Cyswllt Amgylchedd Cymru | Wales Environment Link

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Driving Environmental Recovery in the Seventh Senedd

The New Welsh Environment Act

Summer 2026

The Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act 2026 was one of the final Bills passed by the Sixth Senedd. It creates a robust and ambitious framework to strengthen environmental governance and drive action for a healthier environment.





The new law is badly needed: Wales' wildlife is declining rapidly, our rivers and seas are polluted, and it is not easy for people to challenge authorities where they see things going wrong.

Implementation of the new Act begins under the watch of the Seventh Senedd. This briefing outlines what Members of the Senedd need to do in the coming months to make the new Act a success. Wales Environment Link and Green Alliance are here to help.

Key provisions



The Act requires the Welsh Government, public authorities and the Senedd to take action. It has three main parts, which aim to better integrate environmental thinking into policy; hold public bodies to account for environmental compliance and delivery; and increase ambition and action for nature:

Part 1 enshrines core Environmental Principles in Welsh Law, which must be applied in policy making.

Part 2 establishes the Office of Environmental Governance Wales.

Part 3 requires the Welsh Ministers to set, and to meet, legally binding biodiversity targets.



Part 1 – Environmental principles

The Act sets out a high-level environmental objective: the attainment of a high level of environmental protection and improvement of the environment.

It also sets out four core environmental principles:

- Precaution
- Prevention
- Rectification at source
- Polluter pays



Ministers and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are required to 'have special regard' to the four principles when making policy, and to integrate environmental protection into policymaking. Similar duties are placed on other public authorities. Applying the environmental principles should ensure that policymaking benefits or, at least, does not harm the environment.

Ministers must publish an 'Environmental principles and integrating environmental protection statement' ('the Statement') to support implementation of these duties.

Key matters for this Senedd:

- The duty to have special regard to the principles commences immediately, giving MSs the opportunity to call on Ministers to explain how this has been done when policies are brought forward.
- The Senedd will have the chance to make recommendations on a draft of the Statement in late 2026/early 2027. The finalised Statement must be laid in the Senedd by 31st March 2027.



Part 2 – the Office of Environmental Governance Wales (OEGW)

The OEGW will be a new, independent body with the remit of ensuring that Wales' environmental laws are effective and fit for purpose, and that public authorities such as the Welsh Ministers, NRW and Local Authorities, follow these laws. It will play the role that the Office of Environmental Protection (OEP) plays in England and Northern Ireland, and Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS) plays in Scotland.



The Act ensures access to environmental justice for citizens by enabling people to make representations to the OEGW if they are concerned environmental laws are being broken or are not effective or well implemented.

Using its powers under the Act the OEGW will:

- **Monitor, report and advise** on environmental law and its implementation;
- **Investigate** failures to comply with environmental law;
- **Take enforcement action** using an escalatory system which starts with engagement and negotiation with public authorities and potentially ends with an application to the High Court; and
- **Make Improvement Reports** – on how effectiveness, implementation, or the law itself, can be improved.

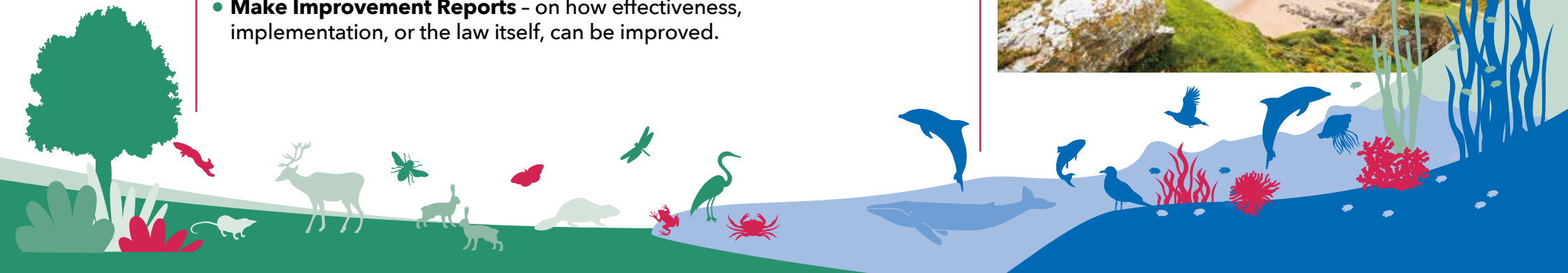




Key matters for this Senedd:

- **Setting up the OEGW** – diligence from Members of the Senedd will be key to push the Welsh Government to meet the 24-month timeline set out in the Act. The Government must not be allowed to drag its feet as Wales has already waited eight years to get to this point.
- **Appointments** – Members of the Senedd will play a role in the appointment of the first chief executive, Chair, Deputy Chair and other non-executive members of the OEGW.
- **Unfinished business** – Permission was not secured from UK Ministers for the OEGW to oversee the delivery of environmental law in Wales by reserved public authorities such as The Crown Estate or Network Rail. This must be addressed as early as possible to avoid an enduring governance gap and double standards.







Part 3 – Biodiversity Targets

This Part establishes a framework to create and deliver legally binding biodiversity targets, which will enable the Senedd to hold Ministers to account for improving the state of Wales' nature.

Ministers must make regulations setting the first targets by 27th April 2028, and they have a duty to ensure the targets are met.

The Act also sets detailed requirements for the Welsh Ministers' Biodiversity Plan. Once the first Biodiversity Targets are in place, the Plan must set out what actions will be taken to meet them. The Plan must address the areas of responsibility of each of the Welsh Ministers.

Every three years the Welsh Ministers must publish a Biodiversity Report on progress, and an Evaluation Report on the effectiveness of their Biodiversity Plans.





Key matters for this Senedd:

- The deadline for **setting the first Biodiversity Targets** is Spring 2028. Ministers must receive independent advice, and we expect a consultation on the draft regulations before the Senedd is asked to pass them via the affirmative procedure.
- Ministers will need to develop a **new Biodiversity Plan** which must set out what actions will be taken – and when – to ensure the new targets are met, and to meet the Global Vision of restoring biodiversity, to benefit everyone, by 2050. Senedd Scrutiny will be vital to ensure the new plan sets clear pathways to stop the loss of biodiversity and drive its recovery.
- **Be a voice for biodiversity in the Senedd** – nature affects so many aspects of our lives in Wales and is intrinsic not only to our environment but to our economy, society and culture. We are here to help you make this case. Look out for WEL's Nature Champions programme to learn more.



Wales Environment Link (WEL) is a network of environment, countryside and heritage Non-Governmental Organisations in Wales. Our vision is a thriving Welsh environment for future generations.

Green Alliance is an independent think tank and charity focused on ambitious leadership for the environment.

Mae Cyswllt Amgylchedd Cymru yn rhwydwaith o Sefydliadau Anllywodraethol ym meysydd yr amgylchedd, cefn gwlad a threftadaeth yng Nghymru. Ein gweledigaeth yw amgylchedd ffyniannus yng Nghymru ar gyfer cenedlaethau'r dyfodol.

Mae'r Gynghrair Werdd yn elusen ac yn felin drafod annibynnol sy'n ffocysu ar arweinyddiaeth uchelgeisiol ar gyfer yr amgylchedd.

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