

The impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on the agriculture and fisheries sectors, food supply, animal welfare, climate change and the environment

ABOUT WCVA

1. Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) is the national membership organisation for the voluntary sector in Wales. Our vision is for a future where the third sector and volunteering thrive across Wales, improving wellbeing for all. Our mission is to be a catalyst for positive change by connecting, enabling and influencing.
2. We are pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the Committee's consultation. We thank those organisations and individuals who have contributed evidence to our response, which focuses primarily on the areas of climate change and the environment.
3. [The Third Sector Data Hub](#) tells us that environmental groups make up 5.4% of voluntary sector activity in Wales. However, a good number of voluntary sector organisations also deliver environmental improvements alongside their primary aim.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL ORGANISATIONS

4. During lockdown, WCVA held a series of events under the banner of #DifferentFuturesWales, exploring the impact of the outbreak on a number of themes, including the environment and climate change. During our environmental session, many

organisations noted that lockdown had led to a significant reduction in carbon emissions.

5. The crisis has also led to individuals reconnecting with their communities in ways that benefit the environment, including shopping locally and engaging with community growing schemes.
6. However, although the crisis has had beneficial effects such as the above, the furloughing of staff by local authorities has had negative impacts – for example, Wales Environment Link have reported that surveys on litter collection and fly tipping have not been able to proceed, creating a data gap.
7. Environmental organisations have, like the majority of sector organisations, suffered severe financial losses during the outbreak. This has hindered their essential work and will continue to do so into the future.
8. Eight environmental groups have applied to the Third Sector Resilience Fund at the time of writing, requesting a total of £249,591. At time of writing, a total of £183,810 has been awarded to four of these organisations. Others are still being considered by the panel.
9. Work should be done to analyse the effects of the crisis on the environmental sector, including Wildlife Trusts, to ascertain its resilience and impact on the volunteer base. It is these volunteers that provide the ground-level activity that benefits us all.
10. We are pleased that Welsh Government has joined the Well-Being Economics Government Network and hope this progresses the aims of the Future Generations Act while helping the country recover from the pandemic.
11. Discussions are ongoing regarding setting up a National Nature Service in Wales as a response to the crisis. This idea should be explored further via cross-sectoral dialogue.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CREATE A SUITABLE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

12. The impending recession means there is a danger of not capitalising on the positive impact community action has had on the environment during lockdown. There is a fear that, instead, economic stimuli that has a negative effect on climate change and the environment could be introduced. All plans and policy decisions Welsh Government make from this point forward must have environmental and climate change concerns embedded within them and, as far as possible, seek to sustain and encourage the new positive community and individual behaviours that have emerged during lockdown. It should seek to create a funding and policy environment to allow the sector to play its role in addressing climate change, building on the learning gained in the immediate response to the pandemic.

13. The Third Sector Support Wales network can link the grassroots community-based response to the national policy response, enabling knowledge transfer. The right space needs to be created to enable organisations to share experiences and best practice that has emerged or is emerging from the pandemic.
14. Cytun and the Welsh Centre for International Affairs have recently collaborated on research for WCVA, titled [*Responding to the climate crisis*](#). Although this work began pre-Covid, much of the learning from it is relevant as Wales seeks to recover from the crisis.
15. The sector should be supported to gather and develop better evidence related to climate and environmental action to help organisations decide what action they should take. Cynnal Cymru's Carbon Literacy Project and the Centre For Alternative Technology's Zero Carbon Britain has developed tools to assist organisations with this.
16. The research from Cytun and WCIA indicates that the voluntary sector in Wales lacks expertise in economics. Upskilling of the sector is required to help organisations understand the impact their economic decisions have on the environment and for them to fully engage with the Foundational Economy.
17. Consideration of the impacts of climate change must be embedded within all thinking and decisions related to the Foundational Economy. The Foundational Economy can make a huge contribution to a low carbon future, particularly in the areas of food supply and local energy generation. However, there has not been an explicit link made between the Foundational Economy and climate change. The voluntary sector is well-placed to forge this link, building on WWF Cymru's Environmental and Foundational Economy Conceptual Model.
18. The Sustainable Development Alliance must seek to become stronger, working closely across the four nations, with academia, government, businesses, trade unions, the Future Generations Commissioner and the public sector on tackling climate change, while ensuring that people of all backgrounds are given a voice.
19. Welsh Government's work on the Foundational Economy, the low carbon economy, decarbonisation of the public sector and the Economic Contract provide a framework for tackling climate change. These strategies must be implemented effectively, but this implementation must be co-ordinated and co-produced with all stakeholders.
20. We are pleased that the voluntary sector is being encouraged to submit proposals to the Green Recovery Panel convened by Natural Resources Wales.

ISSUE FURTHER GUIDANCE AS LOCKDOWN EASES

21. As lockdown eases there is a risk of emissions increasing once again as people start to use their cars more. Welsh Government should seek to combat this by promoting the Active Travel Act across Wales and seek further opportunities to embed it into current practices.
22. Communities should also be issued with renewed guidance on organising beach cleans for voluntary groups, as the relaxation of lockdown has led to a spike in people and litter on our shores.
23. On the subject of pollution, Refill have flagged a recent rise in disposable plastic containers being used in the food sector, including takeaway bags, plastic bags for supermarket deliveries and coffee shops refusing to accept reusable coffee cups due to hygiene concerns around refillable containers. Also, PPE equipment such as masks have been found littering parks and streets. Welsh Government should issue guidance to the food sector and the public about the need to continue using multi-use containers and cut back on plastics.
24. Communities should be supported to continue or begin work on local initiatives, such as food growing projects and community energy schemes, that can reduce emissions and food poverty as well as potentially engaging those who have been lonely or socially isolated. Place-based initiatives such as these can be key in the localisation agenda and community recovery from the crisis.

INVOLVE COMMUNITIES IN THE RECOVERY

25. Should office space become redundant following the increase in home working, there are opportunities to convert these spaces for other use that deliver health and bio-diversity benefits for local communities.
26. Work needs to be undertaken to engage emerging community leaders in climate change and sustain the community response. The sector, with support from government and the public sector, is well placed to do this. The Local Nature Partnerships have a role to play too in engaging leaders and coordinating and supporting nature-focused volunteer activity. All this activity will contribute to communities' sense of place. Pride in place will lead to more environmentally-conscious communities, as set out in our report [Empowering Communities](#). The [Square Mile](#) concept is a further indication of the relationships people have with their immediate environment and how a sense of place can create belonging, community and an enjoyable environment for all.

INVEST IN JOBS

27. We echo Wales Environment Link's call for investment in green and blue jobs. These are jobs which have a role in restoring, protecting and maintaining the environment, such as nature conservation, land management and sustainable tourism, and are vital for ensuring a green and just recovery. However, these should have defined career paths and be paid the Real Living Wage.

PREPARE FOR BREXIT

28. There are a number of environmental concerns relating to Brexit, including the potential loss of EU regulations with a positive effect on tackling climate change; possible loss of access to the EU Carbon Trading Scheme; loss of a funding source for environmental action; possible reductions in international trade and the loss of its positive benefits, such as reducing global poverty, and the danger of UK withdrawal from other international efforts. It is vital that Welsh Government has constructive dialogue with UK Government on these issues as post-Brexit legislation is developed to minimise the negative impacts and enhance any positive ones for Wales.

THE RESILIENCE OF THE SECTOR

29. Environmental organisations, whose income has already been negatively impacted by the crisis, continue to run into problems with Welsh Government's main environmental grant schemes – the Natural Resources and Wellbeing Grant Scheme and the Sustainable Management Scheme, as well the administration of the European Maritime Fisheries Fund. Issues include delays with payments and lack of access to officials. Many organisations are still awaiting payment for completed work. It is essential these payments are made swiftly to help these organisations survive. The Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs voluntary sector group has already held discussions with the Environment Minister about these issues.

30. Cuts to Natural Resources Wales' budget, due to Covid-19, will have a negative impact on their work and ability to support the work of the voluntary sector.

DISCUSSION

31. WCVA will be pleased to discuss these or any other points relating to this consultation response with officials, committees or Ministers if requested.

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