

Produce a Clean Water Bill for Wales and for Welsh Rivers

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 8 Rhagfyr 2025
Petitions Committee | 8 December 2025

Reference: RS25/12648

Introduction

Petition Number: P-06-1541

Petition title: Produce a Clean Water Bill for Wales and for Welsh Rivers

Text of petition:

Our rivers are crying out for help. We do not have long before it will be too late to save them.

For too long, legislators, regulators and polluters have talked about protecting our rivers but nothing meaningful is ever done.

We are calling on Members of the Senedd to commit to producing a Clean Water Bill for Wales.

The Clean Water Bill will:

- Set an ambitious framework of legally binding targets for biodiversity and water quality
- Ensure there is regulator that is fit for purpose that holds all polluters equally to account



- Issue new Permits that are meaningful and which broaden the range of pollutants which mandate action [and] have significant consequences for breaking permit limits
- Carry out a review of the way water companies operate in Wales
- Ensure enforcement of the provisions of the Water (Special Measures) Act 2025
- Ensure all rivers designated as Special Area of Conservation (SAC) are tested in line with Bathing Water Quality Regulations
- Work with Farmers to encourage food production without creating nutrient runoff

The Water Bill must ensure action over words and prioritise nature over profit-at-all-costs. Citizen Scientists, local communities and river users should be included in the committee formulating the bill.

The text provided above is submitted by the petitioner. The petitions team make every effort to ensure it preserves their authentic voice. This text has not been verified for accuracy, or errors, and may contain unverified opinions or assertions.

Mae'r testun uchod yn cael ei gyflwyno gan y deisebydd. Mae'r tîm deisebau yn gwneud pob ymdrech i sicrhau ei fod yn cadw ei lais dilys. Nid yw'r testun hwn wedi'i wirio am gywirdeb, neu wallau, a gall gynnwys barn neu honiadau heb eu gwirio.

1. Background

Senedd Research has a number of publications that give background information to the issues raised in this petition, these include:

- [The Water Industry in Wales](#) - includes relevant legislation, the devolution settlement, water companies in Wales, Welsh Government policy and the roles and responsibilities of key organisations including regulators.
- [A guide to water quality in Wales](#) - outlines how water quality standards are implemented, monitored and upheld, and who's responsible. It also discusses some of the main challenges to water quality in Wales, and what the Welsh Government has been doing to tackle them.
- [Storm overflows explained](#) - how they're managed, how well they're understood, and how they're impacting water quality.
- [Bathing water quality in Wales](#) - how bathing water quality is measured and classified.

2. Welsh Government action

The Welsh Government has hosted a number of 'water summits' [since 2022](#), aiming to drive collaborative action to tackle water quality in Wales. The most recent took place in [September 2025](#) and focused on tackling agricultural pollution.

The Welsh Government also established the [Wales Better River Quality Taskforce](#) in 2022 to evaluate the approach to managing and regulating [storm overflows](#). The Taskforce published [five action plans](#) for areas identified as requiring additional action. These were last updated in 2023.

In his letter to the Committee, the Cabinet Secretary highlights existing "specialist and targeted programmes ... designed to tackle pollution in our rivers to ensure they achieve good ecological status". As such he disagrees with the petitioners view "that all rivers designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) should be tested in accordance with the Bathing Water Quality Regulations".

2.1. Review of water sector regulation

In October 2024, the UK and Welsh governments launched a joint "[Independent Commission into the water sector and its regulation](#)", which aimed to "form the largest review of the industry since privatisation".

In July 2025, the [final report of the Independent Water Commission](#) (IWC) was published. It made 88 recommendations and concluded that a “fundamental reset” of the water sector was needed. Recommendations include:

- new national strategies to be brought forward;
- integration of system planning across the water sector;
- changes to the legislative framework to drive solutions to reduce pollutants and rainwater entering the system;
- regulator reforms - Ofwat be abolished, and a separate, independent economic regulator for Wales’s water sector be established; and
- regulation reforms - a “[fundamental reset](#)” in the way regulators engage with companies.

In the [Welsh Government’s response to the report](#) in July, the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs, Huw Irranca-Davies MS, said:

This is a once in a generation opportunity to reset arrangements created before devolution and is about more than institutional change.

In a subsequent [statement to Plenary on 21 October](#) the Cabinet Secretary highlighted that “the complexity of water sector reform is significant”, and the “need for primary legislation in the UK Parliament, followed by primary legislation in Wales”.

In his letter to the Committee, the Cabinet Secretary says the Welsh Government is currently working on its response to the IWC report.

2.2. Legislating to protect biodiversity

The Cabinet Secretary’s letter says the Welsh Government is “fully committed to continuing to develop[ing] and strengthen[ing] environmental law in Wales”. He highlights work to bring forward the [Environment \(Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets\) \(Wales\) Bill](#), which makes three key proposals, to:

- embed [environmental principles](#) into law to underpin future policy decision-making;
- establish a permanent [environmental governance body](#) which would hold public authorities to account on environmental law; and

- introduce a statutory framework for legally binding biodiversity targets.

The Cabinet Secretary explains that:

... Welsh Ministers will be required to set targets on at least one issue within each priority area. The priority areas include reducing pollution, and a target in this area could focus on freshwater health by seeking to reduce excess nutrients, hazardous chemicals, and plastic pollution.

3. Welsh Parliament action

The Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee has undertaken various pieces of work around water quality, including:

- an inquiry into water quality and sewerage discharges (2022);
- an inquiry into the performance of Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water (2024);
- Natural Resources Wales (NRW) annual scrutiny sessions; and
- consideration of legislative consent for the UK Water (Special Measures) Bill.

The Petitions Committee has considered the following petitions within this subject area:

- P-06-1281 Urgently stop raw sewage discharges into Barry's Old Harbour and Watchtower Bays (completed);
- P-06-1398: To act to increase the effectiveness of Natural Resources Wales in halting pollution on the Teifi (completed);
- P-06-1312 To help improve water quality in the River Usk by upgrading sewage systems in the Usk valley (completed).

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.

