



## Environment

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 will require public bodies listed in the act to improve the long-term economic, social and environmental well-being of Wales by contributing to the achievement of a set of 'well-being goals'. The incoming government will set these goals and report on progress.

In the meantime, the goals the Welsh Government has pursued over its last term of office are in the First Minister's Programme for Government. The Welsh Government's website provides data on progress, including the environment<sup>1</sup>.

### Greenhouse gas emissions

- The Welsh Government's latest Annual Report on Climate Change (2014)<sup>2</sup> shows that although Wales is meeting the target of cutting emissions by 3% a year, we are not on track to meet the overall target to cut emissions by 40% by 2020, from 1990 levels. The report showed that emissions were down by 17.9% from the 1990 level. Given how close 2020 now is, emissions will need to fall at a much faster rate if the target is to be met.

- The Annual Report shows that the best progress has been made through implementation of the Welsh Government's Towards Zero Waste strategy. This has not only put Wales fourth in Europe in terms of recycling, but has also decreased emissions by 20.4% and supported significant economic benefit for Wales. This begs the question why similar progress can't be made in other sectors. The devolved public sector, for instance, has reduced emissions by just 3.1% since 1990, and agriculture and land use by just 1.2%.
- The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 will, among other things, place a duty on the Welsh ministers to ensure that by 2050 emissions of greenhouse gases are cut by at least 80%.

### Renewable energy

- The contribution of renewable electricity generation to total electricity generation in Wales has increased to 10.1% in 2013 from 2.9% in 2004<sup>3</sup>.
- However, over the same period, the same measure increased from 11.7% to 32% in Scotland and from 2.1% to 19.7% in Northern Ireland.

- The UK Government has so far retained responsibility for approving onshore power-generating infrastructure above a threshold of 50MW, but now proposes to increase this threshold to 350MW. This will increase the scope for a future Welsh Government to promote renewable energy.

## Flooding

Many parts of Wales are vulnerable to flooding.

- Welsh Government data shows that in 2014 more than 208,000 properties in Wales were officially at risk of flooding<sup>4</sup>. The flooding disasters in recent years in Somerset, Cumbria and Yorkshire illustrate what is at stake, and the more intense patterns of rainfall expected with climate change mean that such problems are likely to become more frequent.
- The Welsh Government is committed to spending £245m on flood defence over its current term of office, coupled with £50m from the European Regional Development Fund. This funding is targeted primarily at building physical defences against flood-water and river and coastal erosion. It is also critically important, however, to reduce the rate at which rain runs off the hills after intense periods of rainfall, for instance by restoring upland peat and planting trees on valley slopes. This would require significant changes to farming practice.

## Wildlife

Reports such as the 2011 National Ecosystem Assessment show that Wales' biodiversity (plant and animal life) is continuing to decline and Wales did not meet its 2010 Biodiversity Targets. The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 aims to place a biodiversity duty on public bodies.

## Questions for candidates

1. Are you committed to meeting the 2020 target for cutting greenhouse gas emissions? Is this a priority? If it is a priority, what action do you propose to accelerate progress so that the target can be met?
2. Do you intend to accelerate the development of renewable energy? How?
3. Is sufficient priority being given to reducing the number of properties at risk of flooding? Have we got the balance right between building physical flood defences and preventative measures to make upland river catchments less vulnerable to sudden intense rainfall?
4. Do you think it is important to reverse the decline in Wales' wildlife. If so, how can public bodies help?

## References

- 1 <http://gov.wales/about/programmeforgov/environment/performance?lang=en> (viewed 18 January 2016)
- 2 <http://gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/climatechange/publications/2014-climate-change-annual-report/?lang=en> (viewed 13 January 2016)
- 3 <http://gov.wales/about/programmeforgov/environment/performance?code=OU013&lang=en> (viewed 13 January 2016)
- 4 <http://gov.wales/about/programmeforgov/environment/performance?code=OU091&lang=en> (viewed 13 January 2016)

