

A BES guide

INFLUENCING ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY IN WALES



**BRITISH
ECOLOGICAL
SOCIETY**

BES priorities in Wales for 2024-2025 focus on policy and legislation aimed at protecting and enhancing biodiversity, changing land use, water quality and the marine environment.

Environmental policy has profound consequences for biodiversity in Wales.

That this policy is underpinned by robust ecological evidence is vital.

This is what policy makers want and this is how you can help.

CONTENTS

The political process in Wales	3
Devolved powers	
What is policy and legislation?	
How does a Bill become an Act?	
Who are the key actors?	5
Formulating, developing or amending policy	
Advising, lobbying or providing evidence for policy	
How you can influence	8
Consultations	
Connections and collaborations	
Key legislation	9
Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015	
Environment (Wales) Act 2016	
Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023	
Key policies	11
Nature Recovery Action Plan (2015)	
Woodlands for Wales (2018)	
Welsh National Marine Plan (2019)	
Future Wales: The National Plan 2040 (2021)	
Policy and the BES	12

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THE POLITICAL PROCESS IN WALES

DEVOLVED POWERS

Timeline of devolution in Wales

1997	1998	1999	2006	2011	2017	2020
Referenda on Devolution in Wales and Scotland	Government of Wales Act 1998 passed by UK Parliament	Formation of National Assembly for Wales (NAW)	Government of Wales Act 2006 through conferred powers model	NAW granted primary legislative powers by referendum	Wales Act 2017 through reserved powers model	Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 passed, and NAW becomes Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament)

Devolved and Reserved Powers, and the Sewel Convention

The devolved issues of most relevance to the BES include the environment, rural affairs, agriculture, fisheries, and forestry. Whilst the environment is a devolved policy area the position can be complicated by, for example, energy policy being a reserved power of the UK Parliament.

The Senedd has legislative competence over matters which broadly have the most day-to-day relevance to the Welsh people, although the UK Parliament does retain the power to legislate in those areas as well.

Reserved matters include foreign affairs, defense, energy and a range of other things specified in Schedule 7A of the Government of Wales Act 2006. The Senedd has little control over fiscal issues but some simple powers. For example, land transaction taxes were devolved under the Wales Act 2014.

WHAT IS POLICY AND LEGISLATION?

What is policy?

A policy is a set of ideas or principles aimed at guiding actions to achieve an objective. Government or public policy describes a course of action or an objective planned by the Government on a particular subject. Documentation on Welsh Government policies are publicly available through the Senedd [website](#).

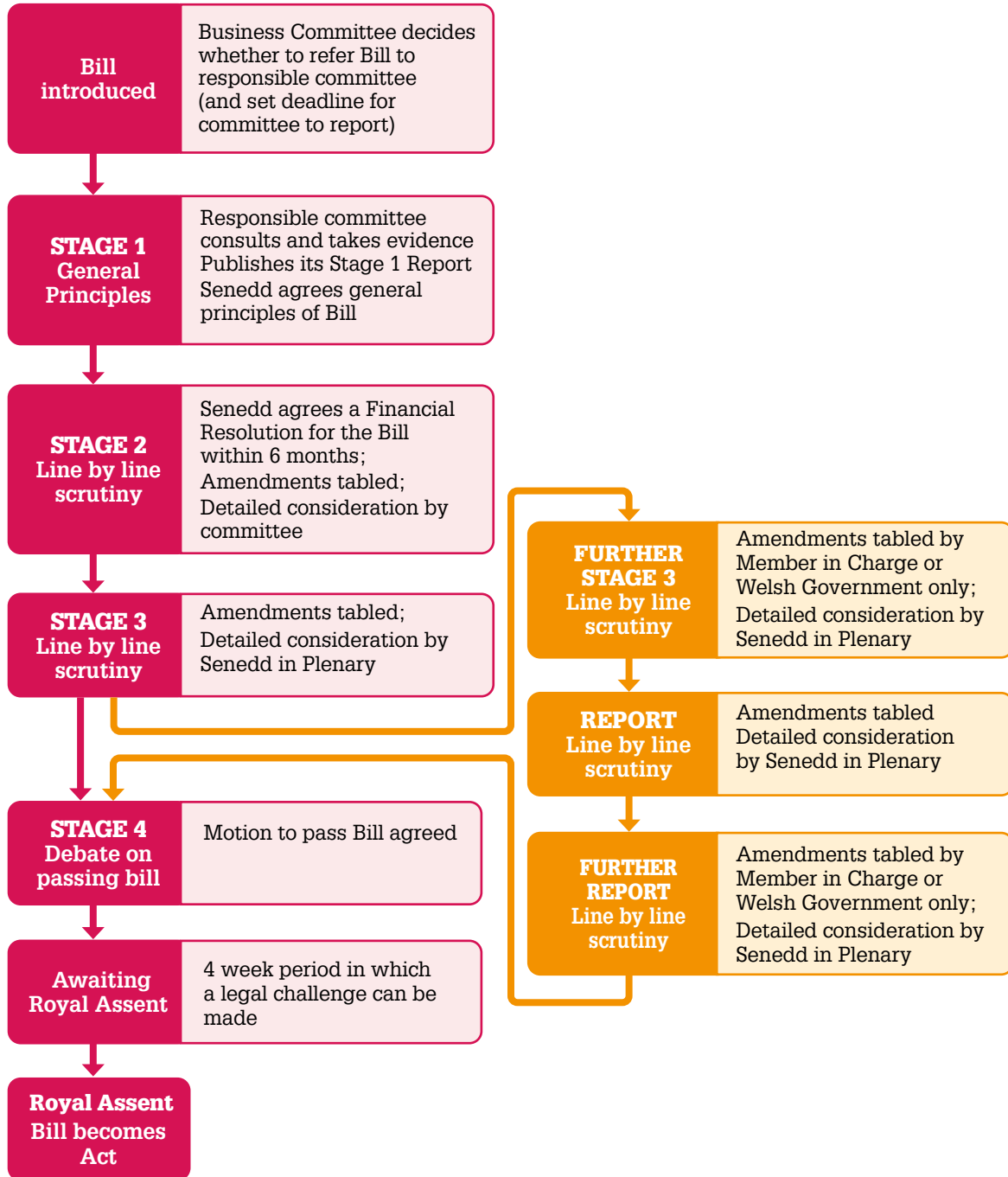
What is legislation?

Legislation is made up of the laws that govern life in Wales. Wales is governed by laws created in the UK Parliament and the Senedd (Welsh Parliament), but this report just covers the workings of the Senedd. Welsh legislation takes two forms: primary legislation and secondary legislation. Primary legislation is made up of Acts passed by the Senedd.

A Bill is a draft law, and it becomes known as an Act when it has been passed by the Senedd, receives Royal Assent and becomes enforceable. An Act passed in the Senedd can be identified because it will have (Wales) at the end of its title, for example the 'Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015'.

Primary legislation can give government ministers or other bodies the power to create subordinate or secondary legislation, which is often in the form of a statutory instrument (SI). In Wales, these SIs are laid before the Senedd and are subject to either the negative or affirmative procedure. The negative procedure is most commonly used and requires the Senedd to object to it if it does not wish it to become law. If the affirmative procedure is followed, the Senedd must pass a resolution approving a draft of the SI before it takes effect.

HOW DOES A BILL BECOME AN ACT?



[Source: Modified from Senedd diagram (<https://senedd.wales/NAfW%20Documents/Assembly%20Business%20section%20documents/flowcharts-AssemblyScrutinyofPublicBills/flowchart-AssemblyScrutinyBills-en-print.pdf>)]

WHO ARE THE KEY ACTORS?

FORMULATING, DEVELOPING OR AMENDING POLICY

[Welsh Government Ministers](#) and their advisors, civil servants, [Welsh MSs](#) and [MPs](#).

Senedd and the Welsh Government

The Welsh Government and the Senedd are two separate entities with different roles and responsibilities. The Welsh Government is held to account by the Senedd, and both are accountable to the Welsh people.

Senedd Cymru (Welsh Parliament)

Law-making body for devolved matters.

Scrutinises the work and policies of the Welsh Government.

The Senedd is elected by the Additional Member system. It is currently formed of 60 Members of Senedd (MSs) across all political parties, with each citizen in Wales represented by five MSs - one constituency MS and four regional MSs.

It is unicameral (ie. has one legislative chamber).

The Llywydd (Presiding Officer) chairs the Plenary Meetings of the whole Senedd and always remains politically impartial.

Welsh Government

Formulates and implements policy on devolved matters.

Introduces most Bills (draft laws) to be considered by the Senedd.

The First Minister is nominated by the Senedd and appointed by HM the King.

Led by the First Minister and formed of a Cabinet of 13 MSs.

Welsh Ministers are MSs appointed by the First Minister from the political party with the most votes in the Senedd to head a government department supported by Welsh Deputy Ministers. The First Minister also appoints a Counsel General.

Recent changes in Senedd

In June 2024, the Senedd Cymru (Members and Elections) Act 2024 was passed. This Act will change the number of MSs in Senedd, how and how often they are elected, and boundaries of constituencies.

ADVISING, LOBBYING OR PROVIDING EVIDENCE FOR POLICY

Government agencies and public bodies

- **Natural Resources Wales**

[Natural Resources Wales](#) (NRW) is a Welsh Government's Sponsored Body, and is the principal advisor to Welsh Government on environmental topics. Unlike elsewhere in the UK, which have separate government linked organisations to manage different aspects of the environment (e.g. Forestry Commission, Forestry England, Environment Agency, Natural England, Office of Environmental Protection), in Wales this is brought together under NRW. Thanks to this, NRW can make decisions based on evidence and expertise across different departments.

- **Chief Scientific Adviser for Wales**

The [Chief Scientific Adviser for Wales](#) (CSA) reviews scientific advice, and presents it to the First Minister and Welsh Ministers. They also work to develop Welsh scientific capacity and ensure STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) subjects are promoted in public policy.

- **Senedd Committees**

[Senedd committees](#) scrutinise the government, associated public bodies and

legislation. During a committee inquiry, which can focus on a Bill or on any topic which is devolved, they will collect evidence from experts and organisations.

- **Senedd Research**

[Senedd Research](#) is a politically impartial research and information body that provides unbiased research to MSSs, their staff and Senedd Committees. Their research and enquiry responses are designed to support scrutiny of legislation and policy.

- **JNCC**

The [Joint Nature Conservation Committee](#) (JNCC) is the public body that advises the UK Government and devolved administrations on UK-wide and international nature conservation. JNCC are the forum through which the country nature conservation bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland discharge their statutory responsibilities across the UK and internationally. JNCC coordinates joint statements and reports from the Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies, such as those issued ahead of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP15. This includes the [Nature Positive 2030](#) report and the Joint Statement entitled [Nature Recovery for Our Survival, Prosperity and Wellbeing](#).



Research institutes

- **Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UKCEH)**
The [UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology](#) is an independent, not-for-profit research institute. They collaborate with various organisations and provide evidence to inform government decision making, with one of their sites based in Bangor, Wales.
- **Welsh University Research**
Welsh universities produce research that addresses policy needs in the nation. The Welsh Government funds universities through the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), although there is a plan to establish a [Commission for Tertiary Education and Research](#) (CTER) and dissolve HEFCW in 2024. The Welsh Government sets out its funding allocations and priorities for HEFCW every year through a remit letter, which includes teaching as well as research.

Partnerships

- **Environment Platform Wales**
[Environment Platform Wales](#) (EPW) aims to bridge the gap between policy makers and research by supporting researchers to engage with NRW and Welsh

Government, develop projects that align with Welsh policy evidence needs and apply for large-scale funding.

- **Wales Biodiversity Partnership**
The [Wales Biodiversity Partnership](#) (WBP) brings together actors from the public, private and voluntary sectors. It is made up of working groups that promote and monitor biodiversity and ecosystem action in Wales. WBP also runs the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Evidence and Research Needs (BEERN) programme, which aims to identify research needs which relate to Welsh policy and delivery priorities.
- **Wales Environment Link**
[Wales Environment Link](#) (WEL) is 'a network of environmental, countryside and heritage non-governmental organisations working across Wales'. WEL promotes collaboration between its members and supports them to engage in the development of Welsh policy and legislation.
- **Wales Coasts and Seas Partnership**
The [Wales Coasts and Seas Partnership](#) (CaSP Cymru) similarly brings together groups and stakeholders that are working on the resilience of marine ecosystems.

HOW YOU CAN INFLUENCE

CONSULTATIONS

The Welsh Government regularly consults on proposed areas of policy such as a draft strategy or at the early stages of planning a Bill before it is drafted. Any interested parties/individuals may respond to a consultation. All consultation responses are analysed and used in the decision making process. The Welsh Government maintains an [online Consultation Hub](#) where anybody can go and participate in current consultations.

The Senedd and its committees also regularly conduct consultations and calls for evidence. NRW also uses consultations and calls for evidence to inform their activities and the activities they regulate. A recent example is [Nature and Us/Natur a Ni](#) – which is NRW's national initiative on the future of the Welsh natural environment.

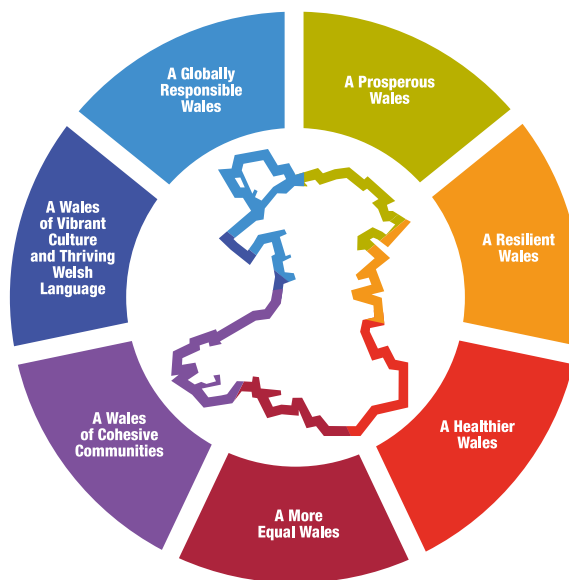
CONNECTIONS AND COLLABORATIONS

Building connections with key contacts through the policy process can be beneficial for ecologists and for their research. These connections can help to shape research questions, signpost additional funding, and increase the impact of research findings.

KEY LEGISLATION

WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015

[The Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) places a duty on Welsh Government and other public authorities in Wales to carry out their activities ‘in accordance with the sustainable development principle’. This sustainable development principle is defined as acting ‘in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’. The needs of the present include improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales and the Act includes seven statutory goals in this respect. The Act is designed to ensure that different public bodies in Wales will think more creatively about ways to create a sustainable Wales and to consider the consequences of any actions on future generations. They have a legal duty to collaborate together and involve people in their decision making, ensure an integrated and preventive approach to key challenges and think in the long-term.



[Source: [Welsh Government \(https://www.gov.wales/well-being-of-future-generations-wales/\)](https://www.gov.wales/well-being-of-future-generations-wales/)]

Unique to Wales, the Act has been hailed as a groundbreaking and forward-thinking initiative and has attracted interest from countries across the world, highlighting Wales as an innovator in its approach on environmental legislation.

To measure progress against these goals, [national indicators](#) were put in place. Included in these indicators, are those relating to the environment (41-46):

41. Emissions of greenhouse gases within Wales.
42. Emissions of greenhouse gases attributed to the consumption of global goods and services in Wales.
43. Areas of healthy ecosystems in Wales.
44. Status of Biological diversity in Wales.
45. Percentage of surface water bodies, and groundwater bodies, achieving good or high overall status.
46. The social return on investment of Welsh partnerships within Wales and outside of the UK that are working towards the United Nations SDGs.

ENVIRONMENT (WALES) ACT 2016

The [Environment \(Wales\) Act \(2016\)](#) enables the Senedd to plan and manage the natural resources of Wales in a more sustainable and coordinated way. The Act provides Welsh Government with a duty to create a National Natural Resources policy based on the principle of [Sustainable Management of Natural Resources](#) (SMNR):

The objective is to maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide and, in so doing:

‘meet the needs of present generations of people without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs, and contribute to the achievement of the well-being goals in section 4 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015’.

This act includes the Section 6 Biodiversity duty which requires ‘a public authority must seek to maintain and enhance and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions’, as well as Section 7 which lists habitats and species of importance to Wales.

AGRICULTURE (WALES) ACT 2023

Agricultural policy is devolved in Wales, as well as in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Before Brexit, agricultural policy was delivered by the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) but England and the devolved nations have, or are in the process, of developing their own legislation.

Brexit has provided an opportunity for change in Welsh agricultural policy. Since Brexit, the Welsh Government has been developing a Sustainable Farming Scheme that will replace the CAP. This began with a consultation in 2018 entitled ‘[Brexit and our Land: Securing the Future of Welsh farming](#)’ and one in 2019 called ‘[Sustainable Farming and our Land](#)’. The original transition away from CAP was planned to begin in 2021, but the transition period has been extended until 2025 due to the complexity of the work.

A White Paper which drew on these consultations was issued in December 2020. This outlined the principle of Sustainable Land Management that new agricultural policy would be based on, and the [Sustainable Farming Scheme](#) that would address ‘climate change, public health and environmental issues’. The Government collected responses on a consultation regarding this white paper, and also engaged farmers in a process of co-design through surveys, one-to-one meetings and workshops.

KEY POLICIES

Wales declares both a Climate Emergency and a Nature Emergency

[Welsh Government declared a Climate Emergency in 2019](#) – which prompted many other governments to make their own Climate Emergency declarations. Then in 2021, the [Welsh Parliament declared a Nature Emergency in Wales](#) following the findings of the State of Nature Report 2019.

NATURE RECOVERY ACTION PLAN (2015 ONWARDS)

The [Nature Recovery Action Plan](#) (NRAP) set out the principles that will guide Welsh government policy in this area. The [2015 strategy](#) was drafted to set out how Wales will fulfil commitments laid out in the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the CBD, incorporated the principles enshrined in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, and put principles such as the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources set out in the Action Plan into law.

An updated [NRAP for Wales 2020-2021](#) was published that set out themes for action, including things such as completing the Marine Protected Sites Network and delivering the Marine Protected Area management action plan.

There is provision to refresh the Nature Recovery Action Plan as part of upcoming legislation on environmental principles, governance and biodiversity targets from 2024 onwards.

WOODLANDS FOR WALES (2018)

Welsh policy on woodland creation and management is detailed in [Woodlands for Wales](#), and supports the sustainable approach of the [UK Forestry Standard](#) (that each of the four nations' governments approve). Only 15% of Wales is wooded (conifer or native, including ancient woodland) - and this policy identifies key outcomes in 50 years' time. These include increased woodland cover, with healthy and resilient ecosystems to be achieved, that are well adapted to deliver benefits.

Following on from this policy, the Welsh Government have begun a [National Forest for Wales](#) Scheme that allows foresters and land managers to manage their woodlands sustainably as part of a vision for a nationwide network of woodland and forest.

WELSH NATIONAL MARINE PLAN (2019)

This plan sets out a strategy for Welsh marine policy for the next 20 years to achieve a vision of 'clean, healthy, safe, productive and biologically diverse oceans and seas'. The plan is partly made up of general policies, including one called 'Living within Environmental Limits' that seeks to maintain Good Environmental Status (GES) of coastal and marine waters as set out in the [UK Marine Strategy](#). The rest of the plan is composed of sector policies that cover specific activities such as fishing, energy generation and aquaculture. There is also a [Marine Protected Area Network Management Framework for Wales 2018-2023](#) which aims to guide authorities which have statutory roles and responsibilities to manage MPAs in Wales.

FUTURE WALES: THE NATIONAL PLAN 2040 (2021)

[Future Wales](#) is the national development framework, which highlights the need to consider the current climate and ecological emergencies facing Wales. This framework outlines a sustainable development strategy linked to the goals of the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

POLICY AND THE BES

BES POLICY TEAM

We support our members and combine their knowledge to promote ecological science and evidence informed solutions to policymakers. We offer training and development programmes for all career stages and work with members on briefings and consultation responses. [Find out more and get involved.](#)

BES-WELSH POLICY GROUP (BES-WPG)

We are a volunteer group of BES members and collaborators working to ensure policy and management in Wales are informed by relevant ecological information and understanding.

We:

- Provide technical expertise and ecological evidence for policy makers and managers and advise how policy and management are impacting on ecological outcomes
- Facilitate a closer working relationship between ecological policy makers, researchers and professionals
- Communicate ecological knowledge and its relevance for effective policy and management to the public

HOW DOES THE BES-WPG ENGAGE WITH POLICY?

The BES-WPG proactively engages with policy through our Caffi Ecology events which bring together experts and policy makers to discuss a particular policy-relevant topic. We also conduct reactive work such as responding to relevant Welsh Government consultations. Additionally, we help other ecologists to get involved through our policy training events, policy guides and expert workshops.

More information about our current work, access to our newsletter and how to get involved in policy in Wales can be found on the BES website policy pages.

We are the British Ecological Society: the oldest ecological society in the world.

We were established in 1913 and we have been fostering the science of ecology ever since. We have 7,000 members around the world and bring people together across regional, national and global scales to advance ecological science. Membership is open to anyone, anywhere.

Our vision is for nature and people to thrive in a world inspired by ecology. We rely on the commitment of hundreds of volunteers to help us – from the editors who work on our journals, reviewers in our Grants Review College, the teams behind each of our Special Interest Groups, the trustees and members of our Board of Trustees and committees to the helpers at our Annual Meeting – we could not do what we do without their effort and passion.

We actively value the diversity and wide range of perspectives that people from different backgrounds bring to their work, to ecology and to our Society.



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