

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Materion Allanol a Deddfwriaeth Ychwanegol | External Affairs and
Additional Legislation Committee
Y goblygiadau i Gymru wrth i Brydain adael yr Undeb Ewropeaidd| Implications
for Wales of Britain exiting the European Union
IOB 20
Ymateb gan Cyswllt Amgylchedd Cymru
Evidence from Wales Environment Link

Dear Mr Rees,

We're writing to respond to your consultation on the implications for Wales of Brexit.

As is widely noted, the process of exiting the EU has many unknowns which are a significant factor for forward planning in every sector. For Wales Environment Link's (WEL) members, specifying a single 'top priority' in advance of the UK Government triggering Article 50 is a difficult ask, considering just how much of the Welsh environment is dependent on EU standards and regulations. However, 'ensuring continued and strengthened protection of the environment' should be considered our response to that question. Individual WEL members will be sending the Committee their own responses, as well as WEL's Marine Working Group.

Our environment is vulnerable. The EU has regulated and brought about environmental improvements and protections in many areas. The Birds and Habitats Directives are a major success story for nature conservation and international cooperation, responsible for the creation of the largest and most coherent network of protected areas in the world (the 'Natura 2000' network). Together, they represent the cornerstone of UK and EU-wide efforts to halt and reverse the loss of biodiversity, providing vital protection for rare and vulnerable species and habitats throughout their range. In Wales, as in the other UK countries, these Directives underpin the protection of many of our most important and precious wild places, and have played a critical role in dramatically reducing losses and driving the recovery of threatened species, such as the once extinct bittern.

In addition, the Bathing Water Directive in particular has seen a dramatic improvement in the quality of our seas, which has in turn seen benefits for both wildlife and tourism. Not replacing these with a comprehensive set of UK-wide or Welsh legislation and policies will risk quickly undoing all the improvement that we have strived towards for the last few decades.

Air, water and wildlife does not recognise borders. For this very practical reason, there should be the same baseline of standards in place for European, UK and Welsh waters. A collaborative approach to protecting habitats and conservation is also necessary if we are to reverse the decline of many endangered species.

The environment-related sector that is most consistently funded by the EU is farming, through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This is a rare opportunity to reform the way this works. Farming is approximately just 0.7% of Wales' GVA¹ whereas wildlife-based activity is at 2.9%², which does not factor in the wider contribution of biodiversity or the benefits to the economy of outdoor tourism.

With the new Welsh legislation³, we have an opportunity to do things differently; to ensure the delivery of environmental benefits under a future policy of Sustainable Land Management. The State of Nature 2016 report emphasised that "*intensive management of agricultural land had by far the largest negative impact on nature, across all habitats and species*".⁴ It would be damaging to replicate the current agricultural policy as it is and Wales should be looking to carve out its own ways of restoring nature for the public good, with fair transitory arrangements and mechanisms to encourage farmers to change practices where necessary, or spread good practice where appropriate.

Wales benefits from the Environment Act and Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, which guide the way towards a sustainable and resilient approach to safeguarding our natural resources, for both present and future generations. This ought to inform developing new, Welsh approaches. Environmental standards should be as good as if not better than what we currently have.

The key points WEL would like to make are:

- The EU Directives which protect species, habitats, water and air quality need to be protected and enforced in Wales, and should be reinstated in domestic legislation.
- International agreements – such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (RAMSAR), the European Landscape Convention and climate change targets – will be even more important after Brexit. It is to Wales' benefit that much of these are embedded in its legislation already.
- There needs to be an adequate financial settlement for Wales to enable delivery of new environmental legislation and protection. We know that to recover wildlife and our natural resources we need to increase investment. A settlement based on the Barnett formula would result in less funding than currently comes to Wales for conservation and consequently would be an insufficient allocation of funds to enable the transition to a sustainable future for the Welsh environment.
- Wales should continue to lead the way, as it has done with the Environment and Wellbeing of Future Generations Acts, and carry on work with the EU and other international partners to learn from each other.
- Work and commitment to increasing recycling rates, pursue circular economy ambitions, and reduce carbon should continue at the same rate, as well as bringing forth forward-thinking initiatives as seen through the 5p carrier bag charge. Wales should be no less ambitious or agenda-setting in embarking on ways to protect our environment.

We have appended two other WEL papers that are particularly relevant to Wales's approach to Brexit: our key asks in taking forward sustainable land management, after we are no longer subject to European law, and our Brexit position statement.

Kind regards,
The Wales Environment Link

¹ House of Lords Library Note (April 2016) 'Rural Economy: Key Statistics and Recent Developments' – <http://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/LLN-2016-0020>

² Natural Resources Wales (June 2015) 'A Snapshot of the State of Wales' Natural Resources' – <http://naturalresources.wales/media/4798/snapshot-report.pdf>

³ Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

⁴ State of Nature (September 2016) 'State of Nature 2016: UK and its Overseas Territories' – https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/State%20of%20Nature%20UK%20report_%2020%20Sept_tcm9-424984.pdf

Wales Environment Link (WEL) is a network of environmental, countryside and heritage Non-Governmental Organisations in Wales, most of whom have an all-Wales remit. WEL is officially designated the intermediary body between the government and the environmental NGO sector in Wales. Our vision is a healthy, sustainably managed environment and countryside with safeguarded heritage in which the people of Wales and future generations can prosper.

This paper represents the consensus view of a group of WEL members working in this specialist area. Members may also produce information individually in order to raise more detailed issues that are important to their particular organisation.



change and reducing waste. Work must continue in Wales to implement the new commitments under these Acts regardless of a UK withdrawal from the EU. WEL members are keen to continue to help Welsh Government deliver these shared objectives.

A key process over the next nine months will be the development of the cross-departmental National Natural Resources Policy (NNRP), under Part 1 of the Environment Act. The NNRP must set out the priority actions to secure resilient ecosystems that provide a wide range of benefits into the future – food and fibre, clean water and rich soils, flood prevention, carbon sequestration, jobs, local economies and green tourism as well as proven links with improved mental and physical health.

The economic uncertainty we face as a result of existing austerity and Brexit, means it is more important than ever that we recognise the real value of the natural environment, and make prudent decisions about the future use and management of our land, seas and natural resources. The development of the NNRP provides a major opportunity to do this.

WEL members urge the Welsh Government and NRW to collaborate fully with environmental NGOs in Wales as part of a cross-sector approach to develop and deliver a shared vision for the future of Wales' environment.



Key asks for future land management support in Wales

24th November 2016

Set out below are six key asks calling for a future land management system in Wales that applies the principles enshrined in Welsh law to all forms of land management. As we transition out of the EU, we must move towards new policies and payment systems that enable Wales to fully implement these principles in order to support a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems.

1. The Welsh Government must be able to set land management support in context of its own legislation – the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the Environment (Wales) Act – and provide a place-based approach through the National Natural Resource Policy and Area statements.
2. We want to see environmental standards at least as good as they are now, and the Welsh Government calling on the UK Government to provide strong leadership on environmental standards at an international level.
3. There should be a financial settlement for Wales to enable the full delivery of environmental objectives. A settlement based on the Barnett formula would result in less funding than currently comes to Wales and consequently would be an insufficient allocation of funds to enable the transition to a sustainable future for the Welsh environment.
4. Pillar 1 payments are unsustainable and should not be taken forward into future support mechanisms. In the context of Welsh legislation, public money should only be made available for delivery of public benefits. There should be an end of support to farming and forestry that externalises costs as this compromises Wales' ability to deliver sustainable management of natural resources and invest in restoration of ecological resilience to deliver the greatest public benefit.
5. Build a robust and well-resourced enforcement system based on high minimum standards.
6. Alongside delivery of public benefit, there should be a move to developing new and innovative supply chains for existing and new quality sustainable products. This will require upskilling of land managers to encourage innovation.