

Open Letter to the First Minister of Wales June 2022

Wales needs access to environmental justice

Dear First Minister,

In June 2021, the Senedd declared a nature emergency. In response, the Welsh Government promised to bring forward legislation to establish statutory targets for nature's recovery, alongside an independent body to hold public authorities to account on their environmental commitments. Almost a year on, there is no clarity on when this will be done. We, the undersigned, call on the Welsh Government to bring forward these important new laws, for the people and wildlife of Wales, without further delay.

The Welsh Government's welcome commitment to a new environmental watchdog was first made in 2018 and has often been repeated, but is yet to be realised. When the UK was a member of the EU, the oversight and enforcement provided by European institutions protected our environment and enabled citizens to raise complaints, free of charge. This often led to investigation and court action, including on air quality and nature protection.

Replacement arrangements are now in place elsewhere in the UK, in the shape of Environmental Standards Scotland and The Office for Environmental Protection (which will enforce environmental law in Northern Ireland and England). Both have been legally vested, put teams in place, consulted on strategies and provide a clear route for people to raise concerns if they consider a public authority is failing to comply with or implement environmental law. Access to environmental justice – an international right – is supported by these processes.

In Wales, while there are temporary arrangements in place, there are no legal powers, no public strategy and no easily navigable (or even, easy to find) website. Still, the first annual report published by the Interim Environmental Protection Assessor for Wales

on 1st June demonstrates that there is concern about how our environmental laws are being used.

Wales can ill afford to fall behind in matters of environmental protection: one in six of our species is at risk of being lost from Wales, and only a fraction of our best nature sites on land and at sea are reported to be in good condition. Over 1600 people die early each year due to air pollution. The continued delay in passing laws to protect and improve our environment undermines people's right to environmental justice and is diminishing the reputation of the Welsh Government as a world leader on sustainable development.

Clean air, clean water and thriving nature are central to people's health and well-being. Wales' environment and its citizens deserve environmental justice – for this, we need robust legislation to drive recovery, as well as the tools to hold government to account, so that current and future generations benefit from a healthy environment.

Yours sincerely,

Roger Thomas	Chair of Wales Environment Link
Joseph Carter	Chair of Healthy Air Cymru / Head of Asthma + Lung UK Cymru
Alun Pritchard	Director of RSPB Cymru
Shaun Spiers	Chair of Greener UK
Rachel Sharp	Director of Wildlife Trusts Wales
Anne Meikle	Director of WWF Cymru
Chris Mills	Chair of Afonydd Cymru
Jason Reeves	Head of Policy at the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)
Angela Charlton	Director of Ramblers Cymru
Kit Stoner	Chief Executive of Bat Conservation Trust
John Harold	Director, Snowdonia Society
Nicola Hutchinson	Director of Conservation for Plantlife (Cymru).
Haf Elgar	Vice Chair of Healthy Air Cymru/ Director of Friends of the Earth Cymru
Ruth Billingham	Head of Campaigns and Public Affairs at Living Streets Cymru

Lowri Jackson	Head of Policy and Campaigns at the Royal College of Physicians Wales
Christine Boston	Director of Sustrans Cymru
Gwenda Owen	Engagement Officer at Cycling UK Cymru
Angela Charlton	Director of Ramblers Cymru
Gareth Cunningham	Head of Conservation Wales at Marine Conservation Society
Natalie Buttriss	Director of Coed Cadw Woodland Trust Wales

Supported by all WEL members



Wales Environment Link (WEL) is a network of environmental, countryside and heritage Non-Governmental Organisations in Wales. WEL is a respected intermediary body connecting the government and the environmental NGO sector. Our vision is a thriving Welsh environment for future generations.

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