

Biodiversity

Research Briefing

May 2026



The Welsh Parliament is the democratically elected body that represents the interests of Wales and its people.

Commonly known as the Senedd, it makes laws for Wales, agrees Welsh taxes and holds the Welsh Government to account.

An electronic copy of this document can be found on the Senedd's website:
research.senedd.wales

Copies of this document can also be obtained in accessible formats including Braille, large print, audio or hard copy from:

Welsh Parliament
Tŷ Hywel
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1SN

X: [@SeneddResearch](https://twitter.com/SeneddResearch)
Senedd Research: research.senedd.wales
Subscription: [Newsletter](#)

© **Senedd Commission Copyright 2026**

The text of this document may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium providing that it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading or derogatory context. The material must be acknowledged as copyright of the Senedd Commission and the title of the document specified.

Biodiversity

Research Briefing

May 2026

Authors:

Matthias Noebels, Sara Moran, Amandine Debus and Katy Orford.

This briefing provides a background to biodiversity, explores how it is being protected through laws and policies, and gives examples of what stakeholders are calling for.

Senedd Research acknowledges the parliamentary fellowships provided to Matthias Noebels by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and to Amandine Debus by the Natural Environment Research Council, which enabled this Research Briefing to be completed.



Contents

1. Summary	6
2. Introduction.....	8
What is biodiversity?	8
Why is biodiversity important?	8
How and why is biodiversity declining?	9
3. Biodiversity legislation and policy	12
International.....	12
Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework	12
Other international treaties	14
European Union.....	15
The Birds Directive.....	15
The Habitats Directive.....	16
UK-EU obligations.....	16
UK.....	17
Intergovernmental collaboration.....	18
UK biodiversity legislation	18
UK biodiversity policy	20
Wales.....	20
Welsh biodiversity legislation	20
Welsh biodiversity policy.....	23
4. Biodiversity monitoring.....	28
5. Financing nature recovery in Wales	29
6. Key issues for the Seventh Senedd	30
Biodiversity targets.....	30
Protected areas.....	30
Office of Environmental Governance Wales	31
Pollution	31
Tree planting.....	31

Sustainable Farming Scheme	32
Green jobs	32
Financing.....	32
Annex - Protected areas	33

1. Summary

What is the issue?

In 2021 the Senedd declared a 'nature emergency'. This was in recognition of human-induced declines in biodiversity. The 2023 State of Nature Report highlighted that 18% of 3,897 species assessed in Wales are threatened with extinction.

Pressures on biodiversity come from many sources, including climate change, urbanisation, pollution, hydrological change, certain agricultural and woodland management techniques and invasive non-native species. Biodiversity has intrinsic value and provides benefits to humans, through 'ecosystem services' such as flood prevention and food production. Biodiversity losses cause risks to human safety and well-being.

How is biodiversity being protected?

Nature conservation is an area of devolved competence in Wales. Many policies and legislation on biodiversity in the UK, including Wales, are derived from the EU and international obligations, such as the Nature Directives and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) commitments.

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and the Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act 2026 include various duties to protect biodiversity in Wales. The Nature Recovery Action Plan is the Welsh Government's overarching biodiversity strategy.

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is the statutory nature conservation body responsible for the management of Wales' natural resources on behalf of the Welsh Government.

What are environmental stakeholders calling for?

- Meaningful statutory biodiversity targets to be brought forward.
- Improved designation, management and monitoring of protected sites.
- Measures to control pollution, particularly into watercourses.
- Afforestation which maximises benefits for biodiversity.
- A strategic approach to green jobs.
- Appropriate financing of nature recovery through both public and private funding.

2. Introduction

This section introduces what biodiversity is, why it is important, and why it is declining.

What is biodiversity?

Biodiversity, or biological diversity, is defined as “the diversity of living organisms, whether at the genetic, species or ecosystem level” in the [Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#). Similar definitions are used by the international [Convention on Biological Diversity](#) (CBD) and the [UK Government](#).

The definition emphasises the range of ways in which biodiversity occurs. Biodiversity considers genetic variants and variety of species, but also different types of habitats.

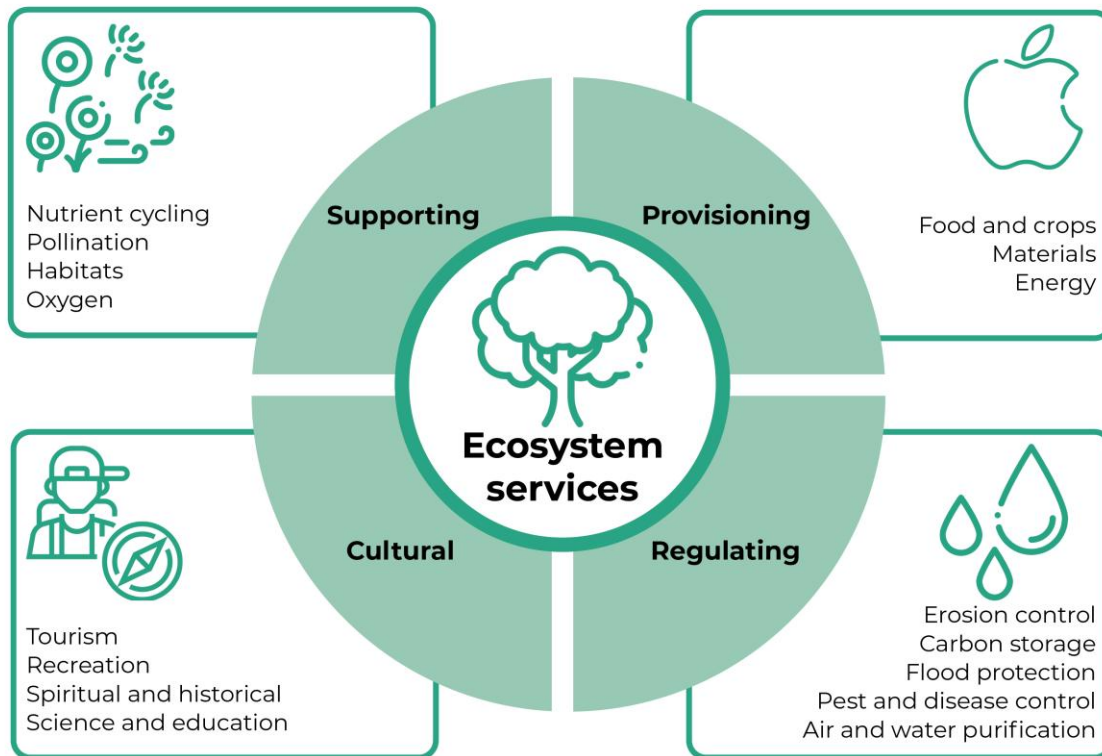
Wales’ geographic location bordering three oceanic climate zones and its varied geology and temperate climate has the potential to support a diversity of species. Some species, like the Radnor lily or the Snowdon lily, **are not found anywhere else** in Britain. The number of species in Wales is difficult to determine, but the [Wales Biodiversity Partnership](#) estimates that there are around 50,000 species.

Why is biodiversity important?

Biodiversity is the building block of ecosystems and supports a healthy natural environment. Biodiversity helps the environment to provide a range of benefits to humans, often classed as ‘**ecosystem services**’. These range from pollination and flood prevention to recreational and health benefits (Figure 1).

The UK Government-commissioned 2021 [Dasgupta Review](#) assessed the economic benefits of biodiversity globally and the economic costs and risks of biodiversity loss. The review shows that sustainable economic growth and development requires nature enhancement to increase collective wealth and well-being.

Figure 1. Categories and examples of ecosystem services.



Source: Figure based on UK National Ecosystem Assessment.

How and why is biodiversity declining?

Global biodiversity levels have always undergone changes. **Scientists have identified five mass extinction events** since complex life on Earth **first evolved 540 million years ago**. Each mass extinction is thought to have resulted in at least 75% of all species becoming extinct. **Fossils found in Wales** are evidence of species that became extinct hundreds of millions of years ago, to be replaced by others through evolution.

Some scientists think we are entering the Earth's sixth mass extinction event, and the first **linked to human activity**. **Research indicates** that the average rate of vertebrate species loss over the last century is up to 100 times higher than pre-human extinction rates.

The IPBES Global Assessment (2019) revealed widespread, accelerating declines in biodiversity and life-support systems. IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) is an

independent intergovernmental body comprising over 130 member governments providing scientific assessments about the planet's biodiversity as well as actions to restore it. The 2019 study concluded that biodiversity is threatened by habitat conversion, excessive resource harvesting, climate change, invasive species, and other impacts. The assessment gained unanimous approval by the 132 member countries. It highlighted that unless these declines are reversed, regression in human safety, mental and physical health, and food and livelihood security will continue.

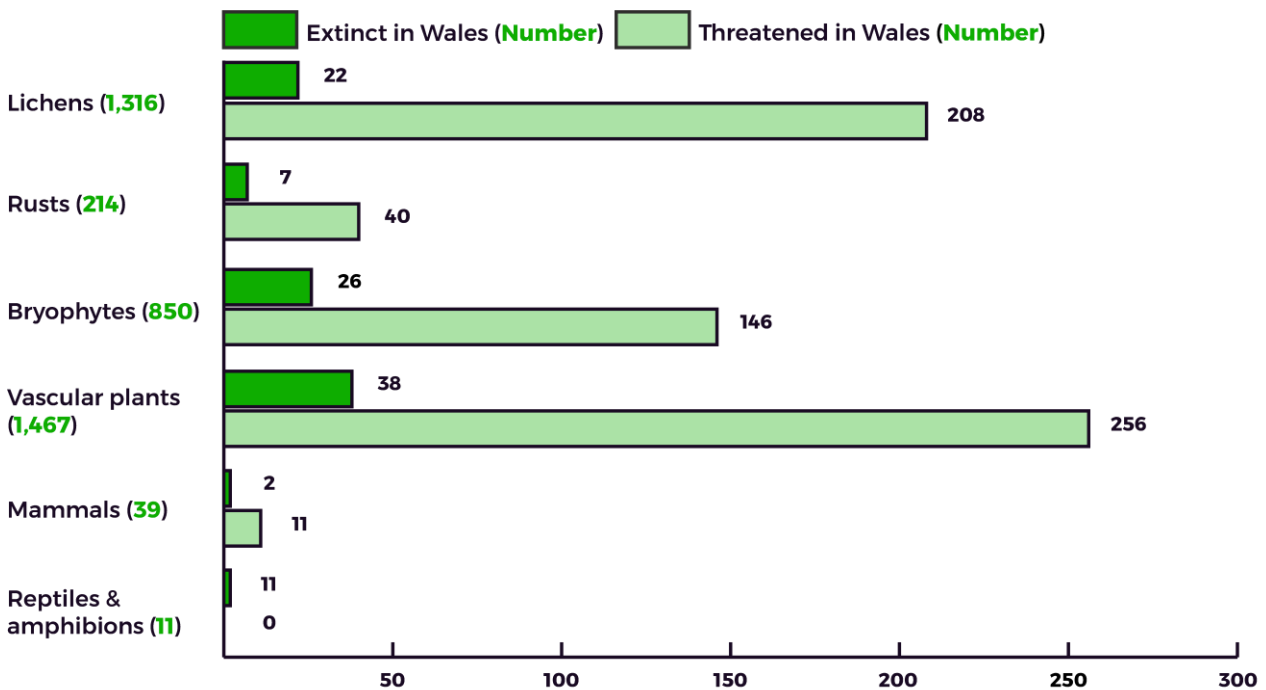
The UK environment sector's collaborative **State of Nature report 2023**, and NRW's **State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR 2025)**, concluded that pressures upon biodiversity in Wales come from certain agricultural and woodland management practices, urbanisation, pollution, hydrological change, over-exploitation, invasive non-native species and climate change.

Figure 2. Species in Wales threatened with extinction – fen orchid, water vole and sand lizard



The **State of Nature Report 2023** presents assessments of extinction risk within Wales for 3,897 species across several taxonomic groups. Of these, 663 (18%) are threatened with extinction from Wales, and another 95 (2%) have become extinct (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Species in Wales threatened with extinction



Source: *State of Nature 2023, [Wales report](#) (using Wales-specific [IUCN Red List assessments](#)) showing assessed species in ‘Red List’ categories, by broad taxonomic group. The numbers in brackets are the number of assessments. ‘Threatened’ = IUCN Red List criteria ‘Critically endangered’, ‘Endangered’ or ‘Vulnerable’. ‘Extinction’ relates to ‘modern extinctions’ i.e. species described by science rather than all extinctions in Earth’s history.*

NRW’s [SoNaRR 2025](#), which provides the evidence base for Welsh Government biodiversity policy, concludes that **ecosystem resilience** remains low across most habitats, including terrestrial, freshwater and marine ecosystems.

Wales is ranked 224 out of 240 countries on the [Biodiversity Intactness Index](#), putting it in the bottom 10%.

In 2021 the [Senedd declared a ‘nature emergency’](#) in recognition of human induced declines in biodiversity.

3. Biodiversity legislation and policy

Many laws and policies on biodiversity in Wales and the UK are derived from EU and international law, such as the EU's Nature Directives and the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. This section presents international treaties, EU, UK and Welsh biodiversity laws and policies.

International

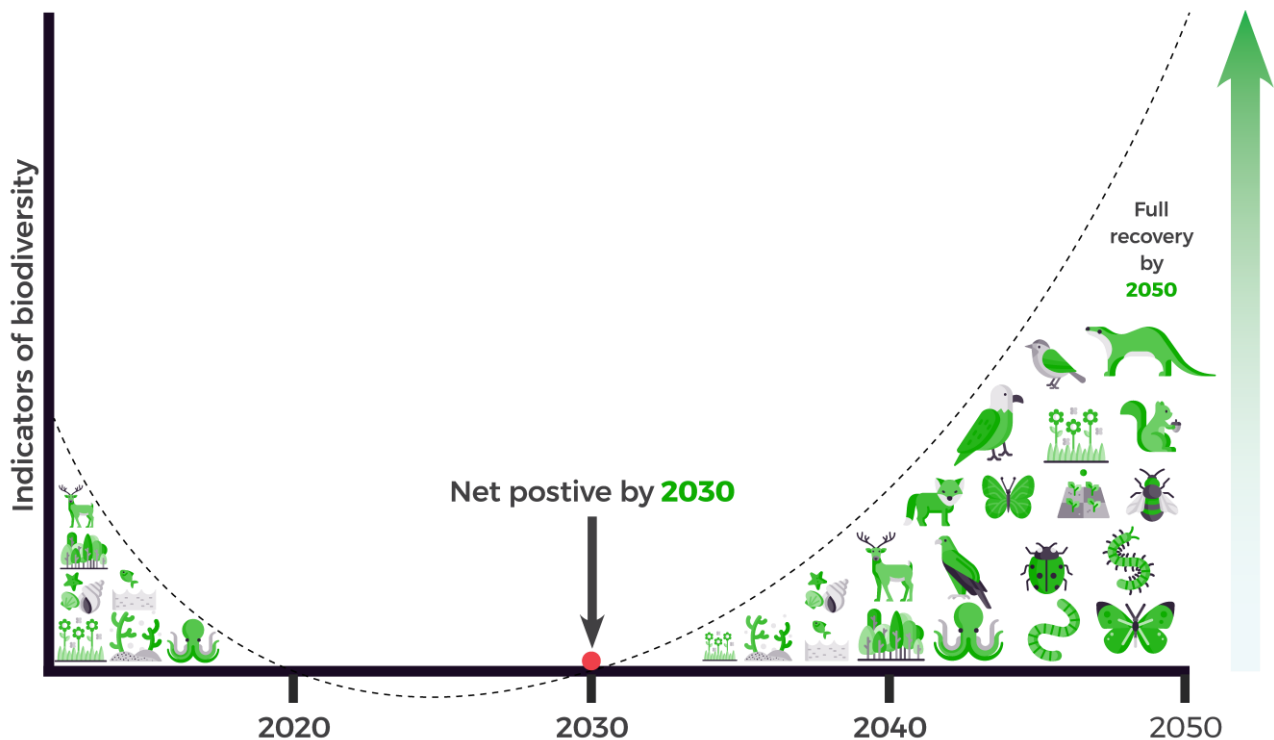
Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) **Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF)** was **adopted in December 2022** at the COP15 UN biodiversity conference. The GBF aims to halt and reverse the loss of nature by 2030 and achieve recovery by 2050 (Figure 4). This means that by 2030 biodiversity should be increasing and that **by 2050** “biodiversity is valued, conserved, restored and wisely used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people”. It includes four goals and 23 targets to achieve by 2030.

These include targets to:

- Protect ecosystems (targets 2 and 3) and species (targets 4, 5 and 6);
- Tackle pollution (target 7); and
- Respect the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities (goal C and included in 7 targets).

Target 3, also referred to as ‘30by30’, is a high-profile aspect of the COP15 agreement, which aims to ensure that by 2030 at least 30% of land, fresh water and sea are effectively conserved and managed.

Figure 4. Global Biodiversity Framework

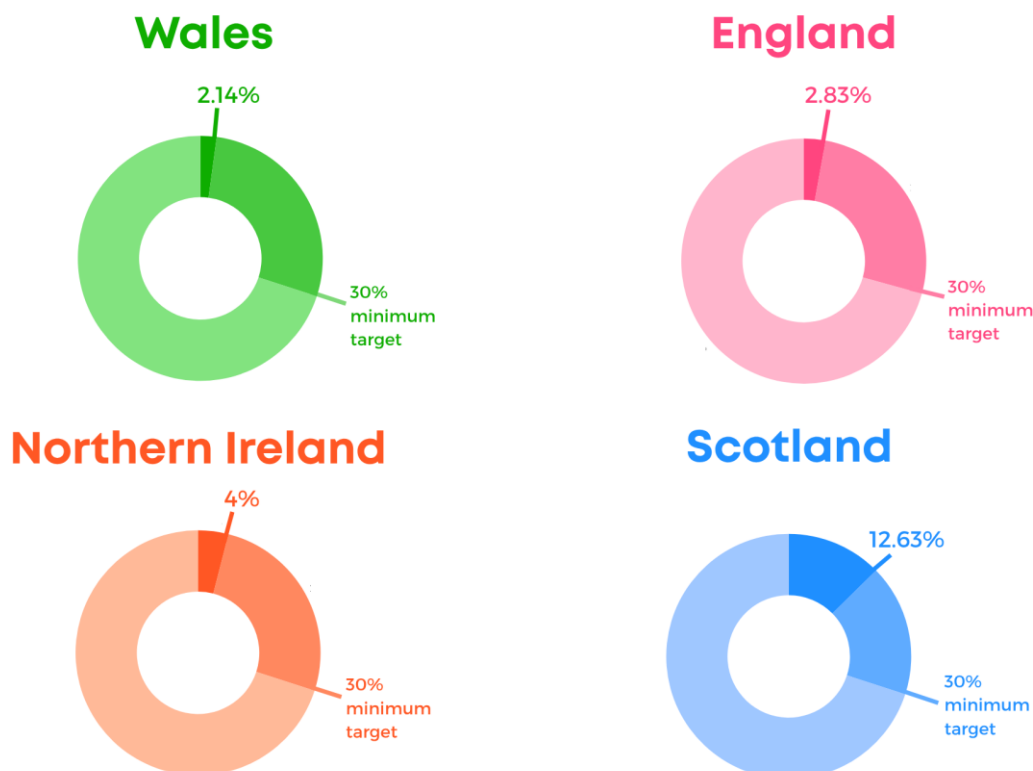
Source: adapted from naturepositive.org

The UK is a party to the GBF and, as biodiversity is a devolved area, the Welsh Government has a role to play. As a response to the 30by30 target and ahead of COP15, the Welsh Government launched a **Biodiversity Deep Dive**, which concluded in October 2022. A **group of experts and practitioners**, identified **key themes and recommendations** for actions to support the 30by30 target.

The Welsh Government published a **framework for 30by30** in 2025, including criteria for what areas could be included in 30by30.

The environment sector's **2025 UK-wide progress report** suggested only 2.14% of Welsh land meets the 30by30 criteria (Figure 5). There was insufficient data to assess progress in the marine environment.

Figure 5. Progress towards the 30by30 target on land across the UK



Source: *30by30, 2025 UK Progress Report*, *Wildlife and Countryside Link*

Other international treaties

Biodiversity is the subject of several other international biodiversity treaties. A few examples are listed below.

- The **1979 Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats** ('Bern Convention') aims to conserve flora, fauna and habitats, promote cooperation, and call attention to endangered and vulnerable species. Parties are obliged to promote national conservation policies and measures against pollution. In the UK, the Bern Convention is implemented by the **Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981** (detailed below).
- The **1979 Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals** ('Bonn Convention') aims to conserve migratory animals, including terrestrial, aquatic and avian species, and promote sustainable use of their habitats. In the UK, the Bonn Convention is implemented by the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and the **Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000**.

- The **1971 Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat** ('Ramsar Convention') aims to protect wetlands, promoting their sustainable use as well as international cooperation. There is no dedicated legislation for Ramsar sites in the UK, but they are also Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). Many Ramsar sites overlap with **Special Areas of Conservation** (SACs) and **Special Protection Areas** (SPAs).
- The **Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction** (the 'Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty' or 'High Seas Treaty') was adopted in June 2023. It contains binding and voluntary measures to address degradation of ocean ecosystems in areas beyond national jurisdiction (i.e. the high seas).

European Union

The EU passed two important Directives addressing biodiversity, the **Birds Directive** (on the conservation of wild birds) and the **Habitats Directive** (on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora). Together they are known as 'the Nature Directives'.

Although the Nature Directives **apply domestically through retained EU law** following the UK's exit from the EU, UK and Welsh Ministers can replace or repeal this legislation in devolved areas, including via the **Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023**. Some of the Act's powers to restate/reproduce or revoke/replace retained EU law expire on 23 June 2026.

The Nature Directives are implemented in the UK through various instruments as described below ('UK biodiversity legislation' section).

The Birds Directive

The Birds Directive was adopted in 1979 in recognition that habitat loss and degradation are the most serious threat to wild birds. The Birds Directive protects, with some exceptions, all naturally occurring wild birds, across EU Member States, as well as their eggs, nests and habitats. It prohibits actions such as deliberate killing or destruction (Article 1). It requires EU Member States to designate Special Protection Areas (SPAs) for the protection of migratory birds (Article 2) and a further 194 bird species listed in Annex I of the Directive (Article 4).

The Habitats Directive

The Habitats Directive was adopted in 1992 to ensure restoration or maintenance of natural habitats and species of interest at a favourable conservation status.

Article 2 of the Habitats Directive requires EU Member States to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) for the protection of over 1,000 animal and plant species as well as 200 habitats. The Directive is not limited to species facing extinction. It aims to protect species that are endangered, vulnerable or rare, and habitats that are in danger of disappearing, have a small natural range, or present outstanding examples of typical geographical regions.

Article 3 of the Habitats Directive also established the **Natura 2000 network**, which is composed of biogeographical regions containing all SACs and SPAs. Since withdrawing from the EU, the UK has replaced Natura 2000 with the UK **National Site Network** (detailed below).

UK-EU obligations

The UK and EU agreed the terms of their post-Brexit relationship in the **Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA)**.

The TCA contains several provisions relating to the environment and climate. They are both part of the **'level playing field' (LPF) provisions**, which aim to ensure fair competition between the UK and EU in a manner conducive to sustainable development.

'Nature and biodiversity conservation' is explicitly listed in these provisions. They include a non-regression duty not to weaken or reduce the levels of protection in place on 31 December 2020 in a way that affects UK-EU trade or investment. They also permit the UK and EU to use rebalancing measures if their future levels of protection diverge.

In addition to the LPF provisions, biodiversity considerations come under other **provisions on environmental cooperation**. For example, the TCA sets out the basis for UK-EU cooperation in Articles 763-770, which apply to it and future UK-EU agreements. There are two provisions which relate directly to environment and climate:

- The fight against climate change; and

- Global cooperation on issues of shared economic, environmental and social interest.

'The fight against climate change' is also considered an 'essential element' of the TCA (Article 764). Essential elements have an elevated status in the TCA because a breach can lead to termination of the agreement.

The TCA's trade provisions include commitments to take sustainable development into account. Duties are placed on the UK and EU in a number of focused sections on trade and specific environmental areas, such as climate change, biological diversity, forests and marine biological resources and aquaculture.

In September 2025, four Senedd committees published a **joint report** on Wales' first four years under the TCA. The Climate Change, Environment, and Infrastructure (CCEI) reiterated its view that Brexit led to an **environmental governance gap in Wales** and pointed to the then **Environment (Governance, Principles and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Bill** (detailed below) as a means to address this.

Although it did not address biodiversity specifically, the Committee said that the TCA "represents a significant shift" because it contains no dedicated chapter on environment and climate cooperation. Instead, the TCA focuses on the environment in the context of trade. The Committee documented evidence received calling for future UK-EU alignment on related issues, such as deforestation, and for the potential of new UK-EU agreements on environment and climate. It concluded that:

The TCA has fundamentally altered the nature of UK-EU environmental cooperation, moving away from a shared governance framework to one underpinned primarily by economic interests. Although the TCA includes some high level environmental provisions, these largely reflect existing international commitments such as the Paris Agreement. Furthermore, the TCA's level playing field provisions and non-regression commitments do not replace environmental cooperation as was experienced under EU membership.

UK

Although nature conservation is devolved in Wales, the UK Government represents Wales at an international level and it is the UK that is party to the CBD.

Intergovernmental collaboration

The UK and devolved governments collaborate in the Four Countries' Biodiversity Group (4CBG) in order to meet national and international biodiversity commitments.

Post-EU withdrawal the UK countries also aim to coordinate action through **Common Frameworks** and regular inter-governmental meetings as part of **formal intergovernmental structures**.

The **Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)** was established under the **Environmental Protection Act 1990** and reconstituted under the **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006**. JNCC is the public body that advises the UK Government and devolved governments on UK-wide and international nature conservation. JNCC includes representatives of the nations' statutory nature conservation bodies, including NRW for Wales.

UK biodiversity legislation

Below are the main laws that address biodiversity at a UK level, and apply to Wales.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

The **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981** (as amended) is the key legislation for the protection of animals, plants and habitats in the UK. It implements the EU Birds Directive, providing the legislative basis for SPAs.

The 1981 Act prohibits (with exceptions):

- intentionally killing, injuring or taking listed wild animals;
- intentionally picking, uprooting or destroying listed wild plants;
- introducing non-native wild species, both animals and plants, into the wild; and
- possessing invasive species.

The 1981 Act legislates for:

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs);
- National Nature Reserves; and
- Marine Nature Reserves.

The designation of these protected areas in Wales is generally the responsibility of NRW.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

The [Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017](#) is the main piece of legislation through which the EU Habitats Directive and parts of the EU Birds Directive are implemented in England and Wales for terrestrial and inshore habitats.

Regulations for the offshore

For offshore marine areas, the Nature Directives are implemented through the [Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017](#) and the [Offshore Petroleum Activities \(Conservation and Habitats\) Regulations 2001](#).

Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019

The 1981 Act, both 2017 Regulations, and the 2001 Regulations have been amended by the [Conservation of Habitats and Species \(Amendment\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations 2019](#) in order to keep them operable post-EU exit.

The 2019 Regulations replace the Natura 2000 network through a new UK National Site Network. The [Explanatory Memorandum](#) to the 2019 Regulations states:

The intention is to ensure habitat and species protection and standards as set out under the Nature Directives are implemented in the same way or an equivalent way when the UK exits the EU. There is no change to policy.

Further UK legislation

Further UK legislation on biodiversity, relating to Wales, includes:

- [National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949](#);
- [Fisheries Act 2020](#);
- [Marine and Coastal Act 2009](#); and

- **Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order 2019.**

UK biodiversity policy

In 2021, JNCC, along with Natural England, NRW, NatureScot and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, published **Nature Positive 2030**, which includes two reports: a **Summary Report** and an **Evidence Report**. These reports describe how the UK can fulfil its commitments to the **Leaders' Pledge for Nature**, launched at the United Nations General Assembly in 2020 to reverse biodiversity loss by 2030.

In the run up to COP15 in 2022, the UK's Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies published the **Nature for Our Survival, Prosperity and Wellbeing** Joint Statement, building on Nature Positive 2030 and reinforcing the need for action.

In 2025 the four UK governments published the **UK national biodiversity strategy and action plan for 2030** (UK NBSAP). The UK NBSAP commits the UK to achieving all 23 GBF targets.

The UK submitted a set of 23 National Targets to the CBD in August 2024. These sit alongside the UK NBSAP and include a subset of country-level commitments to illustrate the actions for delivering the GBF in the UK. These are publicly available on the **CBD Online Reporting Tool**.

Wales

Welsh biodiversity legislation

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016

The purpose of Part 1 of the **Environment (Wales) Act 2016** (2016 Act) is to promote sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR).

Section 6 of the 2016 Act requires public authorities to maintain and enhance biodiversity to promote ecosystem resilience. This 'biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty' includes that public authorities must publish plans setting out their proposed actions to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem resilience, and **report on their progress** every three years. This duty has been augmented by the **Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act 2026** (detailed below).

Section 7 of the 2016 Act requires the Welsh Ministers to take all reasonable steps to maintain and enhance **living organisms and types of habitat that are of principal importance** for biodiversity in Wales.

The 2016 Act also establishes a framework of reports/policies for SMNR:

- Every 5 years, NRW must publish a State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) which provides the evidence base on SMNR in Wales, including biodiversity, and considers trends affecting SMNR. **SoNaRR 2025** is the most recent publication.
- The Welsh Ministers must publish and implement a national natural resources policy, outlining key priorities, risks and opportunities for SMNR. The policy must be reviewed after each general election. The first **Natural Resource Policy** (NRP) was published in 2017, and reviewed by the Welsh Government in 2026, at the end of the government's term. **The previous Welsh Government's intention** was for a revised NRP to be published during the Seventh Senedd.
- NRW must publish **area statements**, which are place-based natural resource reports, contain references to natural resources in an area, explain how the principles of SMNR have been applied, and address any priorities, risks or concerns.

The 2016 Act also includes provisions that have an impact on biodiversity such as on climate change targets, waste, fisheries and marine licensing.

Senedd Research has **produced a guide** with more details on the SMNR requirements of the 2016 Act (though note some aspects have been augmented by the **Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act 2026** (detailed below)).

The Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act 2026

The **Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act 2026** (the 2026 Act) introduces:

- an environmental objective and environmental principles to underpin decision-making (Part 1);
 - powers to establish a statutory body, the 'Office of Environmental Governance Wales' (OEGW), responsible for ensuring public authorities comply with their duties under environmental law (Part 2); and
 - a biodiversity target setting framework (Part 3).
-

The biodiversity targets will be introduced through regulations in the following priority areas:

- (a) reducing the risk of the extinction of native species;*
- (b) the effective management of ecosystems;*
- (c) reducing pollution; and*
- (d) the quality of evidence to inform decisions relating to biodiversity, access to that evidence and its use and application.*

The regulations must be introduced by April 2028.

Part 3 of the 2026 Act also augments the Section 6 biodiversity and ecosystem resilience duty of the 2016 Act, including aligning the duty to the biodiversity targets.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015

The **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** (2015 Act) aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales in accordance with the sustainable development principle. This means that public bodies must act so that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The 2015 Act defines seven well-being goals. The goal “A resilient Wales” recognises the importance of biodiversity for well-being:

A nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems that support social, economic and ecological resilience and the capacity to adapt to change (for example climate change).

The 2015 Act requires **national well-being indicators** to measure the progress towards this and other well-being goals defined in the Act. Indicators 43 (‘Areas of healthy ecosystems in Wales’) and 44 (‘Status of Biological diversity in Wales’) particularly consider biodiversity.

Other relevant legislation

Other pieces of legislation relate to biodiversity in Wales through addressing drivers of biodiversity loss. Some examples are included below.

- The **Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Wales) Act 2023** bans the sale or supply of certain single-use plastic products in Wales. Single-use plastic items are the dominant source of ocean litter, threatening biodiversity, especially marine habitats. **Another Senedd Research briefing** provides further information.
- The **Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) (Wales) Regulations 2021** include regulatory measures to address pollution of waterways, applying to all farmers in Wales. These include controlling the spread of nitrogen fertiliser and storage of slurry.
- The **Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023** introduces the Sustainable Land Management (SLM) objectives which underpin farm support. SLM objectives are: sustainable food production; mitigating and adapting to climate change; enhancing ecosystem resilience; and conserving the cultural resources of the countryside, promoting public access and the Welsh language.
- The **Planning (Wales) Act 2015** aims to support sustainable development through the planning process.
- The **Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Act 2024** aims to improve air quality in Wales and makes provision for national strategies.

Welsh biodiversity policy

Many Welsh Government policies have a bearing on biodiversity and the previous Welsh Government had **an ambition to integrate biodiversity considerations** across government. Below are some examples.

Nature Recovery Action Plan

The **Nature Recovery Action Plan (NRAP)** is the Welsh Government's national biodiversity strategy and action plan which aims to address CBD commitments domestically. **The previous Welsh Government's intention was** that an updated NRAP will be consolidated with the Welsh Government's biodiversity plan under Section 6 of the 2016 Act (augmented by the 2026 Act).

Protected areas

There are a number of designations to protect areas for nature (detailed in the [Annex](#) to this briefing). As discussed, the National Site Network includes Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The previous Welsh Government's [Nature Networks Programme](#) aims to strengthen the National Site Network. This includes the [Nature Networks Fund](#) where grants are awarded for [projects](#) that improve the condition of, and connectivity between, protected sites.

There are Welsh Government policies aiming to protect biodiversity in designated landscapes (National Parks and National Landscapes) such as [Ffermio Bro](#) which aims to support farmers in the delivery of the 30by30 target. Designated landscapes have special protections in national planning policy (see [Planning Policy Wales](#)).

Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures

Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) are areas of conservation potential outside of statutory protected sites and [can contribute to 30by30](#). Importantly, [the previous Welsh Government highlighted](#) that OECM status is a recognition, not a regulation. The status does not oblige additional management requirements for landowners. Instead, it acknowledges where conservation outcomes are already being achieved through existing governance and management. [A programme of identifying OECMs](#) is on-going, and they will be known as '[Naturfa](#)' sites in Wales.

Marine Protected Areas

Protections in the marine environment are collectively known as Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and include SACs, SPAs and Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) amongst others ([see Annex](#)). [The Marine Protected Area management framework for Wales 2018-2023](#) describes the MPA network, how it's managed, and ways to improve its management and condition. The framework states the Welsh Government has overall responsibility for ensuring effective management of MPAs, but 'management authorities' (organisations with statutory responsibilities in relation to any type of MPA) have responsibility for delivering management measures. The annual [Marine Protected Area Network Management Action Plan](#) aims to complement the framework by setting priority actions to improve the management and condition of MPAs. The framework and action plan have not been updated since ending in 2023.

Local Places for Nature

The **Local Places for Nature (LPfN) programme**, commencing in early 2020, aims to help communities with high deprivation and little access to nature to restore and enhance nature in their local areas. This programme supports small-scale projects carried out by local authorities and community groups. **Examples include** the creation of green spaces, community orchards, and growing projects; changes in mowing practices; and tree planting.

National Peatlands Action Programme

The **National Peatlands Action Programme (NPAP)** aims to restore peatlands in Wales to restore ecosystems, regulate water, and store and capture carbon. NPAP is funded by the Welsh Government and coordinated by NRW.

Natur am Byth

Natur am Byth targets the protection of endangered species in Wales and community engagement to promote nature conservation. This programme is led by NRW, in partnership with nine environmental charities.

Local Nature Partnerships

Local Nature Partnerships (LNP) have been set up around Wales, funded by the Welsh Government to:

- provide biodiversity advice;
- maximise funding opportunities and collaborations;
- empower community groups to take action; and
- target community engagement activities by drawing on their skill sets and those of LNP partners.

Tree planting

The Welsh Government's **Woodlands for Wales strategy** (first published in 2009 and updated in 2018) recognises that woodlands can make significant contribution to biodiversity and healthy ecosystems.

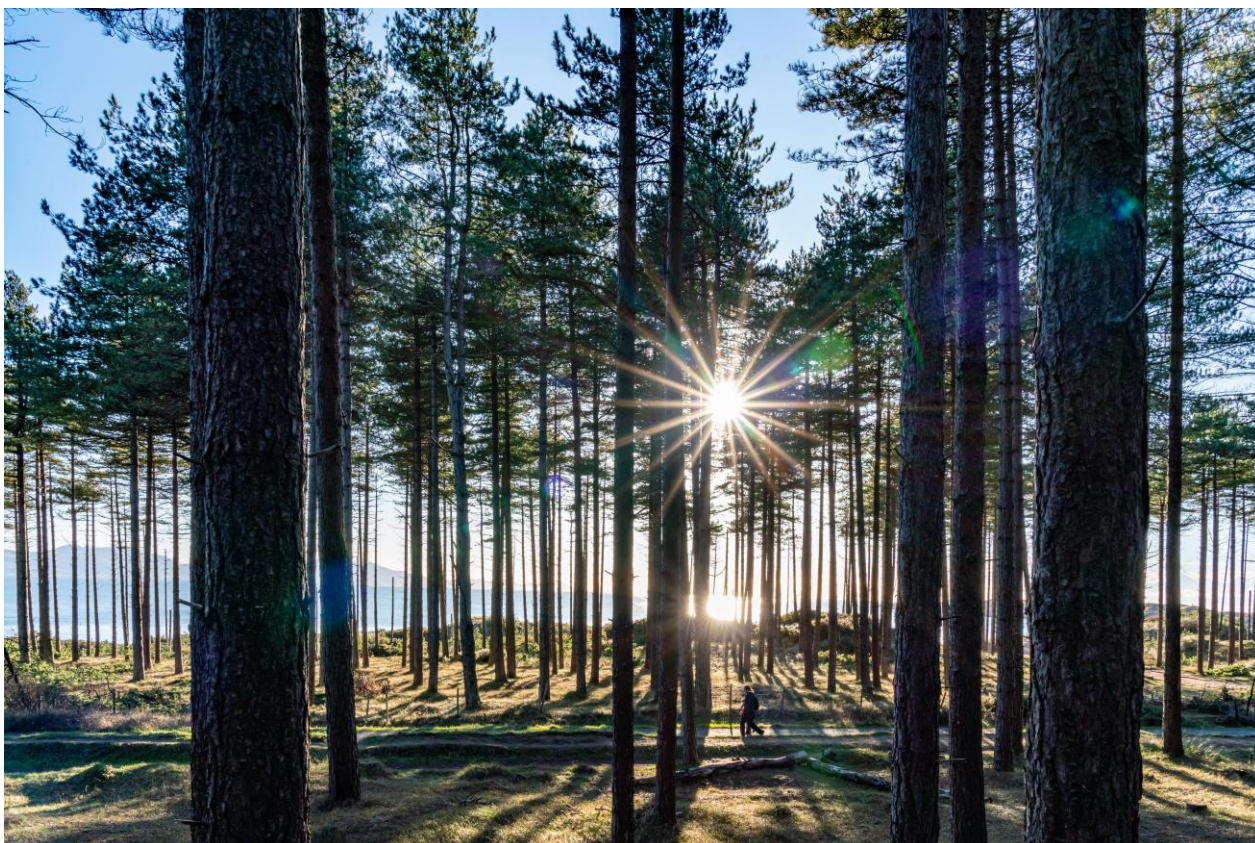
Tree planting targets have changed over time, and tree planting rates have been **well below target** for a number of years. In 2021 the Welsh Government

set a target of **43,000 hectares (ha) of new woodland planted by 2030**, to meet a **UK Climate Change Committee (UKCCC) 2020 recommendation**. The UKCCC more recently (2025) recommended a lower tree planting target of 22,000ha of woodland planted by 2030 as part of the updated **balanced pathway ambition**. However it suggested a more ambitious 2050 target of 208,000ha.

A **Trees and Timber Deep Dive** in 2021 resulted in a number of **recommendations** around afforestation to meet the aims of the Woodlands for Wales strategy. The **Timber Industrial Strategy** was subsequently published in 2025.

The **National Forest** is a long-term Welsh Government project **launched in March 2020**. It comprises both **creation of new woodland** and upgrading existing woodland to meet UK forestry standards and **National Forest for Wales Outcomes**. The National Forest aims to improve biodiversity by providing: habitat for wildlife; carbon capture to mitigate climate change; and benefits for rural development, the economy, and recreation. The **National Forest for Wales Status Scheme** was launched in June 2023.

Figure 6: Newborough Forest on the Anglesey coast



Sustainable Farming Scheme

The **Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS)** is the Welsh Government's agricultural support policy which incentivises actions to achieve the Sustainable Land Management (SLM) objectives - including ecosystem resilience (detailed above).

All those joining the scheme are required to undertake the **'Universal' actions** to receive the Universal Baseline Payment, including a **Social Value Payment**. Non-compulsory **'Optional'** and **'Collaborative'** actions, which are expected to deliver more ambitious outcomes, will be available for additional payment.

There is a **scheme requirement** to have 10% habitat on each farm. While tree planting is not a scheme rule or Universal action, **the previous Welsh Government's ambition** was for at least 17,000ha of new trees to be planted under SFS incentives by 2030.

Net benefit for biodiversity in planning policy

The Net Benefit for Biodiversity approach (in **Planning Policy Wales** (PPW)) is that development should leave biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems in a "significantly better state than before". This is through securing immediate and long-term, measurable and demonstrable benefit, primarily on or immediately adjacent to the site. A 'step-wise' approach is set out in PPW.

Nature recovery for the strategic road network

The previous Welsh Government published **Llwybr Newydd i Natur – the Nature Recovery Action Plan for our Strategic Road Network** in October 2023. This was a result of the previous Welsh Government's Roads Review and COP15. It recognises that the road network provides an opportunity to improve habitat connectivity across the landscape through roadside hedgerows, grasslands and woodlands.

4. Biodiversity monitoring

Biodiversity monitoring is undertaken by a number of partners to understand trends in species and habitats, and the drivers of change. Biodiversity monitoring is also a mechanism to engage citizens to promote the public's appreciation of nature.

NRW is responsible for monitoring the condition of the features in the protected site network through UK **'Common Standards Monitoring'**.

The Welsh Government models and monitors the environmental, social and economic impact of some of its policies through the **Environment and Rural Affairs Monitoring & Modelling Programme (ERAMMP)** which is led by the UK Centre of Ecology and Hydrology. It collects data across the Welsh landscape and links any changes to ensuing impacts, such as economic consequences.

There are UK-wide monitoring programmes run on a volunteer basis, particularly for bats, birds, butterflies, plants, and pollinators and **the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) has a role** in collating this information. JNCC also leads the development of the **UK Marine Biodiversity Monitoring Programme**.

Monitoring of protected sites in the marine environment has been identified as an area needing more resource, as a lack of data **has made it difficult** to accurately assess progress towards 30by30. NRW has carried out **an assessment** of evidence needs.

The collaborative **Nature Positive 2030** report by JNCC and the four UK statutory nature conservation bodies highlights the availability of citizen science and technology such as **remote sensing** and genetics to improve biodiversity monitoring.

5. Financing nature recovery in Wales

In addition to government funding for biodiversity improvements, private revenues for investing in nature are gaining more focus.

Funding for nature has been provided directly by the previous Welsh Government through a variety of programmes and schemes across a number of policy areas as highlighted above such as the Nature Network Programme, Local Places for Nature Programme, and Natur am Byth.

Following the 2022 Biodiversity Deep Dive, **the previous Welsh Government committed**, in the longer-term, to “increase public investment in nature’s recovery by ensuring the response to the nature emergency is integrated across government departments”.

The Sixth Senedd’s Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee **recommended** the “government should consider increasing allocations for biodiversity in light of the nature emergency” during 2026-27 draft budget scrutiny.

The Welsh Government’s **Nature Recovery Action Plan 2020-21** recognised the need to increase private investment in nature recovery. The Biodiversity Deep Dive reiterated this, committing the previous Welsh Government to take action to “unlock...private finance to deliver for nature at far greater scale”.

In September 2024, the Welsh Government published **Draft Sustainable Investment Principles**, aiming to guide private investment in nature. The Principles aim to ensure funding is “of high integrity, benefits and engages local communities and avoids inappropriate land use change and greenwashing”.

6. Key issues for the Seventh Senedd

This section briefly explores some of the key issues that may arise during the Seventh Senedd, based on stakeholder asks.

The Sixth Senedd's Climate Change, Environment and Infrastructure Committee carried out an inquiry exploring some of these issues, recommending various actions to tackle the nature emergency.

Biodiversity targets

Stakeholders are calling for meaningful and timely biodiversity targets to be brought forward as a priority through regulations under the Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act 2026.

RSPB Cymru is looking for multiple targets to be set for each priority area, and several stakeholders have emphasised the importance of stakeholder engagement in the target setting process. NRW has stressed the biodiversity targets “must be measurable, time-bound, and embedded across sectors” and that future SoNaRR reports must demonstrate what has been delivered.

Protected areas

Experts say, to reach the 30by30 target, sites protected for nature must be “better, bigger, and more effectively connected” and a specific recommendation of the Biodiversity Deep Dive included an action to:

Ensure protected sites (management, monitoring, designation), land and sea, are a priority for NRW through corporate and future strategies and provide adequate funding.

An Audit Wales report has since highlighted limited action by NRW to designate SSSIs.

There will be **pressure on the new government** to improve marine protections through improved designation, management and monitoring including **designation of a new Marine Conservation Zone**.

RSPB Cymru is calling for reform of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 to ensure the statutory purposes, duties and governance arrangements of these designated landscapes do more for biodiversity.

Office of Environmental Governance Wales

Stakeholders are calling for the new Office of Environment Governance Wales (OEGW) to be set up as a priority to fill the 'environmental governance gap' and for it to be **independent and appropriately funded** to carry out its functions effectively. The Environment (Principles, Governance and Biodiversity Targets) (Wales) Act 2026 requires the OEGW to be established and functional by April 2028.

Pollution

Tackling pollution into watercourses including from **agriculture** and **sewerage** have been high profile issues.

In 2025 there was a **statutory review of the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations** resulting in 23 recommendations to be taken forward over the short, medium and long term. **The previous Welsh Government accepted** the recommendations in full.

With incidences of **untreated wastewater release from storm overflows**, environmental stakeholders are **calling for** more action to address this source of pollution, and in February 2026 the **previous Welsh Government set out proposals** to reform the water industry.

Tree planting

Environmental stakeholders often refer to the right tree in the right place principle to ensure benefits are maximised. The **National Forest in Wales Evidence Review** found that benefits for biodiversity may be highest when improving woodland quality instead of size. This issue is addressed in a **Senedd Research article**.

Sustainable Farming Scheme

Environmentalists are calling for the Optional and Collaborate layers to be appropriately funded so that farmers are incentivised to deliver for the environment. **RSPB Cymru says** the SFS must go further to reverse the decline of threatened species.

Farming Unions say achieving the ambition of the SFS and the SLM objectives will require an uplift in funding from the 2026-27 budget allocation.

Green jobs

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) has highlighted capacity gaps in the ecology sector.

Nature Service Wales (NSW) aimed to create a national movement to deliver nature-based skills and knowledge through education, training, and volunteering, delivered via a network of local partners. **Wales Environment Link** says NSW is “the way we can shift our skills, help young people with jobs and retrain those in unsustainable industries with a clear route to skills that are more necessary than ever”. **NSW has called for** the Welsh Government to commit to investing in its long-term potential.

Financing

Wales Environment Link’s Pathways to 2030 report highlights the need for further investment to finance nature recovery. This report argues that insufficient funding has caused nature loss in the past. It estimates **an additional £158 million per annum** is required for appropriate nature recovery action.

Wales Environment Links’s **Innovative Funding paper** and its **research into innovative funding mechanisms** sets out ideas for taxes, levies and funds to be created from pollution products or processes, “so that we have at least some small form of compensation to reinvest in our natural resources”.

Annex - Protected areas

This section brings together the different types of designations in Wales to protect nature, and the underlying legislation.

Figure 7: Puffins on the coast of Skomer Island, in the only Marine Conservation Zone in Wales



Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) are recognised for their important wildlife and natural features (covering land, sea and freshwater) and are protected under section 28 of the **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**. NRW is responsible for designating sites as SSSIs. NRW also directly manages SSSIs on land it has responsibility for, and advises other landowners/occupiers on sites it does not manage directly. In 2025 there were **1,083 SSSIs** in Wales.

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) were originally designated under the EU Birds Directive, but post-EU exit they exist as part of the UK's National Site Network under the **Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019**. SPAs protect habitats of migratory and rare or vulnerable bird species, such as red kite, merlin, osprey and golden plover. SPAs are identified by NRW considering selection guidelines from JNCC. They can be on land or at sea.

Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) were originally designated under the EU Habitats Directive, but post-EU exit they exist as part of the UK's National Site Network under the **Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019**. SACs aim to conserve biodiversity through the protection of over 1,000 listed animal and plant species as well as 200 habitats. They can be on land or at sea.

The **National Site Network** is the replacement for **Natura 2000** following UK withdrawal from the EU. This network includes all previous Natura 2000 (SAC and SPA) sites, as well as the new SACs and SPAs designated after the UK left the EU. The objective is to provide the same level of protection for threatened species and habitats as with the EU Natura 2000 network, and to facilitate co-operation between stakeholders.

Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) aim to protect a range of rare or threatened marine habitats and species. MCZs replace the previous marine nature reserves through the **Marine and Coastal Act 2009**. There is currently one MCZ in Welsh seas, the **Skomer Marine Conservation Zone**.

Ramsar sites are protected wetlands under the **UNESCO Ramsar Convention**. Ramsar sites are identified by NRW, in collaboration with JNCC. All Ramsar sites are also SSSIs.

Biosphere reserves are designated by UNESCO and form part of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves. They receive protected status through other designations, such as SSSI. There is currently one Biosphere Reserve in Wales, the **Biosffer Dyfi Biosphere**.

National Nature Reserves (NNRs) are designated by NRW under the **National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949**, or under the **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**. Besides nature conservation, they are also designated for research and study purposes. All NNRs are also SSSIs. They are either managed by NRW or by voluntary bodies, such as the National Trust, the RSPB, or the Wildlife Trusts.

Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) are of local instead of national interest and don't have the statutory designation of NNRs. They are designated by local authorities. They include abandoned quarries, canals or disused railway sidings.

Designated landscapes are of two categories: 'National Parks' and 'National Landscapes' (National Landscapes were previously known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty -AONBs).

National Parks are established under the **National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949** and have two statutory purposes: "of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the areas"; and of "promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of those areas". Balancing conservation and recreation is driven by the **Sandford principle** which gives conservation priority over recreation when "irreconcilable" conflict occurs. The **Environment Act 1995** established National Park Authorities which are required to produce National Park Management Plans and are the local planning authority for the area.

National Landscapes are designated under the **Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000** and have one statutory purpose: "of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area". They don't have the same level of protection as National Parks and local planning decisions are made by the local authority.