

Consultation response form

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Response of Natural Resources Wales to the Welsh Government Consultation on Local Air Quality and Noise Management in Wales

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) welcomes the Welsh Government initiative to update the local air quality management regime established by the Environment Act 1995.

The approach to better integrate local and national management the impacts of air quality and noise will help inform and influence public bodies in Wales, such as NRW when discharging the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

Q1. In section 6 of this consultation document we asked a number of questions about the changes we are considering taking forward in the first year of this five-year Assembly, alongside a review of national planning policy and guidance on air and noise pollution.

Local Authority Resources (6.1, 6.2, 6.7)

We welcome initiatives that can potentially reduce the burden on local authorities, and provide them with more opportunity to focus on key pollutants of concern and wider public health benefits of a more co-ordinated approach to managing air quality and noise.

Links between the LAQM process and Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (6.5, 6.6, 6.9, 6.10, 6.15)

NRW welcomes the proposals set out in the consultation to place more emphasis on partnership working and linking the LAQM reporting process to the newly established Public Services Boards (PSBs) and Well-being plans. This should help and inform location action plans to deliver “shared outcomes” in relation to air quality and noise. We recognise that we have a role to play in working with Local Authorities and Local Health Boards to deliver shared outcomes, within the PSBs and potentially through other partnerships.

Along with the suggestions in the consultation for additional information to be included in the annual reports, we would also welcome the inclusion of information on amelioration and mitigation measures in respect to noise and air pollution and the number of Statutory Quiet Areas created as refuges from noise, defined by the criteria for the Green Flag Award.

As well as building the links between the LAQM process and the PSBs, it is important to build and/or maintain links to other policies and strategies that influence both air quality and noise. To help deliver “shared outcomes” it is important that policies and strategies contained in the Road Traffic Reduction reports, air quality and noise reduction plans and local Well-being plans are consistent and integrated with Development Plan Strategies and policies to ensure an integrated approach to national policy and guidance on noise and air quality.

It is important to ensure spatial planning and individual planning applications consider development in terms of location, impacts (to and from the development) and remedial actions in areas of poor air quality and noise, if a significant issue. For regulated operations, although some issues relating to noise and air quality can be addressed through the Environmental Permitting Regulations, the location of a planned or existing development cannot.

NRW involvement in national noise mapping (6.14)

In principle, we have no objection to taking on a greater role in the delivery and interpretation of Wales’ national noise maps but this would be subject to the provision of appropriate funding and training. We would welcome further discussions with Welsh Government official on this matter prior to any final decisions being made.

Q2. There is considerable uncertainty about the extent to which we will still be bound by our current EU obligations relating to air and noise pollution following the UK’s withdrawal from the European Union. Therefore, we are not yet in a position to state precisely what further action we propose to take forward in the second, third, fourth and fifth years of this Assembly.

Bearing this uncertainty in mind, along with the information provided on the current state of play in Wales in sections 1 to 5 and Annex A of the consultation document, please tell us what further action, if any, you would like to see taken forward on air and noise pollution in the next five years?

Section 2 defines the “Legal Landscape” and identifies the provisions of the Environmental Impacts Assessment Directive. The Directive is key to understanding and mitigating the impacts of cumulative development. Further guidance needs to be provided to deliver this as well as the requirements of Habitats Risk Assessment and SEA.

We would welcome the continuation of Welsh Government’s support of the Green Flag Award scheme in Wales, including working with the sub-licence holder to ensure those involved in the scheme understand the implications of Welsh noise policy for sites which they may be called upon to judge. We would hope this support continues until a more suitable means is found of independently auditing that the management of statutory Quiet Areas is fit for purpose.

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