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Jack Sargeant MS
Chair, Petitions Committee
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30 March 2023

Petitions@senedd.wales

Dear Mr Sargeant

Petition P-06-1297 Stop "Controlled Burning" in Wales

I write in my capacity as Chair of the Wales Wildfire Board (WWB) following the recent Petition Committee at the Senedd where a petition on putting a stop to controlled burning was discussed. The WWB formed during 2022 following a meeting of the Strategic Arson Reduction Board (SARB) to look at redefining the approach to tackling wildfires across Wales. The issue of uncontrolled burning and wildfires has become an increasing challenge for several organisations hence the agreement to form the WWB last year. The balance between proactive preventative measures and reactive response measures are very fine and the influence that climate change predictions present are accepted to be exacerbating the problem.

The national picture of wildfires across the UK in 2022 was stark with around a thousand incidents meeting one or more of the following criteria having occurred by September of that year, with approximately 25% of the UK activity occurring in Wales alone.

- More than 10,000 square meters
- More than 4 fire appliances
- More than 6 hours in duration of firefighting
- Flame length of more than 1.5m
- Serious risk to life, environment, infrastructure, property

We can recall the devastating footage of last summer's wildfires across the UK with homes being lost and hectare upon hectare of uncontrolled fires spreading across the landscape. A similar picture is being seen internationally and examples of good practice are being sought from across the globe, but it is clear that no one single approach can address this multi-faceted issue.

The WWB identified an opportunity to move toward a more inclusive, longer-term approach based around commitment to a Wildfire Charter for Wales. The WWB intend to formally launch the Charter

at the 2023 Royal Welsh Show, but a version is attached to this letter for your reference which I'm sure you'll agree includes a wide-ranging focus.

There are many examples of partnership work realising some considerable successes in incident reduction, community engagement and improving the way that organisations work together. It is the wide-ranging membership of the WWB from Emergency Services, Natural Resources Wales, Farming Unions, Met Office, Public Health Wales, Professors from academia, National Park Authorities and others that is its strength, and which should allow for a progressive and considered route forward for us to tackle Wildfires here in Wales.

One of the main purposes of the WWB is to provide strategic leadership for the delivery of proactive and reactive intervention methods for dealing with wildfires throughout Wales, based on threat, harm and risk and a standing item on the meeting agenda is the regulatory and legislative approach in Wales. On this matter, some Board members recently met with policy makers from Welsh Government to discuss opportunities to include measures for tackling wildfires within the new Sustainable Farming Scheme proposals in Wales.

The WWB was encouraged to note the recommendation from the Petitions Committee to the responsible Minister for a review of the Heather and Grass Burning Code for Wales 2008 as the position has shifted over the 15 years that have since elapsed. Whilst it is accepted that different groups in society will hold different opinions on the topic of controlled burning it is important to note that it will take a full range of measures to address the matter in hand, as identified by the RSPBs response to yourself setting out their approach to using controlled burning on South Stack and Ramsey.

The matter of burning over peatland however deserves far greater attention as set out in a recent article referring to a 10 year study by researchers at the University of York - No 'one size fits all' heather management method for protecting carbon-rich peatlands.

It is the WWBs opinion that controlled burning, compared with uncontrolled burning, does have a place in the armoury for us to collaboratively tackle the issue of wildfires in Wales going forward. Ultimately there is no one management system that all landowners should use, various research is showing us that there is a choice and evidence to support those choices, which has been lacking previously, is now coming to the fore.

I thank you for taking the time to read the letter and would respectfully request that the support of the WWB for a review of the Heather and Grass Burning Code for Wales can be included as part of the recommendation from the Petitions Committee. The WWB would of course welcome and appreciate an involvement in any forthcoming review and would be able to contribute wide ranging knowledge and understanding held by Board members on the topic area.

Your Sincerely



Iwan Cray

Chair

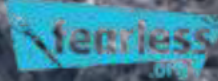
Wales Wildfire Board



Parc Cenedlaethol Arfordir Pembrokeshire Coast National Park



BRECON BEACONS NATIONAL PARK



Iechyd Cyhoeddus Cymru Public Health Wales



#DAWNSGLAW

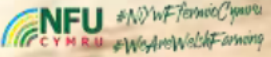


Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru Natural Resources Wales



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#NiWfFermioCymru #WeAreWolchFamers



Wales Wildfire Charter Draft

Wales Wildfire Board 2022



Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub Fire and Rescue Service

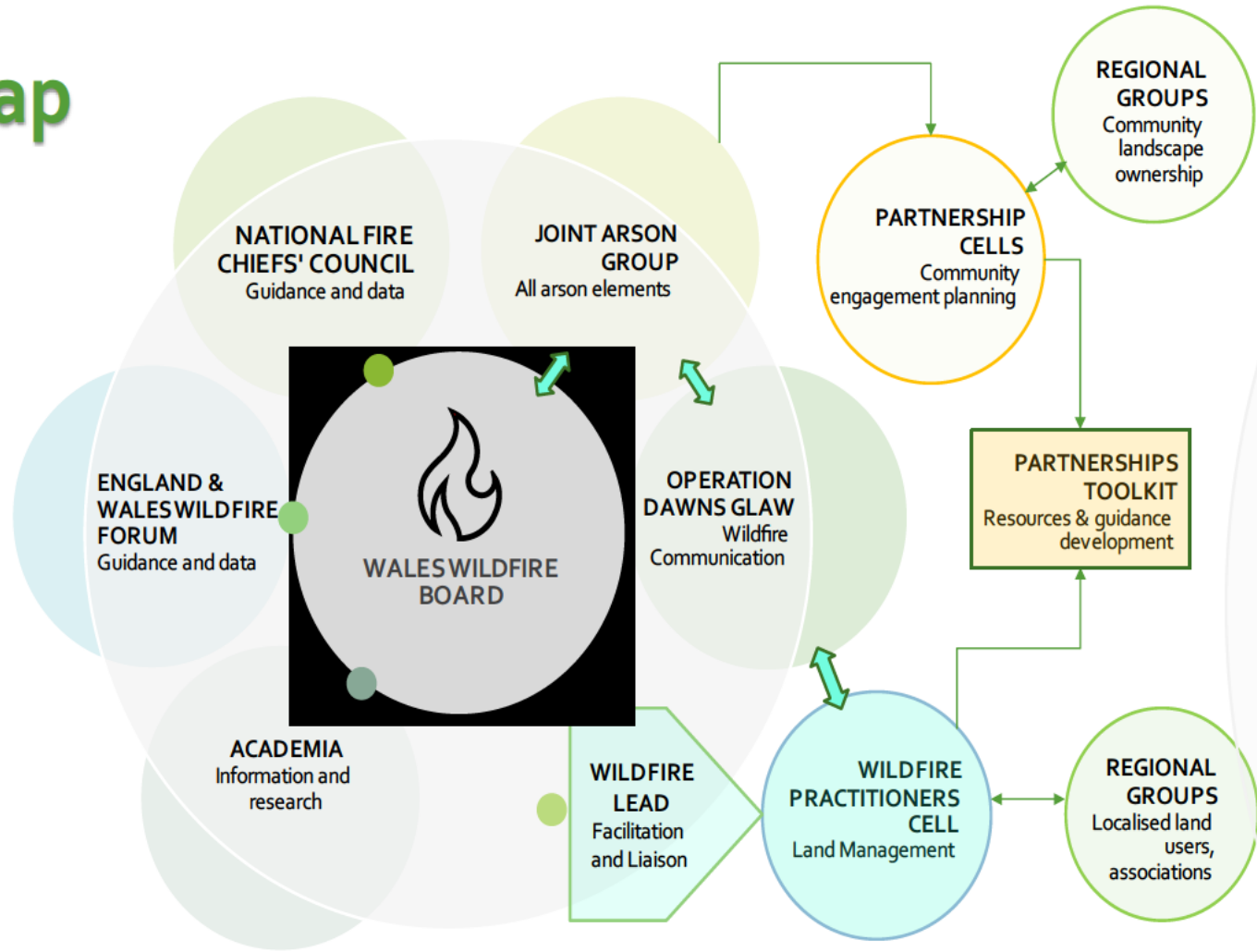


Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service



Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub De Cymru South Wales Fire and Rescue Service

Group Map



DRAFT

Wales Wildfire Charter

By working together we commit to:



DRAFT

Partnership

Through an evolving partnership approach, we will:

Bring together Emergency Services, Public and Private Organisations, Landowners and Land Users to manage and develop our landscape.

Through leadership and communication we will:

Understand and recognise each others impacts to develop a range of early interventions

Deliver a one voice approach to wildfire messaging, awareness and education across Wales

Have a better understanding of wildfire risk management across Wales

Change perceptions and create a wildfire wise Wales

Wales Wildfire Charter

By working together we commit to:



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Environmental & Community Resilience

We will contribute to management of our landscape to:

Protect wildlife, forestry, and livelihoods, improve wellbeing, health, and amenity, facilitate sustainable food production and create sense of place and community ownership.

We will enhance our Welsh landscape by :

Managing the number, scale and severity of wildfire incidents

Adapting to nature and climate developments and restoring connections to green space and community

Supporting deaner air and protecting natural and heritage resources

Protecting our carbon sources in soil and woodlands

Wales Wildfire Charter

By working together we commit to:



DRAFT

Prevention & Protection

We will work together to:

Implement a diverse range of management techniques to reduce the impact of wildfire in the Welsh landscape and on our communities

We will do this collaboratively to:

Adopt and support a Landscape Management approach to Wildfire Risk Management

Share knowledge and provide training through a Wales wide collaboration network

Create a multi-functional Fire Risk Map and a toolkit for preventative land management techniques

Reduce uncontrolled wildfire numbers and severity by sharing resources and implementing prevention measures