

Petitions on the name 'Wales' and 'Cymru'

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 16 Medi 2024
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This briefing has been prepared to support the Committee's consideration of two petitions relating to the name of the Country - one in support of abolishing the name 'Wales', making 'Cymru' the only name, and one in support of maintaining the name 'Wales'.

Petition 1

Petition Number: P-05-1446

Petition title: Abolish the name 'Wales' and make 'Cymru' the only name for our country

Text of petition: Wales is a name imposed on Cymru and is essentially not a Welsh word at all. The world knows about Wales because of its English connection since 1282. Hardly anyone has heard of Cymru or realises that we have our own unique language and culture which is totally different from the other countries within the United Kingdom



Petition 2

Petition Number: P-05-1451

Petition title: Keep the name 'Wales' and not waste any more taxpayers money on pointless exercises

Text of petition: This is to counter the petition to abolish the name 'Wales' and to only refer to our fine land as 'Cymru'.

We are proud of our Welsh roots but this would be a pointless waste of taxpayers money. Cymru OR Wales-let people refer to God's country however they want and not impose an ideology on anyone.

Let the silent majority be heard!

1. Background

There have been many international examples of places and nations changing their official title. In 2022, the Turkish Government sent a letter to the UN formally requesting that it be referred to as Türkiye, the Turkish spelling and pronunciation of Turkey. The Republic of Türkiye is now the country's official name, and the country is listed as Türkiye in the UN list of Member States.

Another recent example is Czechia, the new name adopted in 2016 for the Czech Republic. However, some in the country had concerns that the name was too similar to the Russian region, Chechnya, while it was reported that the former prime minister, Andrej Babiš told the Wall Street Journal in 2020 "I don't know who came up with such a stupid idea".

There have also been calls to change the name New Zealand to Aotearoa (long white cloud) in Māori. More than 70,000 people signed a petition there calling for a change in name. Meanwhile, there was also talk of the possibility that India might change its name to Bharat, the Sanskrit and Hindi name for India after the Prime Minister, Nerandra Modi, sat behind a nameplate inscribed with "Bharat" during a G20 summit.

Here in Wales, the petition calling for abolishing the name 'Wales' and use 'Cymru' as the sole name has gathered 12,100 signatures. While a counter-petition to keep the name 'Wales' has gathered 5,430 signatures.

2. Etymology of 'Cymru' and 'Wales'

Dr. Dylan Foster Evans, an expert on the history of the Welsh language posed the question - What's in a name? - in this article on Welsh place names, noting that the:

English name, *Wales*, derives from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning 'foreigners', or in particular those foreigners who were under the influence of the Roman empire.

The Welsh name for Wales, *Cymru*, on the other hand:

comes from the plural of *Cymro*, 'a Welshman'. The word *Cymro* is thought to derive from an earlier Brittonic word, *combrogos* - 'a compatriot' or 'a fellow-countryman'.

In an opinion piece on Nation.Cymru in 2019, Gareth Ceidiog Hughes writes about the use of the word Welsh, noting that the etymology of the word Welsh is "rooted in less than flattering connotations":

It is derived from the old Germanic word *walha*. It is a variation on a common word used hundreds of years ago by Saxons to mean foreigners or outsiders. Germanic tribes invaded England in the fifth century, and this is how they referred to the native Celtic population, whom they displaced, murdered or enslaved.

The article goes on to contrast what the writer considers a "far more benign etymology of the word *Cymry*" which is

derived from the Old Welsh word *combroggi*, meaning fellow-countrymen or compatriot. *Cymru* is the land of the compatriots.

3. Use of 'Cymru' only

Wales remains the internationally recognised name of the nation, rather than *Cymru*, despite the equal status given to both languages in Wales.

In October 2022, the Football Association of Wales made headlines on the eve of the World Cup in Qatar, when it transpired that informal discussion had been taking place with European football's governing body, UEFA, about its name.

The Chief Executive, Noel Mooney, told reporters that *Cymru* is already used internally by the FAW for its communications and by its staff, and that:

The team should always be called Cymru, that's what we call it here.

He continued by noting that:

Internationally we feel we have a bit more work to do yet. So we are going to this World Cup as Wales.

But I think 2023 will be a year when we have a good discussion with all the different stakeholders - whether that's governments, our own boards, councils and decision-making bodies, staff, club and players.

4. Organisations changing to Welsh only names

There are also examples of organisations in Wales 'changing' names, at least in terms of its daily use, to using only their Welsh name.

In November 2022, Snowdonia National Park Authority agreed to refer to Wales' highest mountain, *Snowdon*, by its Welsh name only, *Yr Wyddfa*. It also decided to refer to the National Park as 'Eryri' only, rather than Snowdonia.

The Park Authority recommended that Members of the authority:

approve the use of the names Yr Wyddfa and Eryri in the Welsh and English languages, giving officers the discretion to use the terms, Yr Wyddfa (Snowdon) and Eryri (Snowdonia) in English, should the context require this for education and engagement purposes. It is foreseen that Yr Wyddfa and Eryri will be the usual and common forms and that over time, as awareness increases, that these would be the only forms used by the Authority. The change would occur over time, as Authority publications and interpretation are updated.

Following suit the following April was Brecon Beacons National Park. After a rebranding exercise, the Park decided it would only use its Welsh language name, *Bannau Brycheiniog*, as its corporate name in future.

The *Senedd* itself has a Welsh and English name, but the name *Senedd* has established itself as the primary name used for the national parliament.

The Senedd and Elections (Wales) Act 2020 replaced the name 'National Assembly for Wales / Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru', with 'Senedd Cymru or the Welsh Parliament'. Both have equal status in the legislation, although the Act refers to the institution as 'the Senedd' throughout. The legislation also made provision for elected members to be known as 'Members of the Senedd / Aelod o'r Senedd'. which may have supported the use of the 'Senedd' more widely in public discourse in both Welsh and English context.

5. Welsh Parliament action

The Senedd has considered several petitions in the last few years relating to Welsh place-names. A petition that closed in February 2023 called for renaming Wales to her original name, Cymru, which received 414 signatures.

It was considered by the Petitions Committee on 06 February 2023.

6. Welsh Government action

Responding to the petition to 'rename Wales to her original name, Cymru' in 2023, the Minister for Education and Welsh Language at that time, Jeremy Miles MS, noted that:

Our intention [the Welsh Government] is to continue to use both Cymru and Wales, to refer to our nation in both its official languages, and to continue to promote the visibility and use of Welsh at a community and national level, reflecting our conviction that Welsh belongs to us all.

Responding to the current petition on making 'Cymru' the only name for the country, the then Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Energy and Welsh Language, Jeremy Miles MS noted his "support for any public body that promotes its Welsh name" which highlights the language and the culture.

The Cabinet Secretary went on to reiterate what was said to the previous petition in 2023 that that:

It is not our intention to formally change to using only 'Cymru'. This does not mean that we are not extremely supportive of using 'Cymru' as an organisation, and we're eager to increase the use of the Welsh name for our country...

[...]Ultimately, the name that we use for the country is bound up with our identity as individuals, as people, as a nation. With that in mind, we support the idea that anyone has the right to use 'Cymru' or 'Wales' for our country.

Responding to the petition to “Keep the name ‘Wales’ and not waste any more taxpayers money on pointless exercises”, the Cabinet Secretary stated that:

Our policy as an organisation is to use the Welsh language as well as the English, to reflect the nature of our work representing and working on behalf of everyone in Wales, no matter where they live or which language they speak. With that in mind, it is not our intention to formally change to using only 'Cymru'.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.