles, wellbeing goals, ways of working, biodiversity duties, carbon budgeting and public sector collaboration. These goals can enhance and improve the way public bodies and Public Service boards abide by these Acts. These should be amended to assist in creating **a holistic suite of environmental protection legislation, to ensure that leaving the EU does not mean leaving behind a healthy environment**.

4 | Prevent waste and end pollution

We want to see Wales taking a world-leading role in achieving zero-waste and realising the ambition to create a circular economy. Wales can and should be leading on these initiatives, building on previous successes of the single-use carrier bag charge and household recycling targets. Prevention, above all, must be at the heart of the new focus and we want to see waste reduction targets put in place to this end. Building on the public momentum of the awareness of plastics in the environment, we must address the proliferation of single-use plastic, as well as investing in efforts to promote reuse through investment in infrastructure and innovation. Caution should be applied not to substitute plastics for alternative materials that may cause future harm.

Leaving the EU should not mean leaving behind a healthy environment


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The UK Environment Bill will give wide-ranging powers to Welsh Ministers on plastics and packaging and we want to see this utilised as soon as possible.

WEL wants to see an 'all in' Deposit Return Scheme in Wales. Whilst aligning elements with the rest of the UK, we would urge that a Deposit Return Scheme is designed for Wales, to benefit the Welsh economy, so that the benefits are not lost to a potential UK-wide scheme. We want to see this being developed in conjunction with other fiscal mechanisms, such as the introduction of levies on single-use products that are hard to recycle and bans on products that cannot be recycled at all.
To further increase our recycling rates and to promote awareness, it will be necessary to introduce a statutory plan for a standardised and consistent approach to waste collection across Wales. Wales must also press ahead with introducing extended producer responsibility so that manufacturers are responsible for the full lifecycle costs incurred from the sourcing to end-of-life of a product.

We urge for the Welsh Government to be ambitious on **creating a circular economy with real investment in infrastructure, that ensures minimal waste, reduces the use of virgin materials and provides direct employment and skills to the people of Wales**. Wales should, to this end, adopt the EU Circular Economy Package into domestic legislation. Minimally, we want to see a commitment to the 'Right to Repair' and adopt the principles laid out in the EU Eco-design Directive.

The potential for the reuse and repair sector needs to be realised and needs government-led incentives to flourish. This can include tax breaks for repairs, investment in 'repair apprenticeships', target collection of textiles, repair cafés, and resource-efficiency audits of any events funded by public money.

Air quality is also a priority for Wales, having repeatedly not met acceptable standards in some areas. Air pollution is detrimental to people, wildlife and planet; a future Clean Air Act should take drastic action to reduce all kinds of pollutants in our air. **We also need to tackle the way agricultural pollution affects our rivers; without action, our rivers will continue to degrade until no more wildlife is able to be sustained in them**.

Without action on agri pollution, our rivers will continue to degrade until wildlife can no longer live in them


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In terms of transport, we'd expect a Clean Air Act for Wales must focus on accessible, convenient public transport infrastructure, active travel routes, nature-based solutions and must include a clear suite of awareness raising measures to increase understanding and engagement. Any vehicle penalties or charges must mitigate the potential adverse impact on low paid workers.

5 | Prioritise eco-literacy and embed green prescriptions in the NHS, for current and future generations

To build a future generation equipped to deal with the challenges in the coming decades, we need to ensure that eco-literacy – education on the biodiversity crisis and tackling climate change, in a citizenship-led approach – is embedded into the new Welsh curriculum and the Areas of Learning. This should not be in chosen establishments but should be commonplace across all groups and regions and education settings from nurseries to youth clubs and Further Education colleges.

Whilst studies show the effectiveness of green prescriptions on mental health, it's still not best practice to first refer people to nature-based services before referring to longer waiting lists for mental health services. Wales Environment Link wants to see a Green NHS that will work in partnership with Welsh NGOs to roll-out prescriptions to exercise, nature reserves, community groups, and volunteer work. Particularly when it comes to the nature crisis, having as many people as possible both in and looking after our environment will be an asset to the public's wellbeing.

For the first ask on eco-literacy, we need to include the climate emergency and ecological crisis in teacher training, involving communities, parents and public sector leaders to ensure education is focused on local and active participation in existing structures. A professional accreditation should be made too, to aid those teaching eco-literacy to varying age groups; this should include people of all ages and promoted in colleges.

We also need to ensure that mechanisms are provided for young people to truly be able to lead on this work. Students and young activists are generating fantastic ideas and logical ways to make their schools and lives more sustainable and create a climate-friendly future. Unfortunately, there are often barriers in place that prevent some of these positive ideas from being acted on. These barriers can be at both a local and national level. It is therefore vitally important that the pathways to making a positive and sustained change are supported by Welsh Government and local governments so that young people are empowered to continue to input and not left feeling disillusioned. This needs to include the Youth Parliament, youth groups and initiatives like Teach the Future and Keep Wales Tidy's Eco-Schools programme.

For the second ask on green prescriptions, **we want to strengthen the link between the environment and wellbeing, both on a personal and community level**. This is heavily reliant on promoting equitable access to public space, which should be part of the new sustainable land management scheme and council policies to promote parks, open spaces and green land.

Public Health Wales should be a key partner in embedding green prescriptions; at the moment, all that has been taking place is pilots in GP clusters and select Health Boards. **We want green prescriptions to be the first port of call, where appropriate, for both physical and mental health**. For example, this can include referrals to exercise for obesity focused on local fitness groups and access to walking/running trails and cycling; referrals to nature-based volunteering for anxiety, depression and other appropriate mental health conditions; and an emphasis on young people being able to use it as an opportunity to socialise and learn from their peers, as well as mentors running the projects.

Both these asks serve as an 'entry point' to nature for the wider public and embedding environmental learning and the benefits of nature to our two mainstays of the public sector: the NHS and schools.


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We need nature front and centre in schools and the NHS

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.

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