



Environment Policy Essentials: Restoring nature

Biodiversity is one of Wales' greatest assets – from the bats in our forests to breeding seabirds on sea cliffs and islands; seals and dolphins swimming among seagrass meadows and pink sea fans, to the heather moors and blanket bogs of the uplands.

Wales homes globally significant populations of seabirds and temperate Celtic rainforests. But just 2.1% of Welsh land and water is protected and in good condition, and 1 in 6 species is at risk of extinction.

Despite severe biodiversity decline, Audit Wales recently found the 'nature emergency has not been a high enough priority'. Climate change is a key driver of biodiversity decline, and wildlife loss is bad news for food production, our economy, and the health and wellbeing of our communities. A recent Food Security Report found that climate change, nature loss, and water insecurity pose "significant risks" to food security.

Time is running out. Action is needed this Senedd term to stop biodiversity loss and put Welsh nature on a path to recovery.





What tools does the Senedd have?

- The Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act 2026 requires the Welsh Government to integrate the Environmental Principles across Government, establish the environmental watchdog, the Office of Environmental Governance Wales (OEGW), and set legally binding biodiversity targets.
- The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 places a duty on Public Authorities to maintain and enhance biodiversity.
- Wales agreed to protect 30% of land, water, and sea by 2030 (30 by 30), under the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF). But our network of protected sites is currently far from meeting the target. Improving the quality and extent of protected areas – in line with recommendations from Audit Wales – will benefit for our communities, economy, and natural environment.
- Nature's future is intrinsically linked to the future of farming. Agricultural policy, including the Sustainable Farming Scheme must provide the regulation, tools, and incentives to help farmers contribute to nature's recovery.
- Policy areas including planning, housing, water and infrastructure present opportunities to avoid causing harm, implement nature-based solutions, and deliver biodiversity benefits.
- Wales is taking steps towards reintroducing keystone species such as beavers and white-tailed sea eagles. Effective management frameworks and a strategic, evidence-based approach will be essential to ensure their return is successful and benefits local communities.
- Wales has stepped towards levering private finance to restore nature, with Sustainable Investment Principles. In 2024, WEL outlined how nature requires increased funding and investment. Studies demonstrate the economic importance of nature, and case studies (such as Aviva & The Wildlife Trust's partnership and the Wye & Usk Foundation's natural capital trading project) demonstrate how this works in practice. The Welsh Government should continue developing nature finance models at pace.







What can MSs do to help meet our 2030 targets?

- Bring biodiversity into every conversation. Nature underpins our lives, and its integration across Welsh Government is crucial for our health, wellbeing, tourism, farming, climate resilience, and biodiversity restoration.
- Demand that land, water, and seas are better managed, protected, and restored, so that nature can co-exist with Welsh communities, by:
  - Improving protected sites to good condition and designating new sites.
  - Continuing the Naturfa programme, ensuring more areas are designated and well managed.
  - Improving the management of National Parks for nature's recovery, expanding them further to develop National Landscapes that are managed for nature.
- Support the rapid development of biodiversity targets and the actions to deliver them by 2028. Legally binding biodiversity targets will drive action and ensure that in future, Ministers are accountable for improving the state of nature.
- Ensure species reintroductions policy and management continues at pace.
- Work with the Welsh Government and the Third Sector to ensure nature restoration is publicly and privately financed and new avenues of investment are established, building on emerging workstreams.



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.

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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