



# Evidence paper for Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs for General Scrutiny at CCEI Committee

11/02/2026

Information on key achievements provided to aid the Committee in advance of the Cabinet Secretary's attendance at General Scrutiny on 11 February.

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## Overview of progress

### Climate mitigation

In Wales, we exceeded our first carbon budget target. The latest data published in June 2025 shows that we are largely on track to meet our second carbon budget, which requires an average 37% reduction in emissions. This represents a significant achievement, with Wales having already reduced emissions by more than a third since 1990. Wales Fourth Carbon budget (CB4) runs 2031-2035. In December, this Government set the level of CB4 at an average 73% reduction against the baseline. This is an ambitious but credible target, informed by the advice of the Climate Change Committee alongside other evidence required by the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

### Climate adaptation

We published our Climate Adaptation Strategy for Wales in 2024. The Strategy provides a clear vision of what a well-adapted Wales looks like – a positive future that addresses the risks from our changing climate, embraces the opportunities, and reduces inequalities across our society. We have developed a comprehensive monitoring framework for the strategy, based on both actions but also outcomes for the people of Wales.

During [Wales Climate Week](#) 2024, we highlighted some of the positive actions farmers are already taking to adapt to our changing climate, with examples provided through Farming Connect's wide network of demonstration farms as well as innovative research into climate resilient crops and adaptive farming techniques. An evaluation report has been published: [Climate Conversations Fund Summary Report](#), which summarises outcomes of the community conversations which followed the main week/virtual conference.

## Public sector decarbonisation

The Welsh Government Energy Service is a key driver in supporting public sector organisations across Wales by providing funding along with technical, commercial and procurement advice to help deliver the collective ambition of a Net Zero public sector by 2030.

In 2024/25, the Welsh Government Energy Service achieved record levels of investment and supported a broader range of organisations than ever before. Its impact has grown substantially in recent years, reaching more communities and driving greater change. To date, projects supported by the Energy Service are expected to generate more than £367m through savings and power generation.

Between 2018 and 2024, the Welsh Government Energy Service supported over 400 projects which range from newly installed renewables, to advancing energy efficiency work and zero emission vehicle fleet replacements. The renewable energy projects alone have introduced 44.5MW of new capacity, equivalent to enough electricity to power 18,000 homes.

A total of £210 million has been invested in projects across public sector organisations, including health boards, local authorities, national parks and colleges. The projects ranged from LED streetlamp installations to low carbon heat solutions. The support will save 857,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> over their lifetime.

## Biodiversity

In December 2025, we published the [Welsh Government section 6 report](#) which outlines the actions taken across government, outcomes delivered and funding awarded to projects to manage and improve our land, freshwater and marine ecosystems. The report provides a comprehensive overview of the Welsh Government's actions to maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience.

A key initiative is The Nature Networks Programme which was launched in response to the nature emergency and supports nature recovery in Wales by improving the condition of the protected sites and their features and building ecological connectivity between them.

The Nature Networks Programme has already had a significant positive impact, with over £54million awarded since 2021 working in partnership with Natural Resources Wales and the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Welsh Government has also agreed to extend legal protection to European beavers in Wales in line with our support to facilitate the managed reintroduction of European beavers in Wales. The legislative amendments will be introduced in this Senedd term in conjunction with the establishment of a Wales beaver Forum recognizing that there will be areas of concern that need careful, collaborative management and robust evidence which will guide our next steps.

Work on revising our Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP) to align with the section 6 plan is progressing well. The vision and aims were shared and well received at the Wales Biodiversity Conference with stakeholders providing input to help shape the revised plan. Further engagement has taken place with a range of stakeholders and delivery partners to help inform and update some of the key collective actions needed to achieve our aims and objectives. The refreshed NRAP is due to be published in Spring 26 however it will need to be updated further as an iterative process to reflect the additional requirements in section 6 and the emerging targets being developed as part of the requirements under the Environment (Principles, Governance and Targets) (Wales) Bill once it becomes law. The Bill includes provision to strengthen cross-government biodiversity integration and delivery by requiring future Section 6 plans to include proposals that cover the areas of responsibility of each Welsh Minister.

The Environment (Principles, Governance and Targets) (Wales) Bill is a landmark piece of legislation. The Bill amends Part 1 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 to introduce a biodiversity target setting framework. Welsh Ministers have a power to set biodiversity targets in regulations, provided they are satisfied that meeting the target would contribute to halting and reversing the decline in biodiversity, in particular through increasing the abundance of native species, enhancing the resilience of ecosystems, or increasing genetic diversity. This is accompanied by a duty for Welsh Ministers to achieve the targets.

The Bill enhances the Welsh Ministers' planning and reporting functions under section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, to include the action they intend to take to achieve biodiversity targets, monitoring and reporting progress toward achieving targets (including setting indicators), as well as a new evaluation report assessing the impact and effectiveness of those policies and actions. The Bill provides the Welsh Ministers with a power to designate public authorities which will have the effect of requiring those public authorities to take action to contribute to achieving the biodiversity target for which they have been designated – further strengthening the current section 6 duty. The Welsh Ministers will also have a duty to promote awareness in Wales of the importance of, and threats to, biodiversity.

## Marine

In 2025–26, the Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network Management Grant Scheme successfully funded seven new projects, contributing to a total of 24 projects and over £500k of investment this Senedd Term. These projects contribute valuable benefits, enhancements, and improved understanding of the management of the Welsh Marine Protected Area network.

Alongside this, I have commenced a review of the MPA Network Management Framework (2018–2023) to ensure it remains fit for purpose, reflects progress and future ambitions for Wales’s MPA network; the updated framework will be finalised by Summer 2026.

Additionally, in June 2025, funded by the Nature Network Programme, Natural Resources Wales published the first comprehensive assessments of our Marine Protected Area Network as part of the Improving Nature Conservation Advice project. These assessments provide critical information to help us understand the health of our Marine MPAs and are the first comprehensive assessments of our Marine MPAs at designated feature level. The MPA features were assessed using indicators to identify what pressures are causing failures, enabling us to focus management efforts on activities that will have greatest impact.

In 2025, Welsh Government with the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies have refined and identified six proposed Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs). Following this, the first iteration of the Regulatory Impact Assessment for these proposed MCZs has been delivered; this is crucial before a consultation can be held. This iteration of the Regulatory Impact Assessment has identified that evidence needs to be strengthened in some of the proposed sites which will be commenced in Spring 2026.

The Wales Coasts and Seas Partnership has developed the MARINE Fund Cymru, a long-term voluntary contributions fund to enable, maintain and enhance the resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems. Welsh Government has provided £85,000 for a Development Manager for 3 years to set up and test this innovative approach. The Fund opened for contributions on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2026 with £500,000 of seed funding from the Crown Estate and a call for projects will follow as soon as possible.

Welsh Government continues to operate the UK’s only nationwide fishing gear collection and recycling scheme. Now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year, the scheme operates at more than 10 harbours across the country collecting a variety of different materials. As of 2025 over 15 tons of fishing gear has been collected and recycled which may otherwise have been discarded at sea.

Since 2021 Welsh Government has awarded nearly £1.12million funding to seagrass and saltmarsh restoration projects through the Nature Networks Programme and the Coastal Capacity Building scheme. In 2024-25 we awarded an additional £100,000 of funding to support Seagrass Network Cymru's (SNC) National Seagrass Action Plan. Led by Project Seagrass, Seagrass Network Cymru comprises of a range of delivery partners including NGO's, academics and Natural Resources Wales. The plan is an excellent example of how Welsh Government funding is supporting a collaboration by bringing together key stakeholders across Wales. This additional funding will help Wales to halt seagrass loss and will support recovery of 266 hectares of seagrass by 2030 in line with our "30x30" conservation targets. Project Seagrass's community focused approach will provide a blueprint for national implementation, supporting skills development and sustainable green jobs across Wales now and into the future.

## Fisheries

12 months on from publishing the Strategic Approach to Welsh Fisheries and Aquaculture, we've made good progress against our priority areas. Significant progress has been made on Fisheries Management Plans (FMP), including steps to implement Bass and Scallop, development of Wales's first Crabs and Lobsters FMP, and contributions to seven joint UK plans. To support sustainable economic benefit domestically from our valuable natural resources, we have continued to manage permitted fisheries based on the latest scientific evidence. This has included the introduction of a new adaptive cockle management system, adaptive management of our whelk fishery and the launch of a recreational bluefin tuna fishery.

We are supporting sector resilience through seafood supply chain initiatives, wellbeing projects, and funding schemes, including £1,146,984 awarded under Welsh Marine and Fisheries Scheme (WMFS) Round 5, £430,132 through the Coastal Capacity Building Fund. An additional £1.29 million is being added to the Fisheries BEL in 2026/27 to support and enhance the important fisheries sector and our coastal communities across Wales. The [WMFS Round 6](#), which opened for applications on 7 January, includes an uplift in its budget to provide the first opportunity for the fisheries sector and our coastal communities to access this additional funding.

## Circular economy

We have taken significant steps forward in delivering Wales's circular economy strategy, which include continuing to improve Wales's recycling to the point that we are second in the world. We have rolled out reuse and repair hubs across the whole of Wales and brought forward the Extended Producer Responsibility scheme for packaging in line with our programme for government commitments, putting the producer paid principle into action. We are successfully implementing the Workplace Recycling reforms which mean that businesses and workplaces across Wales are now recycling in a way which follows the successful approach for households.

## Waste and pollution reduction

A number of actions have been undertaken to reduce the production of waste as well as tackling pollution and littering which impact on public health and the environment. Wales is the first in the UK to prohibit the supply of wet wipes containing plastic, this ban will come into force in December 2026. We also brought a ban on single use vapes into force on 1 June 2025, helping to end throwaway culture and clean up our neighbourhoods. We have delivered a communication campaign to support this and increased funding for our enforcement bodies who ensure the ban is being implemented successfully. Working in partnership with Local Authorities to tackle littering and funding the Fly-tipping Action Wales programme helps ensure a coordinated approach to tackling these blights on our local environments. This includes supporting the use of new technologies to help increase enforcement.

## Air quality and pollution control

Supporting citizens and companies in being better informed is vital in minimising air pollution and in being resilient to instances when air quality negatively impacts public health. We have consulted on proposals to strengthen existing stationary idling offences and the Promoting Awareness of the Air Pollution Delivery Plan. Furthermore, we continue to seek views on the current, live consultation on Fine Particulate Matter (PM2.5) Air Quality Targets, proposing draft regulations to reduce annual mean PM2.5 concentrations to 10  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  by 2035 and reduce average population exposure by 25% by 2035. Citizens, including through schools, are benefitting from published updated guidance for smoke control and Local Air Quality Management, being underpinned by

allocating nearly £1 million to Local Authorities via the Local Air Quality Management Fund for local air quality projects in their areas.

## Environmental permitting and guidance

There continues to be support and information regarding industrial practices so improving public and environmental health with updated Guidance notes for Crematoria and Small Waste Incineration Plants, Combustion Plants (20–50 MW), Waste Wood Combustion and Roadstone Coatings. To help ensure adherence to permitting requirements there continues to be vital funding for Local Authorities to efficiently undertake technical environmental permitting duties. Alongside an array of local and national partners including Natural Resources Wales, there has been strategic and operational support and advice regarding permitting and remediation for Tata Steel's transition to low-carbon electric arc technology.

## Peatland restoration

Working with partners, we successfully met our previous peatland restoration target a year ahead of time. Now, our National Peatland Action Programme aims to increase delivery from 600 ha to 1,800 ha per year by 2030. 3,600 ha have been restored and 8,000 ha have been improved to date. This means 2.2 m tonnes of carbon safeguarded with a further 3 m tonnes targeted and over 12 m m<sup>3</sup> of water storage restored since 2020 with 17 m m<sup>3</sup> more planned.

## Timber industrial strategy

Our timber industrial strategy *Making Wood Work for Wales* was published in July 2025 to grow and add value to Wales's timber sector, supporting decarbonisation, jobs and long-term sustainable forest use.

## Local Places for Nature programme

We have invested £66 m since 2020 to create or improve 4,000+ green spaces, including 3,100 pollinator sites, 1,000 orchards, 100 food-growing sites and 110 therapeutic gardens. 15,000 volunteers across Wales have engaged with the programme, gaining important experiences and skills. The expanded focus of the scheme now supports wider biodiversity and 30x30 goals.

## Progress toward Glyndŵr National Park

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has agreed to make a Designation Order to Welsh Ministers following three years of assessment and public engagement. We will consider NRW's evidence alongside our own assessments to inform a final decision on Designation. If designated this would be the first 'made in Wales' National Park.

## National Forest for Wales

The National Forest for Wales is expanding, it is now over 90,000 ha, including 72 Welsh Government Woodland Estate sites totalling 4,080 ha; supported by Welsh Government's new Landscape Grant Scheme to enhance economic, biodiversity and community benefits. The also includes 23 Coetiroedd Bach (Tiny Forests) across Wales. These are small plots the size of tennis courts created using the Miyawaki method of dense native tree planting. Sites joining the National Forest receive Welsh Larch signs produced by Merthyr Tydfil Institute for the Blind, a social enterprise employing disabled and disadvantaged people throughout South Wales. The signs are made from Welsh Larch which is grown, felled and processed in Wales, and is FSC certified.

## Eco-Schools

We are the Eco-Schools global leaders. Wales is the first nation to exceed UNESCO's 2030 target, with 53% of schools achieving Green Flag accreditation. Working with Keep Wales Tidy, we established the Climate Challenge Cymru event to encourage young learners to put forward their ideas for helping climate and nature. Funding and an expanded event have been confirmed for 2026.

## Coal tips

The Coal tips Act was given Royal Assent and had the first Bill sealing ceremony outside of the Welsh Government estate or Senedd, at Blaenavon's Big Pit, to celebrate the Welsh Seal being applied to the Disused Mine and Quarry Tips (Wales) Bill. Implementation of the new coal tips body is going well, with the

appointment of a Chair – Fiona Jones in November, alongside confirmation that its headquarters will be in Merthyr, on a reclaimed coal tip site, and the organisation will be represented in other parts of Wales. The Authority is expected to create 60 new jobs. Overall programme of inspections continues with landmark 3000<sup>th</sup> inspection and UK Government funding of £118m secured. We recently confirmed a new multiyear grant scheme which will enable vital maintenance works on over 400 former coal tip sites across Wales thanks to over £80 million of funding.

## Flood and Water

There has been a record level of investment of £377m in this Senedd term for flood defences including increasing funding in Natural flood Management. The final schemes of the £291m Coastal Risk Management Programme are approaching completion. We will continue our record investment in flood risk management next year, increasing funding to more than £83 million, an increase from £77 million last year and the highest annual investment ever made in Wales.

We have delivered a joint Independent Water Commission Review with Defra that had real Wales focus offering a once in a generation opportunity to shape the regulation of the water industry in Wales that reflects devolution and the needs and aspirations of the people of Wales.

As a result of the Price Review process, Welsh Water companies will invest £6.26 billion in Wales up to 2030, including £2.45 billion on new investments to deliver improvements. The determination provides funding for water companies to maintain and improve services, meet Ofwat's targets, and invest in infrastructure. Bill increases are necessary to enhance drinking water quality, reduce leaks and waste, and improve treatment processes. DCWW's not-for-profit model ensures that all financial surpluses are reinvested for the benefit of customers and communities and not paid in dividends.

The Welsh Government has made it clear to Ofwat and water companies in Wales that customers expect real improvements in services, infrastructure, and environmental outcomes. We expect water companies to deliver on their commitments, with regulators holding them to account. If companies fail to meet their obligations, any financial penalties should be returned to bill payers.

We have modernised Wales's bathing water framework by ending automatic de-designation, strengthening site criteria, introducing flexible bathing seasons, and updating technical standards for clarity and effectiveness. The new

Regulations will come into force in Wales on 1 April 2026, ensuring a smooth and well-managed transition. With applications received being assessed under the existing 2013 framework, maintaining consistency and fairness.

Our Programme for Government commits us to delivering more inland bathing waters and strengthening water-quality monitoring. Since 2021, we have moved from a single designated site to a modern, evidence-led programme that has delivered two new inland bathing waters, with a further site under consideration for designation this year.

In 2025–26, Natural Resources Wales received an additional £5 million to strengthen regulation and enforcement activities related to water. This represents a major commitment to improving environmental outcomes and supporting sustainable economic growth. In a short timeframe, NRW has developed a comprehensive programme of work to maximise the impact of this funding. This includes establishing new enforcement capacity, investing in technology, and piloting innovative approaches. This additional funding is enabling NRW to build long-term regulatory capability, modernise enforcement through innovative pilots and new technology, strengthen collaborative catchment approaches to tackle pollution, and lay the groundwork for strategic, sustainable solutions that will protect water quality for years to come.