



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Government Integrated Impact Assessment Summary

Title of proposal: Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Bill

Department: Climate Change and Rural Affairs

Minister responsible: Julie James, Minister for Climate Change

Start Date: March 2023

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What action is the Welsh Government considering and why?

The World Health Organisation describes [air](#) and airborne [noise](#) pollution (collectively “airborne pollution”) as two of the largest environmental health risks in Western Europe. Air and noise pollution can also adversely affect wildlife through widespread changes to species distribution and the quality of habitats. It contributes to acidification of soil and surface water, eutrophication in sensitive habitats and damages vegetation through exposure to ozone.

The aim of the Welsh Government [Clean Air Plan for Wales: Healthy Air, Healthy Wales](#) (“the Clean Air Plan”) is to improve air quality and reduce impacts of air pollution on human health, biodiversity, the natural environment and our economy.

Our [Noise and Soundscape Plan](#) (due to be updated in 2023) aims to achieve appropriate soundscapes, meaning the right sound environment in the right time and place.

Both our Clean Air Plan and Noise and Soundscape Plan, describe actions Welsh Government is taking to tackle airborne pollution across society. In the main, we have legislative and policy tools to deliver the Plans. However, we identified areas where we need to change and update existing legislation to deliver our aim.

We published a [White Paper to consult on proposals for a Clean Air Bill for Wales](#). The responses received to the White Paper further informed development of proposals contained in the Environment (Air Quality and Soundscapes) (Wales) Bill (“the Bill”).

In summary, the Bill will:

- ◆ provide a framework for setting national air quality targets;
- ◆ amend existing legislation relating to:
 - the national air quality strategy;
 - local air quality management;
 - smoke control;
 - clean air zones/low emission zones; and
 - vehicle idling;
- ◆ place a duty on Welsh Ministers to promote awareness of air pollution; and
- ◆ place a duty on Welsh Ministers to publish a national soundscape strategy.

Long term trends, challenges and opportunities

Exposure to pollutants including fine particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide can cause some health problems and make others worse. Breathing in these pollutants over several years can increase health risks from heart and lung diseases, including lung cancer. There is also evidence other body organs may be affected, with possible effects on dementia, low birth weight and diabetes.

Quantifying health impacts of air pollution is difficult, but there is strong evidence linked with adverse health impacts. Therefore, it is important to [take action](#) to [reduce air pollution](#) and harm that goes with it.

[It is estimated air pollution is responsible for an effect equivalent to between 29,000 and 43,000 deaths per year in the UK. In Wales, the burden range estimate \(using 2019 data\) is reported as being equivalent to between 1,200 and 2,000 deaths \(at typical ages\) each year.](#) Burden range does not reflect ‘actual’ deaths from air pollution exposure. It is an estimate of the ‘equivalent’ reduced life expectancy, when summed, which everyone experiences because of air pollution exposure.

Improvement in our air environment requires sustained and long-term action, with many actions requiring significant investment and behaviour change to be effective.

Long-term targets set by regulation under the Bill will reflect current evidence. We will balance desirability of achieving lower levels sooner and associated health benefits, against impacts on society including costs and effects of possible measures required to achieve them.

Prevention

The Bill aims to address the underlying causes of poor air and soundscape by reducing emissions, preventing harm to human health and habitats and, where this is not possible, by mitigating the effects of such emissions. It also supports efforts to tackle the climate and nature emergencies and reduce inequalities.

Integration

Action to improve the air environment is integrated with our cross-Government strategies and plans, including the [Programme for Government](#), [the Net Zero Wales Plan](#), and [the Wales Transport Strategy](#). It also aligns to key areas of the Environment (Wales) Act and priorities in our statutory [Natural Resources Policy](#) and [Planning Policy Wales](#).

Proposals have been developed within the context of our obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act as highlighted in the [Clean Air Plan for Wales \(pages 16-21\)](#).

Collaboration

Solutions to improving the air environment can be complex, requiring collaborative actions across society, including national and local governments, businesses and the public.

Partners who have a shared interest in Bill proposals include relevant departments within Welsh Government, UK Government, local authorities, NGOs, Public Health Wales, NHS Health Boards, Natural Resources Wales and Transport for Wales.

These partners have contributed to the development of the Clean Air Plan, the Noise and Soundscape Plan and consultation on the Bill's proposals and will contribute to delivery of actions needed to implement the Bill and ensure well-being objectives are met.

Involvement

We have involved internal and external stakeholders across Government and sectors, including the public (including protected characteristic groups), in developing proposals in the Bill as well as our Clean Air Plan and our Noise and Soundscape Plan. We continue to involve these stakeholders through the implementation process to draw on their wealth of knowledge and understanding of what is needed in different places by different groups of people.

Impact

[There is significant research](#) from Welsh, UK and international sources that makes clear the relationship between air pollution, health and mortality. In addition, air pollution has caused widespread changes to sensitive ecosystems in Wales. We have substantial evidence of the need and action required to tackle airborne pollution across many sectors, including from agricultural, commercial, domestic, industrial and transport sources.

Costs and Savings

The Regulatory Impact Assessment accompanying the Bill sets out estimated costs and benefits of proposals contained within it. However, to achieve sustained environmental improvements, there will be cost implications beyond the current spending review period.

Given cross-Government financial pressures at the time of writing this IIA and likely ongoing challenging fiscal context, the scale and timing of the implementation of some of the secondary legislation that arises from the provisions of the Bill, such as that relating to new air quality targets and associated monitoring arrangements, will need to be considered in the context of spending plans for future budget rounds.

Conclusion

1. How have people most likely to be affected by the proposal been involved in developing it?

The Bill should be understood in the context of the [Clean Air Plan: Healthy Air, Healthy Wales](#) which it is designed to complement.

The consultation on the Clean Air Plan opened on 10 December 2019 and closed on 10 March 2020. In total there were 1,210 responses to the consultation included members of the public, NGOs and public bodies. In addition, officials held three public consultation workshops, attended by a total of 124 people and attended a meeting of the Wrexham Youth Parliament on 24 February 2020 to seek feedback on the Plan. The Plan was published in August 2020 containing actions to consult on a White Paper on a Clean Air (Wales) Bill.

The Welsh Government's proposals for the Bill were consulted on from 13 January to 7 April 2021 in the [White Paper on a Clean Air \(Wales\) Bill](#), Making Wales a better and healthier place to live.

In total we received 119 contributions to the consultation, including opinions provided at the White Paper event held on 11 March 2021 which was held virtually due to restrictions on face-to-face engagement due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents included members of the public, NGOs and public bodies. The [Summary of Responses](#) shows a range of views were expressed, but respondents were generally supportive of the proposals for legislation.

Discussions with stakeholders continued during 2022, in a process of more targeted engagement, this included, for example, the Children's Right Advisory Group, Healthy Air Cymru and the Cross-Party Group on the Clean Air Act.

The Welsh Government will consult on a new Noise and Soundscape Plan during 2023. This work has been informed by extensive discussions with the acoustics community over the course of the last few years.

2. What are the most significant impacts, positive and negative?

Positive impacts

The overarching aim of the Bill is to bring forward measures that will contribute to improvements in the quality of the air environment in Wales and reduce the impacts of airborne pollution on human health, biodiversity, the natural environment and our economy.

By introducing the Bill, we also aim to maximise our contribution to the sustainable development principle of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (WFGA) to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. The Bill is firmly grounded in the seven well-being goals in the WFGA.

Our consultations and targeted engagement have shown there is strong support for action in this area. We identified several potential positive benefits:

A resilient Wales: Improvements in the air environment have a direct, significant and positive impact locally, regionally and nationally on the Welsh environment and ecosystem functioning.

A Prosperous Wales: Action taken to improve air quality will support economic growth in Wales. Wales is dependent on a productive workforce and being an attractive place for businesses to invest. A healthy workforce and clean air environment would contribute to prosperity through a productive workforce. Improvements in health reduce medical and health costs.

A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language: We are committed to having air quality and soundscapes which support the people of Wales and visitors to enjoy a wide range of recreational activities across Wales. Protection of natural ecosystems and biodiversity would enhance the cultural capital of Wales and can support outdoor activities. We will ensure equal standards in English and Welsh through the implementation of the proposals contained in the Bill. We will ensure there are opportunities to promote the Welsh language through work to implement the new duty placed on Welsh Ministers to promote awareness of air pollution.

A Healthier Wales: The World Health Organisation has described air pollution as the world's largest single environmental health risk. Pollutants such as fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) and nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) are a cause of some health problems and can make others worse. Breathing in these pollutants over several years can increase health risks from heart and lung diseases, and lung cancer. There is also evidence that other body organs may also be affected, with possible effects on dementia, low birth weight and diabetes. Symptoms arising from shorter-term exposure can include eye, nose and throat irritation. Action taken to implement the proposals in the Bill will result in an improvement in air quality with consequent improvements in public health.

A more equal Wales: Reduction of air pollution will have a direct and significant impact on improving health and welfare for everyone, with the greatest impact likely to be felt by those who disproportionately experience greater impacts from air pollution due to health or socioeconomic reasons.

A Wales of cohesive communities: Actions to improve air quality which are led by or co-produced with local communities will carry greater impact and be better integrated with other actions to improve the quality of life, health and well-being, the environment and opportunities for prosperity. Such actions can be encouraged as part of the duty the Bill places on Welsh Ministers to promote awareness of air pollution.

A globally responsible Wales: Air pollution is a major global environmental problem affecting everyone. Air pollution does not respect national and international borders. The Bill demonstrates Welsh Ministers are taking strong positive action on air quality in Wales to meet our national and

international ethical and legal obligations. This action consolidates Wales's standing in the international community as a country dedicated to sustainability and environmental action.

Negative impacts

It is unlikely ambitious national air quality targets set under the Bill could be achieved without additional action beyond the existing policies, measures and natural technology turnover which are planned and committed to. Actions by Welsh Government, public bodies, businesses and individuals are expected to require both changes to behaviour and technology, with implications in terms of lifestyle and economic cost. The level of cost, benefit, feasibility and ambition will be taken into account when modelling a range of possible future emissions reduction scenarios to inform the setting of target levels and dates.

It will therefore be important for individuals and businesses to engage with the consultation process on future target proposals. As policy pathways for achievement of the targets are developed in the future, there will be further opportunities for consultation on specific measures that are tailored to local areas and their sources.

3. In light of the impacts identified, how will the proposal:

- maximise contribution to our well-being objectives and the seven well-being goals; and/or,
- avoid, reduce or mitigate any negative impacts?

The ways in which the Bill's proposals will contribute to the Welsh Government's seven well-being goals are outlined above.

The Bill's proposals will also maximise our contribution to the Welsh Government's well-being objectives. In particular, the commitment to embed our response to the climate and nature emergency in everything we do. The Bill's proposals are a key step in meeting our aim to improve air quality and reduce the impacts of air pollution on human health, biodiversity, the natural environment and our economy.

In achieving that goal, the Bill needs to be seen in a broad context, and not in isolation. It:

- is a crucial part of a package of measures set out in our Clean Air Plan to reduce airborne pollution and improve the air environment in Wales;
- builds on a suite of existing legislation; and
- complements legislation to achieve appropriate soundscapes as set out in the Noise and Soundscape Action Plan 2018-2023.

The Bill's proposals provide a framework for action that will have the effect of reducing airborne pollution (i.e. both air pollution and noise pollution). At this time, it is not possible to accurately assess the full impact the proposals will have. That more accurate assessment will need to be undertaken when the proposals in the Bill are implemented, as that is when the detail will be finalised, and evidence-based decisions will be taken on proposals such as targets to be set under the Air Quality Targets Regulations and the detail of road charging schemes for reducing or limiting air pollution are known.

Through the implementation of the Bill's proposals there will be opportunities to, for example, promote biodiversity, children's rights and equalities. The impact assessments we have conducted and the literature we have reviewed, demonstrates the impact air and noise pollution can have on biodiversity, all members of society, but particularly children, older people and those with impairments or health conditions. The effects of air and noise pollution can also disproportionately affect those on lower incomes. Consequently, through the consultation and impact assessments processes that will be undertaken when we make the secondary legislation and guidance to implement the Bill there will be ample opportunity to discuss ways of further embedding measures to protect/promote these and other areas covered by our impact assessments.

As set out above, it is unlikely ambitious national air quality targets set under the Bill could be achieved without additional action beyond the existing policies, measures and natural technology turnover which are planned and committed to. Again, it will be important for individuals and businesses to engage with the consultation process on future target proposals.

4. How will the impact of the proposal be monitored and evaluated as it progresses and when it concludes?

The policy objective is for the proposals in the Bill to collectively work towards improving the quality of the air environment in Wales. They complement measures set out in our Clean Air Plan for Wales and our Noise and Soundscape Action Plan.

As we implement the Bill, we will also seek to contribute to our response to the climate and nature emergencies.

The Welsh Government will conduct a post implementation review of the legislation no later than five years after it has come into force. It is envisaged the review will assess the effectiveness of the policy in achieving its objectives of improving the quality of the air environment and reducing the impacts of airborne pollution on human health, nature, the environment and our economy.

Full details of the review are to be determined. However, we intend to evaluate the impact the Bill and measures taken to implement the Bill have had on the air environment in Wales. Details of our proposals in relation to the post implementation review of the Bill are set out at section 9 of the Explanatory Memorandum to the Bill. It outlines the action we intend to take, or is already being undertaken, in relation to each of the topics contained in the Bill.