

Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS
Y Dirprwy Brif Weinidog ac Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros
Newid Hinsawdd a Materion Gwledig
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate
Change and Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Ein cyf/Our ref: HIDCC/PO/0335/24

Mike Hedges MS
Chair
Legislation, Justice and Constitution Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

25 November 2024

Dear Mike,

Thank you for your letter of 13 November regarding the Independent Commission and the Review of the Water Sector. The Welsh Government recognises the significance of this independent review and its potential to provide meaningful recommendations for the future of water governance.

The Commission has been established to provide comprehensive recommendations addressing the water sector across both England and Wales. During my recent meeting with Sir Jon Cunliffe, I was reassured the unique characteristics of Wales' water governance model, policy approach, and industry will be fully considered, alongside the wider landscape of water regulation. A Welsh representative on the Commission will be key in ensuring Wales's unique perspectives are integrated throughout the review as well as bringing their own personal expertise and insight. The Commission's independent Chair, Sir Jon Cunliffe, will announce the nominee for that role in due course. Until the Commission completes its work, it would be premature to comment on its possible conclusions or recommendations.

The Welsh Government and DEFRA are contributing to the Commission collaboratively. Officials from both governments are working closely to provide the necessary insights to inform the Commission's work. The Commission is expected to report back to both governments during Quarter 2 of 2025. At that point Welsh Government and DEFRA will consider the recommendations and assess next steps. As part of this process, we are committed to consulting on any proposed reforms.

As I have said, our waterways are not confined by borders. The Commission's review and subsequent recommendations must respect the devolution settlement and ensure a coherent approach to shared challenges. I am pleased that both the Welsh and UK Governments are committed to close collaboration in tackling these issues. Any solutions must be founded on consensus, recognising when cross-border alignment is essential and when distinctive approaches are required for Wales.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Should the recommendations necessitate legislative change, we will carefully evaluate the most appropriate legislative pathway. This will involve discussions with the UK Government, particularly for areas that cross borders, to ensure any legislative solutions are practical, efficient, respect devolved responsibilities and maintain alignment where this is beneficial to both countries. Whether through a Senedd Bill or a UK Bill, we will prioritise solutions that reflect Wales' needs while maintaining our commitment to collaboration.

Once the Commission reports we will consider its recommendations in detail and determine appropriate next steps. This will include engaging stakeholders, communities, and businesses to ensure our response is well-informed and reflects the needs of Wales.

The Commission's independence and the collaboration between the Welsh and UK Governments provide a strong foundation for delivering meaningful reforms. I look forward to considering the Commission's recommendations and ensuring that Wales' unique context is integral to future changes to water governance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Huw Irranca-Davies', written in a cursive style.

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