

Huw Irranca-Davies MS

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate
Change and Rural Affairs

26 February 2026

Dear Huw,

Follow-up from general scrutiny session on 11 February 2026

Thank you for attending the Committee's 11 February meeting for your final general scrutiny session of this Senedd term. Following the session, the Committee agreed I should write to you to outline its high-level views on the areas raised, and to ask for clarification and/or further information on certain matters. These are attached as an Annex.

I should be grateful to receive a response as soon as possible and preferably by 13 March 2026.

Yours sincerely,



Llyr Gruffydd MS,
Chair, Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg neu Saesneg/We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English.



Annex: Views on areas raised and additional questions/requests for information

Water sector reform

The Committee has maintained a strong interest in the water sector and its regulation during this Senedd term. In our [February 2024 report](#), we raised concern that the sector was facing a crisis and its future was uncertain. The publication of the [Green Paper: Shaping the Future of Water Governance in Wales](#) is, therefore, a welcome development.

Given the limited time remaining this Senedd term, we are not in a position to consider the Green Paper in any meaningful way. We will, however, be suggesting that our successor committee may wish to scrutinise the reform proposals as further details emerge.

Waste

Deposit Return Scheme

When questioned on progress towards the introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) you indicated that you would be making a statement on the scheme imminently. The following day, you made a [Written Statement](#) and laid [The Deposit Scheme for Drinks Containers \(Wales\) Regulations 2027](#) before the Senedd.

The Committee has consistently advocated for a DRS and has previously expressed frustration at the delays to its introduction. As such, we are pleased that the regulations have been laid and provide for the introduction of a DRS from 1 October 2027, ensuring alignment with the rest of the UK.

We note the regulations deliver on your long-standing commitment to include glass bottles within the scheme's scope. We also note there will be a four year transition period for glass drinks containers aimed at providing industry with the time to adapt to the scheme's requirements. We consider this to be a pragmatic approach to avoid further delays to the scheme's introduction. We have, however, recently received correspondence from the industry raising concern about the inclusion of glass drinks containers. We will be writing to you separately on this matter.

Single-use plastics

We were disappointed to learn that the Welsh Government will not meet its commitment to implement Phase 2 of the single-use plastic products ban in spring 2026. We note that implementation of the ban will require an exclusion from the UK Internal Market Act 2020 (UKIMA). You explained that, following the UK Government's review of UKIMA, it has changed its approach to agreeing exclusions. You said that, as a consequence, there is insufficient time to agree an exclusion before the Senedd pre-election period begins.

The commitment to implement the Phase 2 ban was made in autumn 2023. It is unclear, therefore, why the Welsh Government did not seek an exclusion at an earlier stage to ensure that it could deliver on its commitment. **We would be grateful for an explanation, including clarification of when discussions with the UK Government on securing an exclusion first commenced.**

Coal tip safety

We welcome the adoption of a multi-year approach to funding coal tip safety. You explained that Phase 1 of the grant scheme (2026-2030) will allocate £80m to 10 local authorities and Natural Resources Wales, enabling major capital works through to minor maintenance work. **We would be grateful for a breakdown in allocation for Phase 1 of the scheme.**

During our scrutiny of the Disused Mines and Quarry Tips (Wales) Bill (since enacted), stakeholders raised concern that the Bill could inadvertently lead to an increase in coal extraction. Consequently, you committed to amend [The Town and Country Planning \(Notification\) \(Coal and Petroleum\) \(Wales\) Direction 2018](#) to make it explicit that the definition of “coal development” includes operations in connection with disused coal tips. In updating us on progress, you confirmed that you intend “to introduce the amended direction before the end of this Senedd term”. We welcome this and hope that it will go some way to addressing the concerns raised by stakeholders.

Air quality

We sought an update on the proposed ban on the sale of wet wood and other highly polluting fuels for domestic use. We note that regulations to implement the ban will not be brought forward before the end of this Senedd term.

You explained that modelling undertaken by Ricardo indicated that domestic fuel regulation could increase costs for consumers, although this assessment was based on limited data. You said that further work is required to strengthen the evidence base for the ban, adding that this work is already underway.

Given the Counsel General’s assertion in July 2025 that the Welsh Government was “looking to bring forward...regulations shortly”, **we would be grateful if you could clarify when the decision to postpone the regulations was taken. We would also welcome clarification on when work to strengthen the evidence base for the ban is expected to be completed.**

Towards net zero Wales

Carbon Budget 2

[Net Zero Wales](#) sets out the Welsh Government’s ambition to outperform Carbon Budget 2 (CB2) (2021-25) by achieving a 44 per cent emissions reduction against the 1990 baseline. You told us you are confident that the Welsh Government will deliver this ambition, which is encouraging.

When asked about the impact of the closure of Port Talbot's final blast furnace on CB2, you told us: "If recent historic blast furnace emissions continued in full through 2024 and 2025, then our estimate is that Wales would still be on track to meet its carbon budget 2 target." **We would welcome clarification on whether your current estimates show the Welsh Government would have outperformed CB2 if not for the closure of Port Talbot's blast furnace and, if so, by what margin.**

If the Welsh Government does outperform CB2, it will stand the next Government in good stead for Carbon Budget 3 (CB3) (2026-2030), which is significantly more challenging. We are aware that, going forward, decarbonisation will become increasingly dependent on policy action in devolved areas, including agriculture and transport. We will be recommending that our successor committee undertakes robust scrutiny of progress towards delivery of the next emissions reduction plan, CB3 and the 2030 interim target.

Decarbonisation of housing

The Committee has previously emphasised the need to accelerate action to address the climate impact of Wales' existing housing stock, in particular the private housing sector. You acknowledged the importance of building householder confidence in retrofit measures to encourage uptake. **You committed to providing us with a list of Welsh and UK Government initiatives aimed at improving home energy efficiency.**

Net zero public sector by 2030

You asserted that the Welsh Government's ambition for a net zero public sector by 2030 has "stimulated significant action" and "leadership" and was "influencing wider change across Wales".

We questioned you on the latest data on public sector emissions, which shows average emissions per organisation have remained constant. You told us that achieving the 2030 ambition would not be "a linear journey". You referred to "real achievement" on waste and building emissions, which have decreased year on year since 2022.

We were disappointed to learn that Welsh Government emissions increased by 49 per cent between 2023 and 2024. You told us:

"[This] is due to an increase in the emissions measured for those supply chains, which are generally measured through what are called expenditure proxies, rather than actual emissions. The Welsh Government itself actually had a slight reduction between 2023 and 2024, and we continue to make progress, but we're now taking into account the supply chains as well."

We would welcome a detailed explanation of the increase in Welsh Government emissions between 2023 and 2024, including the methodologies used in calculating these emissions, which you referred to during our meeting.

Climate adaptation

We raised with you the National Infrastructure Commission's (NICW) [report on climate adaptation](#) (October 2025), which highlights that adaptation does not share equal status with climate mitigation. You told us that:

"in the past, there has indeed often been more focus on climate change mitigation rather than adaptation. And that's been true, by the way, not just in Wales, but across the UK, and in fact probably across most of the world as well. That is now changing, and rightly so, because we're seeing the impacts now of climate in our communities on a daily basis".

You emphasised the need to drive forward on delivery of the Welsh Government's [Climate Adaptation Strategy for Wales 2024](#) (October 2024).

You confirmed that you will be responding the NICW's report by the end of March 2026. **We expect the Welsh Government to provide a considered and substantive response to the report.** In doing so, we ask that you set out clearly whether you have accepted or rejected the NICW's recommendations and provide detailed rationale for your decision.

Sustainable Farming Scheme

In updating us on the Sustainable Farming Scheme, you said "the general mood around it is really positive" and "there's a lot of interest". You explained that figures on uptake will not be available until the application window closes in May 2026.

You said that Optional and Collaborative actions will be introduced in phases throughout the transition period (2026-29), and that an overview of actions available in 2026 will be published next month. We support publication of these actions at the start of the application window to give clarity to farmers applying to join the scheme.

Given the Scheme has an important role in supporting the delivery of domestic climate change and biodiversity commitments, we will be recommending that our successor committee keeps a watching brief over the Scheme to ensure that it delivers the intended environmental outcomes.

Biodiversity

Nature Recovery Action Plan

In our report, [Halting and reversing the loss of nature by 2030](#) (January 2025), we expressed concern about the delay in publishing a revised Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP), which was originally promised in May 2024. In responding to our report, you asserted your goal was to launch the plan at the Wales Biodiversity Conference in October 2025. We are disappointed that the plan has still not

been published. In written evidence submitted before your appearance before us, you said the plan is due to be published in spring 2026. We seek assurance that you remain committed to this timeframe.

Natural Resources Policy

We have previously expressed frustration at the delay in completing the statutory review of the Natural Resources Policy (NRP), required under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. In providing an update, you informed us that the review was completed in May 2025, however, a revised NRP will not be brought forward until the next Senedd term. You refuted the suggestion that this was not in keeping with the spirit of the Act, adding that officials' time has been prioritised to support the Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Bill, amongst other things.

We are disappointed that a revised NRP will not be published before the end of the Sixth Senedd, particularly given that a review of the plan was completed some time ago. **We would be grateful if you could report back to the Committee on the review's high-level findings.**

Global Biodiversity Framework 30 by 30 target

In updating us on progress towards the 30 by 30 target, you explained that the Welsh Government had published its 30 by 30 Framework for Wales (June 2025), which sets its overall approach to delivering the target. You said that, alongside the Framework, you are developing "a suite of very practical evidence-based tools" to support delivery. This includes a tool to identify areas outside of protected areas that could qualify as Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (to be known as 'Naturfa sites'). **We would welcome further details of the on-going programme of work to identify Naturfa sites.**

We are aware that the environment NGO sector's [2025 UK-wide progress report](#) on the 30 by 30 target suggests Wales is projected to miss the target by some way. It is clear that significant challenges lie ahead for the next Welsh Government if it is to deliver on current biodiversity commitments. We will be recommending that our successor committee undertakes robust scrutiny of progress towards delivery of the 30 by 30 target, and the development and delivery of statutory biodiversity targets.

Tree planting

We have previously expressed concern about consistently low tree planting rates, emphasising the need for the Welsh Government to scale up action to meet its target of 43,000 hectares (ha) of new planting by 2030. We were therefore interested to learn that the UK Climate Change Committee's (UK CCC) latest advice is to lower the 2030 target to 22,000 ha. You told us that the Welsh Government has not "formally accepted" the advice but will consider it when determining the future pathway to net zero.

Given current tree planting rates, and in light of the UK CCC's advice, we would welcome clarification on whether you consider the current 2030 target to be achievable. If not, we would welcome details of work you have undertaken since the publication of the advice to determine a stretching but achievable target.

We are aware that significant changes have been made to the Sustainable Farming Scheme following industry concerns about the proposed 10 per cent tree cover requirement. In commenting on the changes, you told us that the ask for each farm to plant at least 0.1 ha of trees by 2028 should be considered "as the minimum". You added that the 'Tree and hedgerow opportunity plan' (under the Scheme's Universal Layer), alongside funding for the Optional Layer "should incentivise greater uptake" towards the Scheme's ambition of 17,000 ha of new trees by 2030. We will be recommending that our successor committee keeps a watching brief over progress towards this ambition and the Welsh Government's wider tree planting target.

Marine environment

We questioned you on the findings of Natural Resources Wales' latest condition assessments, which show over half of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) are in unfavourable condition. You explained that assessments undertaken were at feature rather than site level, referring to "complex reasons" for a single feature failure. We were reassured to learn that "none of the features found to be in unfavourable condition were attributed to fishing pressures".

You drew attention to certain species and/or features in positive condition or "showing signs of recovery", but acknowledged "there's an absolutely urgent need to improve the conditions of the MPA network features".

In our [report on the Welsh Government's draft budget 2025-26](#), (February 2025) we called for you to prioritise finalising a new MPA Network Management Framework to provide a clear, strategic direction for the Welsh Government's policies on marine conservation. In updating us on progress, you said a review of the Framework is due to be completed "in early summer this year". We are disappointed that the new Framework will not be in place before the end of this Senedd term.

You confirmed that designation of new Marine Conservation Zones will not take place until the Seventh Senedd. We reiterate the view expressed in our report, [Halting and reversing the loss of nature](#), that the pace of expanding the Marine Protected Sites Network has been disappointingly slow.

Forever chemicals

We raised with you concerns about land contamination from Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS), commonly known as 'forever chemicals'. You informed us that Welsh Government officials had engaged with counterparts in the other devolved Governments and UK Government to develop the first [UK Strategy on forever chemicals](#) (February 2026). You said the Strategy "gives us a platform

for proper discussion”, emphasising the importance of working collaboratively to address this issue. You committed to raise forever chemicals at the next meeting of the Inter-Ministerial Group (IMG) for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. **Subject to the timing of that meeting, we would be grateful if you could report back to the Committee on the outcome of discussion.**