

Carolyn Thomas MS

Chair, Petitions Committee

Senedd Cymru

Dear Carolyn Thomas MS,

Thank you for providing us with the Cabinet Secretary's response to our petition calling for increased investment and action in nature-based flood management (NFM) to protect Welsh communities. We appreciate the Committee's consideration of this issue and the opportunity to comment in advance of your formal discussion.

Having reviewed the response from the Cabinet Secretary, we wish to raise several areas where key issues remain unclear or unaddressed. We hope these can be explored further by the Committee, particularly given the escalating severity of flooding events in Wales-most recently highlighted by the devastating flooding in Monmouth.

### **1. Lack of clarity on increased funding for NFM and the 10% commitment**

While the Cabinet Secretary outlines that £2 million has been made available for NFM projects in 2025–26 and notes that the next funding round has opened for 2026–27, the response does not address our core request:

Will Welsh Government commit to allocating at least 10% of the national flood prevention budget to NFM?

Furthermore, it remains unclear what proportion of current flood-prevention expenditure is spent on traditional engineered defences compared to nature-based measures. Without this baseline, it is impossible to assess progress or ambition in rebalancing flood-risk management towards natural systems.

Given the urgency demonstrated by recent extreme flooding, can the Committee seek clearer commitments on funding, proportional allocation, and long-term investment trajectories?

### **2. Welsh Government's position on the 2050 flooding-resilience target**

The Cabinet Secretary references work aligned with the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales report Building Resilience to Flooding in Wales by 2050, including development of a catchment planning roadmap.

However, the response does not confirm:

- Whether Welsh Government is formally committed to achieving full resilience by 2050
- What interim or milestone targets exist between now and 2050
- How progress will be measured in the context of rapidly intensifying climate impacts

2050 is 25 years away, and communities across Wales are already facing unprecedented levels of flood risk. We ask that the Committee seek clarity on whether the Government considers

2050 an active target, and if so, how it intends to deliver measurable progress in the short and medium term.

### **3. Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) – voluntary uptake and effectiveness**

The Cabinet Secretary states that the SFS will support flood-management outcomes, including maintaining 10% habitat and planning for tree and hedgerow opportunities.

However, the SFS is voluntary, and:

- The “Tree and Hedgerow Planting Opportunity Plan” requires planning only not delivery
- There is no mechanism described to ensure meaningful uptake of NFM-relevant options in strategically important areas
- There is no explanation of how public money invested through the SFS will be targeted to achieve rapid flood-risk reduction across catchments

We therefore ask the Committee to request clarity from Welsh Government on:

1. How it will ensure sufficient take-up of SFS actions where they matter most for flood mitigation.
2. Whether the Government has modelled the impacts of different levels of SFS participation on catchment-scale water retention and absorption.
3. How communities can understand what contribution the SFS will—or will not—make to future flood resilience under projected climate change scenarios.

### **4. Beaver reintroduction – timeline and strategic planning**

We welcome the Cabinet Secretary’s commitment to the managed reintroduction of the European beaver, including granting it European Protected Species status and establishing a Welsh Beaver Forum.

To maximise their well-documented natural flood-management benefits, we ask the Committee to seek clarity on:

- How Welsh Government intends to develop and publish a full reintroduction plan
- The expected timeline for beavers to return to major Welsh catchments
- Whether the Government envisages widespread re-establishment within the next 10–15 years for meaningful climate-adaptation benefits

### **5. Naturfa / OECMs – support and incentives**

The Cabinet Secretary’s response outlines how floodplain conservation areas may be recognised as Naturfa sites, and how a pipeline approach will support candidate sites.

However, the response does not detail:

- What financial or practical incentives will help landowners transition to this form of land management

- How Naturfa designations will be integrated with flood-risk priorities at catchment scale
- Further clarity on these points would help assess how viable and impactful Naturfa could be in supporting NFM ambitions.

## **6. Involving flood-affected communities in land-management decisions**

The response does not explain how Welsh Government ensures that communities experiencing repeated and severe flooding are directly involved in:

- Land-use decisions that affect their safety
- Catchment-scale planning
- Discussions between communities and landowners whose practices directly shape downstream flood risk

This democratic and participatory aspect is essential for effective, just, and trusted adaptive management.

While we welcome many positive elements in the Cabinet Secretary's letter, there remain significant gaps in delivery pathways, measurable commitments, and long-term funding clarity. We hope the Petitions Committee will consider pressing the Welsh Government for detailed responses on the above points to ensure that nature-based flood management is deployed with the urgency and ambition that the current climate emergency requires.

Finally, as the Youth Climate Ambassadors for Wales, we would appreciate the opportunity to observe the Committee's consideration of this petition. We note that the session is marked as a hybrid meeting and would be grateful for guidance on how we may attend-either by joining online or by sitting in the public gallery.

We look forward to the Committee's discussion and to continuing engagement to protect Welsh communities through resilient, nature-based solutions.

Yours sincerely,

Menna Roberts

Youth Climate Ambassadors for Wales