

# Wales Future Generations Act - a quick guide

Author: [David Thorpe](#)

**This ground-breaking and unique Act means that any private citizen or community group can now challenge decisions by public bodies on the grounds that they do not take account of the needs of future generations.**

What is it? Rather than pass a 'sustainable development act' in Wales, a decision was taken to give the legislation the name ['The Well-being of Future Generations Act'](#).

## The seven 'well-being' goals

The Act is designed to achieve [seven 'well-being' goals](#), chosen as the seven chief aspects of – and requirements for – human well-being:

1. A prosperous Wales: an innovative, productive and low carbon society which recognises the limits of the global environment.
2. A resilient Wales: a nation which maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems.
3. A healthier Wales: A society in which people's physical and mental well-being is maximised.
4. A more equal Wales: A society that enables all people to fulfil their potential.
5. A Wales of cohesive communities: attractive, viable, safe and well-connected communities.
6. A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language.
7. A globally responsible Wales which takes account of its positive contribution to global well-being.

## The five ways of working

It also requires government departments & public bodies to conduct their business in a completely different way from before. The [new way](#) is defined by "the five ways of working".

1. Thinking long-term: balancing short-term needs with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.
2. Prevention: proactive behaviour to prevent problems occurring or getting worse that may help public bodies meet their objectives.
3. Integration: considering how the public body's well-being objectives may impact upon each of the well-being goals, their objectives, or the objectives of other public bodies.
4. Collaboration: with any other person (or different parts of the body itself) that could help the body to meet its well-being objectives.
5. Involvement: involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals, and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area.

A former civil servant, Gretel Leeb, who worked on the implementation of the Act, describes it as "a multi-faceted piece of legislation that cuts right across government". Absolutely.

## One Planet Development

Prior to this Act, Wales had also enshrined the concept of [One Planet Development](#) in planning law. This came within the context of its [Sustainable Development Scheme, "One Wales: One Planet"](#), that includes the objective that within the lifetime of a generation, Wales should use only its fair share of the earth's resources, and "our ecological footprint be reduced to the global average availability of resources - 1.88 global hectares per person in 2003". This aim was carried forward into the Act.

In an important sense, existing one planet developments have acted as pioneers and test cases of what one planet living everywhere might be, and have highlighted certain advantages and shortcomings. What has not been tested is one planet development at scale. The Well-being of Future Generations Act and One Planet Development, taken together, offer a glimpse of how it might play out in Wales.

**Anyone can check their footprint with the Welsh Government's ecological footprint calculator on [this page](#).**

## The 46 indicators

[46 indicators](#) are in place to tell if the Act is achieving its intended results. There is no single, exclusive indicator for each goal; instead, a '[key](#)' is provided to show which indicators made a significant contribution to which goals.

Similarly, there is an indicative [map](#) of the Welsh National Indicators against the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The Act also requires Welsh Ministers to, "in respect of each financial year ... publish an "annual well-being report" on the progress made towards the achievement of the well-being goals by reference to the national indicators and milestones."

## Public Service Boards

[19 regional Public Services Boards](#) (PSBs) based on administrative boundaries administer the Act's implementation locally.

The members of these county-wide boards include representatives of all publicly funded bodies, plus representatives from civil society.

Each PSB is charged to "improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of its area by contributing to the achievement of the well-being goals by making an assessment of well-being in its area and setting objectives to maximise achieving those goals, and by members taking all reasonable steps to meet those objectives."

Each PSB must come up with its own local well-being plan, targeted at the specific needs of its area. Its assessment must refer to the national indicators and future trends reports.

Local Planning Authorities must pay attention to the local well-being plans and understand what their communities need. They must engage the public so that it can influence development proposals at an early stage.

## How the environment fits into this

The state of the environment is incorporated into the local plans and the overall schema for the whole country in the following way. A public body called [Natural Resources Wales](#) is a member of the independent [Future Generations Commissioner for Wales' Advisory Panel](#), and a statutory member of all the PSBs.

It provides the evidence base on natural resources to inform their assessments of well-being and their local well-being plans. The body also advises planning departments to help them prioritise and improve infrastructure.

The state of the natural environment is also intended to be protected and enhanced by the [Environment \(Wales\) Act](#) and the [Planning \(Wales\) Act](#), and by a [National Development Framework](#), when a consultation is completed on the Welsh Government's land use priorities.

## The role of the independent Commissioner

An independent [Future Generations Commissioner for Wales](#) was set up to check whether the Act is being implemented correctly.

The office was established by the Act itself to be a "guardian for future generations" – challenging short-term, narrow policy-making, and reporting on how effectively public bodies are acting and thinking and can think and plan for the future.

The office has 21 staff, an Advisory Panel, and a budget of £1.4m/year. The first Future Generations Report is due by 2020.

Sophie Howe is the current Commissioner. Her background prior to accepting this role was as a local councillor, then advisor to the government on legal matters and equal and human rights.

Howe told me that of the 46 indicators, some PSBs have set objectives. "The way they are planning to measure is not yet very good."

She believes the £6 billion annual budget in Wales should be used "not just to buy from the existing market but to create the world we want to see, such as school dinners from local producers. We need to change the way we procure. I'm confident it will drive this change."

## Measuring progress on GHG emissions

Glyn Jones, Chief Statistician, told me: "The national indicators are used as a basis for the annual [Well-being of Wales report](#), which I publish as Chief Statistician independently of Ministers under the Code of Practice for Statistics.

"The Well-being of Wales report provides a report on our progress as a nation against the goals, as required by the Act."

Also, the [Environment \(Wales\) Act](#) sets out a series of emissions targets defining a pathway to a 2050 goal of reducing Wales' emissions by at least 80 per cent below 1990 baseline levels. This is the same as the UK as a whole.

Like the rest of the UK it also introduces five-yearly carbon budgets which limit cumulative emissions over this period. These targets and budgets are based upon production (important: not consumption) emissions in Wales and are reported in line with international guidelines from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

But the Environment (Wales) Act also includes a further requirement to report upon the emissions associated with the consumption and use of goods and services in Wales, whether produced in Wales or elsewhere.

Glyn Jones said that "Combining all these approaches provides a comprehensive view of how Wales' greenhouse gas emissions are changing over time and allows us to effectively monitor our progress towards reducing Wales' emissions".

## Measuring progress on the ecological footprint of Wales

Data on the ecological footprint of Wales is commissioned regularly from the Stockholm Environment Institute. Their [last report](#) concludes: "The Welsh Government has a goal to achieve 'One Planet Living' within the lifetime of a generation. This will **require a reduction of the impacts of Welsh consumption by approximately two thirds.**"

That is quite a challenge.

The Stockholm Environment Institute's 2015 report goes on: "Whilst currently unsustainable, consumption patterns change, and resource and energy efficiency can improve, and it is Welsh Government's role to develop and implement policies that facilitate the transition to One Planet Living in Wales.

"The consumption of food, housing, transport, consumer items, private services and public services together accounts for 85 per cent of the ecological footprint. The specific consumption categories that contribute the most to the ecological and carbon footprints are household energy use, transport, construction and consumption of meat, fruit and vegetables."

**This is a message which has barely travelled outside the obscure document in which it sits. I have never heard an official or politician relay this message.**

Yet the report repeats the message when discussing the carbon footprint of Wales:

"The carbon footprint of Wales has been calculated at 11.1 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per capita... Most of the greenhouse gas emissions associated with Wales' carbon footprint occurs from purchases of domestic goods and services. **Therefore the priority should be to improve both the efficiency of production and size and type of consumption within Wales. It is also important to reduce emissions released outside Wales but that contribute to products consumed within Wales, along international supply chains.**"

It adds: "The primary land type dominating the footprint is the land required to sequester emissions of carbon dioxide, which arise from the burning of fossil fuels."

If burning of fossil fuels ceased, this would lead Wales to become carbon positive. Regional authorities are named in the report: "The top three local authorities with the highest carbon footprint are Ceredigion, Powys and Isle of Anglesey. Those with the lowest carbon footprint are Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly."

## A potential solution

One of the relatively easy things to do to tackle both the ecological footprint and the carbon footprint and meet the requirements of the WBFGA and the Environment (Wales) Act is to **shorten supply chains and make those supply chains gradually more circular**: to source locally as far as possible, and reuse everything, including nutrients in food.

Those goods which cannot be provided nationally should be sourced ethically and with the footprint of production in mind.

By sourcing more goods and services within Wales, authorities would have much more control over their impacts and be able to make production more circular and resource efficient. The 'five ways of working' strongly imply using the procurement policies of public bodies to achieve this.

**Procuring goods and services locally** within Wales will result in more intensive use of the countryside and greater employment, leading to the sustainable regeneration of rural areas as they service the urban areas. Public procurement policy is already changing along these lines.

The Welsh government and local government are expected to lead by example by procuring from local firms/suppliers using social and environmental criteria, as well as economic criteria, in the choice of suppliers as part of that process.

PSBs should incorporate this in their plans alongside **targets for energy efficiency and 100% renewable energy**.