



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Government Integrated Impact Assessment

Wild Animal Welfare White Paper

Proposal summary

The Welsh Government is consulting on two proposals in relation to wild animal welfare that may be taken forward in primary legislation. The proposed Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill would introduce a statutory close season during which it would be unlawful to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take hare, and a new offence of intentionally or recklessly disturbing seals. The proposals are intended to address identified gaps and inconsistencies within the current legislative framework, reduce avoidable harm to wild animals and support responsible interaction with wildlife. They may affect people and organisations involved in rural, coastal, recreational, commercial, land management, scientific, conservation and enforcement activities, as well as members of the public.

Well-being of Future Generations Act questions.

1. How have the five ways of working shaped the development and implementation of this policy or legislation?

The five ways of working have shaped the development of the proposals from an early stage. **Long-term thinking** has been applied by considering how the legislative framework can continue to provide clear and effective animal welfare protections and support responsible interaction with wildlife. The proposals would form a focused first stage of a wider programme of work to improve the accessibility and coherence of wildlife legislation in Wales.

Prevention is central to both proposals. The proposed seal disturbance offence is intended to deter behaviour that may cause avoidable harm, including stress, injury and the separation of mothers and dependent pups. The proposed close season for hare is intended to reduce the risk of pregnant, or nursing animals being killed, injured or taken during the breeding season and dependent leverets being left without maternal care. Legislation would be supported by guidance, communications and awareness-raising, with the primary intended effect being improved understanding and behavioural change rather than frequent prosecution.

Integration has involved considering the proposals alongside wider animal welfare, biodiversity, rural, agricultural, equality and Welsh language objectives, as well as their potential economic and justice system implications. The proposals have been designed to improve animal welfare while allowing responsible recreational, commercial, scientific, conservation, rescue, rehabilitation and land management activities to continue. The proposed use of existing exceptions and licensing arrangements is intended to provide flexibility where activities are necessary and justified.

Collaboration has informed policy development through work across the Welsh Government and engagement with enforcement bodies, Natural Resources Wales, animal welfare and conservation organisations, and stakeholders with interests in land management, rural activities, recreation and wildlife. This has helped identify gaps in the current framework and consider the practical operation, proportionality and enforceability of the proposals.

Involvement will continue through the public consultation and associated stakeholder engagement. The consultation seeks views and evidence on the proposals, their practical operation, costs and benefits, implementation and enforcement, and any unintended consequences. Responses will be used to test the evidence and assumptions underpinning the proposals, refine the impact

assessments and inform the Welsh Government's consideration of whether, and if so how, the proposals should be taken forward.

2. Who have you collaborated with and involved when developing the proposal, and to understand its impacts, including on people, households, public bodies, businesses and the third sector (e.g. through engagement with relevant stakeholders or public consultation?)

The proposals have been developed through collaboration across the Welsh Government and engagement with enforcement partners and stakeholders. This has included research, policy, analytical and impact assessment input, together with engagement with police and wildlife crime partners, and conservation/welfare organisations. Consideration has also been given to stakeholders with interests in land management, agriculture, shooting, coastal recreation, wildlife tourism, marine activity and wildlife rescue and rehabilitation. This work has helped identify the gaps and inconsistencies within the existing legislative framework and consider the evidence, proportionality, enforceability and practical implications of the proposed measures.

Policy development to date has informed consideration of the groups that may be affected. These include coastal visitors and recreational water users; wildlife photographers; vessel, tourism and recreation operators; commercial fishing interests; researchers and educational bodies; marine conservation, rescue and rehabilitation organisations; farmers, landowners and land managers; sporting estates and shooting interests; rural and coastal communities; enforcement authorities; and members of the public. The anticipated effects on these groups have been considered through the Regulatory Impact Assessment and the relevant individual impact assessments.

The public consultation will provide the principal opportunity for wider involvement in the next stage of policy development. It invites views on the proposed offences, exceptions and licensing arrangements, the proposed dates of the hare close season, implementation and enforcement, costs and benefits, impacts on affected groups, and any unintended consequences. It also specifically seeks evidence to inform the Regulatory Impact Assessment and Integrated Impact Assessment, including evidence about effects on the Welsh language.

The consultation and associated engagement will be accessible to individuals and organisations across Wales. Consultation materials will be published in Welsh and English, alternative formats will be available on request, and responses may be submitted through the medium of Welsh. Consultation responses and further stakeholder engagement will be used to test the evidence and assumptions, identify any impacts not currently recognised, refine the impact assessments and inform the Welsh Government's consideration of whether, and if so how, the proposals should be taken forward.

3. How does the policy contribute to sustainable development and long-term well-being outcomes?

The proposals contribute to sustainable development by seeking to improve animal welfare in a way that balances environmental, social, cultural and economic considerations. They are intended to address specific gaps and inconsistencies within the current legislative framework, reduce avoidable harm to wild animals and support responsible interaction with wildlife. The proposed measures are targeted

and proportionate, with exceptions and licensing arrangements intended to allow necessary and justified activities to continue.

The principal long-term outcome sought is a clearer and more effective framework for protecting the welfare of seals and hare in Wales. The proposed seal disturbance offence is intended to deter intentional or reckless behaviour that causes disturbance wherever seals occur in Wales. The proposed hare close season is intended to protect pregnant and nursing animals and dependent leverets during the principal breeding period, while continuing to permit lawful shooting outside the close season and allowing licensed activity in specified circumstances.

The proposals may also make a minor positive contribution to the resilience of native wildlife populations and public understanding of responsible behaviour towards wildlife. These are potential indirect benefits rather than the primary basis for intervention, which is animal welfare. No adverse impacts on habitats, ecosystems, flora or other fauna have been identified, and the proposals are not expected to result in changes to land use, habitat condition or wider ecosystem functions.

The proposals have been designed to avoid disproportionate effects on rural and coastal communities, agriculture, responsible recreation and relevant businesses. Overall impacts on rural people, businesses and communities are expected to be minimal. Responsible wildlife tourism, recreation, scientific research, conservation, rescue and rehabilitation, and legitimate land management activities should be able to continue; they may fall under one of the exceptions to the new offences or may be subject to the requirement to obtain a licence.

Implementation alongside clear, accessible and bilingual guidance, communications and awareness-raising will support understanding and compliance. The intended emphasis is on prevention, deterrence and behavioural change rather than frequent prosecution. Consultation evidence, stakeholder feedback, reported incidents and enforcement activity will be used to refine the proposals and the supporting impact assessments, and if primary legislation is considered appropriate, will inform implementation and subsequent assessment of whether the intended animal welfare outcomes are being achieved over time

4. What are the key impacts (positive, negative, and opportunities) across each of the seven well-being goals?

A prosperous Wales

Overall economic impacts are expected to be limited. The proposals are not expected to impose significant costs on businesses or households, although some organisations and individuals may need to familiarise themselves with the new requirements and some people/organisations/businesses may incur limited administrative impacts where a licence is required. Responsible wildlife tourism and recreation businesses should generally be able to continue their activities without significant operational change, while clearer standards may support responsible wildlife tourism and public confidence in the sector. No significant adverse effect on agricultural productivity or food production has been identified.

A resilient Wales

The proposals are primarily animal welfare measures rather than species conservation initiatives. However, protecting hare during the breeding season and reducing harmful disturbance of seals may make a minor positive contribution to

maintaining native wildlife populations, normal breeding behaviour and ecosystem resilience. The Biodiversity Impact Assessment identifies an expected neutral to minor positive effect, with no adverse impacts identified for habitats, ecosystems, flora or other fauna.

A healthier Wales

No significant direct effects on physical or mental health or on access to health services have been identified. The proposals may provide limited indirect well-being benefits by supporting responsible enjoyment and appreciation of wildlife and the natural environment. Health impact screening concluded that a full Health Impact Assessment was not required for these proposals.

A more equal Wales

The Equality Impact Assessment has not identified direct or indirect adverse impacts in relation to any protected characteristic. The proposals regulate conduct towards wildlife and are intended to apply consistently across Wales. The principal equality consideration is to ensure consultation materials, guidance, information concerning exceptions and licensing arrangements, and wider communications are accessible and inclusive. Consultation responses will be reviewed for evidence of any barriers or unintended impacts, including those that may arise through implementation, licensing or enforcement.

A Wales of cohesive communities

The proposals may contribute positively to public confidence in wildlife welfare protections and responsible interaction with wildlife in rural and coastal communities. Overall rural impacts are expected to be minimal and proportionate, with no identified effects on access to services, housing, transport or community infrastructure. Potential impacts are concentrated on a limited range of activities involving hare management and interactions with seals. Clear guidance, accessible communications and engagement with affected communities and organisations will be important to support understanding and implementation.

A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language

Hare and seals form part of Wales's natural heritage, and improved welfare protection may support public appreciation of wildlife and responsible enjoyment of rural and coastal environments. The proposals are expected to have a neutral overall effect and minimal direct impact on the Welsh language. Public-facing consultation materials, guidance, information and communications will be available in Welsh and English, enabling Welsh speakers to understand the proposals and engage with consultation and implementation processes as easily through Welsh as through English.

A globally responsible Wales

The proposals demonstrate a commitment to high standards of animal welfare and responsible interaction with wildlife. They may also bring Wales into closer alignment with the underlying animal welfare principles reflected in protections operating or proposed elsewhere in the United Kingdom, while responding to the particular legislative position in Wales. No significant change in greenhouse gas emissions or adverse effect on global biodiversity has been identified.

Overall, the most significant anticipated benefit is improved animal welfare through reducing avoidable harm to seals and hare and providing a clearer basis for

responsible behaviour and proportionate enforcement. The principal potential negative impacts relating to the new offence of intentionally or recklessly killing, injuring or taking hare during the proposed close season, are familiarisation with the new law, licensing-related administrative impacts, and a modest increase in enforcement activity. Opportunities include raising public awareness, supporting responsible wildlife tourism and recreation, improving clarity within the legislative framework and strengthening collaboration between government, enforcement bodies, land managers and animal welfare and conservation organisation organisations

5. What evidence, including reports under the Act, has informed the policy, and how will it support ongoing decision-making?

The proposals have been informed by scientific, legislative, operational and stakeholder evidence. This includes evidence relating to seal disturbance and its potential welfare consequences; evidence concerning hare breeding biology and the welfare risks associated with shooting pregnant or nursing animals; existing wildlife legislation in Wales and elsewhere in the United Kingdom; information from animal welfare and conservation organisations; and engagement with enforcement bodies and stakeholders with interests in wildlife management, rural and coastal activities.

The available evidence indicates that disturbance can cause seals to alter their behaviour, leave haul-out sites, expend energy unnecessarily and experience stress or injury. Particular welfare concerns arise where disturbance results in the separation of mothers and dependent pups or contributes to premature abandonment. In relation to hare, the evidence indicates that females may be pregnant or nursing dependent young during the proposed close season, creating a risk that killing breeding animals may leave dependent leverets without maternal care. The proposals are founded on these animal welfare concerns rather than on evidence of species conservation need.

Relevant national evidence and statutory considerations have also informed development of the proposals. This includes consideration of the section 7 lists of species and habitats of principal importance under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, the section 6 Biodiversity and Resilience of Ecosystems Duty, the State of Natural Resources Report and the Sustainable Land Management objectives under the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023. These considerations have helped assess the potential relationship between the proposals, biodiversity, ecosystem resilience and activities undertaken on agricultural land.

The evidence has been considered through the Regulatory Impact Assessment and the individual assessments covering equality, the Welsh language, biodiversity, rural proofing and Sustainable Land Management. Screening has also been undertaken for children's rights, health, data protection and carbon impacts. Together, these assessments indicate that wider impacts are generally expected to be neutral, minimal or minor positive, with potential effects concentrated on a limited range of activities involving interactions with seals, hare shooting, land management, licensing, familiarisation and enforcement.

Some important evidence gaps and uncertainties remain. These include the scale and nature of seal disturbance in Wales, the extent of hare shooting during the proposed close season, the likely demand for licences, the practical effects on affected individuals and organisations, and future enforcement demand. The

consultation therefore seeks evidence to test the assumptions made, identify impacts or unintended consequences not currently recognised and improve understanding of the likely costs, benefits and practical operation of the proposals.

Consultation responses and further stakeholder engagement will be used to refine the proposals, the Regulatory Impact Assessment and the Integrated Impact Assessment. The evidence will inform the Welsh Government's consideration of whether, and if so how, the proposals should be taken forward. If a Bill is developed, the assessments will be reviewed and updated to reflect the final policy design, agreed implementation arrangements and any additional evidence obtained through consultation, engagement and the legislative development process.

If legislation is taken forward, ongoing decision-making and post-implementation review will be informed by reported incidents, licensing activity, enforcement action and stakeholder feedback, together with any emerging evidence about animal welfare outcomes and unintended impacts. This will help assess whether the measures are operating proportionately, supporting behavioural change and achieving their intended animal welfare objectives.

Summary of Impact Assessments for this proposal

Mandatory publication (if the Impact Assessment is required)

Equality Impact Assessment

Completed: Yes

A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed. No direct or indirect adverse impacts have been identified in relation to any protected characteristic. The main implementation consideration is to ensure that consultation materials, guidance, information about exceptions and licensing arrangements, and wider communications are accessible and inclusive. The assessment will be reviewed in light of consultation responses and any emerging evidence, including evidence relating to licensing and enforcement.

Children's Rights Impact Assessment

Completed: Screening completed; a full assessment is not considered necessary at this stage

No direct impacts on babies, children or young people have been identified. Any effects are expected to be limited, indirect and positive, including opportunities to promote respect for wildlife and the natural environment. Further evidence will be sought through consultation and stakeholder engagement, and the assessment will be reviewed to determine whether a full Children's Rights Impact Assessment is required for any Bill taken forward.

Health Impact Assessment

Completed: Screening completed; a full assessment is not required

Published: Not required for this proposal

The proposal has been assessed as not constituting a decision of a strategic nature about how the Welsh Ministers exercise their functions. No significant direct effects on physical or mental health or on access to health services have been identified.

Other Impact Assessments

Welsh Language Impact Assessment

Completed: Yes

A full Welsh Language Impact Assessment has been completed. The proposals are expected to have a neutral overall effect and minimal direct impact on the Welsh language. The main considerations relate to implementation, including ensuring that consultation materials, guidance, explanatory information and public-facing communications are available in Welsh and English, and that people can engage through Welsh as easily as through English.

Data Protection Impact Assessment Screening

Completed: Yes; a full Data Protection Impact Assessment is not required

The Information Rights Unit concluded that the proposal does not meet the criteria requiring a full Data Protection Impact Assessment. The consultation will follow the formal

Welsh Government consultation process, which has data protection compliance built into it. No new or significantly changed processing of personal data is proposed.

Biodiversity Impact Assessment

Completed: **Yes**

A full Biodiversity Impact Assessment has been completed. The proposals are primarily animal welfare measures rather than species conservation initiatives. However, they are expected to have a neutral to minor positive effect on biodiversity through improved protection of native wildlife species. No adverse impacts on habitats, ecosystems, flora or other fauna have been identified

Rural Proofing Impact Assessment

Completed: **Yes**

A full Rural Proofing Impact Assessment has been completed. Overall impacts on rural people, businesses and communities are expected to be minimal, proportionate and concentrated on a limited range of activities involving hare management and interactions with seals. No significant adverse effects on rural livelihoods, agricultural productivity, land management, access to services or community infrastructure have been identified.

Sustainable Land Management Impact Assessment

Completed: **Yes**

A full Sustainable Land Management Impact Assessment has been completed. The principal relevance arises from the proposed hare close season and its potential interaction with activities undertaken on agricultural land. Overall effects against the Sustainable Land Management objectives are expected to be neutral to minor positive, without materially affecting sustainable agricultural production.

Carbon Impact Assessment

Completed: **Yes; screening completed and a full assessment is not required**

Officials have considered the carbon impact of the proposals. Emissions have not been quantified because they are expected to fall below the threshold for quantitative analysis. Officials have high confidence in this assessment.

Duty of Quality (Health) Impact Assessment

Completed: **Not required for this proposal**

The proposals do not concern the exercise of health functions, the provision of health services or health service quality. A Duty of Quality assessment is therefore not required.

Socio-economic Impact Assessment

Completed: **Not required for this proposal**

The proposals are not considered to constitute a strategic decision for the purposes of the Socio-economic Duty and are not expected to have a material effect on inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage. The potential effects on individuals, businesses and rural communities have nevertheless been considered through the Equality, Rural Proofing, Sustainable Land Management and Regulatory Impact Assessments.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

Completed: **Screening completed; a full Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required at this stage**

The proposal has been considered against the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Wales) Regulations 2004. The proposed Bill would not allocate land, authorise development, establish a framework for development consent decisions or provide for programmes of works. No significant environmental effects of the type normally associated with plans and programmes requiring Strategic Environmental Assessment have been identified. This conclusion will be reviewed in light of consultation responses and further policy development.

Habitats Regulations Assessment

Completed: **Screening completed; an Appropriate Assessment is not required at this stage**

The proposal has been considered against the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. No pathway has currently been identified by which the proposed provisions themselves could result in likely significant effects on the qualifying features of a Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area or Ramsar site. Any future licence applications would be considered separately and would remain subject, where relevant, to the requirements of the Habitats Regulations. This conclusion will be reviewed in light of consultation responses and further policy development.

Additional assessment: justice system impacts

A Justice System Impact Identification assessment has been prepared for the proposals. The assessment considers the potential impacts arising from the proposed creation of wildlife offences relating to seal disturbance and the introduction of a close season for hare. It will be submitted to the Ministry of Justice for consideration, and the assessment of justice system impacts will be refined in light of that engagement.

The justice assessment is therefore not yet final. Agreed information on the anticipated justice system impacts will be incorporated into the Integrated Impact Assessment and the relevant explanatory and supporting documentation for any Bill that is taken forward.

Declaration

I am satisfied that the impact of the proposed action has been adequately assessed and recorded.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Naomi Matthiessen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'N'.

Name of Senior Responsible Officer / Deputy Director: Naomi Matthiessen

Department: Landscapes, Nature and Forestry

Contents

1. Equality Impact Assessment.....	13
2. Children’s Rights Impact Assessment	21
3. Health Impact Assessment	23
4. Welsh Language Impact Assessment.....	24
5. Biodiversity Impact Assessment	29
6. Rural Proofing Impact Assessment.....	38
7. Sustainable Land Management Impact Assessment	43
8. Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening	47
9. Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening	48

1. Equality Impact Assessment

Making Better and Fairer Decisions

PROPOSAL

1. Title of proposal Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill

2. What is your proposal aiming to achieve?

The Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill would form the first stage of a wider programme of wildlife law reform in Wales. The proposed Bill would contain two measures intended to improve animal welfare: the creation of a new offence of intentional or reckless disturbance of seals and the introduction of a statutory close season during which it would be unlawful to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take hare. The proposals seek to reduce avoidable animal suffering, address identified gaps in the legislative framework and support responsible interaction with wildlife through proportionate and enforceable legal protections.

3. When did work start on the proposal?

July 26

4. Which organisations, groups or communities are likely to be affected?

- Members of the public engaging with wildlife.
- Coastal visitors and tourists.
- Recreational water users.
- Wildlife photographers.
- Wildlife tourism operators.
- Vessel operators.
- Commercial fishing operators
- Marine conservation organisations.
- Marine wildlife rescue and rehabilitation organisations.
- Researcher and educational bodies.
- Landowners and land managers.
- Farmers and agricultural businesses.
- Sporting estates.
- Shooting organisations and representative bodies.
- Natural Resources Wales.
- Police forces and prosecuting authorities.
- Animal welfare and conservation organisations

IMPACT ON, AND ENGAGEMENT WITH, PEOPLE IN PROTECTED GROUPS

Lack of evidence is not a reason for not assessing equality impact.

AGE

1. What evidence is available and what is its source? Include the findings from any engagement.

The proposed Bill does not target any age group and the proposed offences apply equally regardless of age. Evidence gathered during policy development, including the Regulatory Impact Assessment, stakeholder engagement and Justice System Impact Identification work, has not identified any age-specific impacts. The proposals regulate conduct towards seals and hare rather than access to services, employment, education, housing or benefits.

2. Is any evidence unavailable or uncertain?

There is limited demographic information regarding the ages of people who may disturb seals, kill, injure or take hare or potentially become subject to enforcement action. Consultation responses may provide additional evidence.

3. Who have you engaged with, why and how?

Engagement has included conservation organisations, animal welfare bodies, Natural Resources Wales, enforcement partners, wildlife crime officers and representatives of recreational and land management interests. Engagement focused on animal welfare, implementation and enforcement and did not identify age-specific concerns.

4. How has evidence affected your proposal?

No evidence has been identified suggesting that people of different ages would experience materially different effects from the proposals.

5. What are the likely impacts of the proposal?

No direct impacts have been identified. Children and young people may experience an indirect positive benefit through improved awareness of responsible behaviour towards wildlife and stronger animal welfare protections. Any benefits are expected to be experienced broadly across society rather than by a particular age group.

6. What steps will you take to enhance positive or reduce negative impacts?

Consultation materials, guidance and communications will be made accessible and available through a range of channels appropriate to different age groups.

DISABILITY

7. What evidence is available and what is its source? Include the findings from any engagement.

The proposed Bill is not expected to impact people with disabilities differently from others. The proposals create wildlife offences and do not affect access to services, employment, housing, healthcare or benefits. The principal equality consideration relates to ensuring information, guidance, consultation materials and communications are accessible.

8. Is any evidence unavailable or uncertain?

No specific evidence has been identified suggesting disabled people are more likely to be affected by the offences. However, consultation responses may identify accessibility considerations requiring further action.

9. Who have you engaged with, why and how?

Engagement has focused primarily on wildlife, enforcement, conservation and animal welfare stakeholders. Public consultation will provide a further opportunity to identify any accessibility barriers or unintended impacts.

10. How has evidence affected your proposal?

The Welsh Government recognises the social model of disability and the need for communications and engagement activities to be accessible and inclusive.

11. What are the likely impacts of the proposal?

No direct impacts have been identified. Indirect impacts could arise if communications, guidance, consultation documents or information relating to offences and licensing arrangements are not accessible.

12. What steps will you take to enhance positive or reduce negative impacts?

Consultation and guidance materials will be available in accessible formats on request. Communications and stakeholder engagement activities will be designed to be inclusive, and reasonable adjustments will continue to be available where required.

RACE

13. What evidence is available and what is its source? Include the findings from any engagement.

No evidence has been identified suggesting the proposals would affect people differently because of race, ethnicity, nationality, or membership of a particular ethnic community. The legislation regulates conduct rather than particular groups of people.

14. Is any evidence unavailable or uncertain?

There is limited demographic information regarding persons who may become subject to enforcement action.

15. Who have you engaged with, why and how?

Engagement has focused on policy stakeholders, enforcement authorities and wildlife interests. Consultation responses will be used to identify any evidence not currently available.

16. How has evidence affected your proposal?

No changes to the proposals have been required in relation to race.

17. What are the likely impacts of the proposal?

No direct or indirect adverse impacts have been identified. Any benefits associated with improved animal welfare and public confidence in wildlife legislation are expected to be experienced broadly across society.

18. What steps will you take to enhance positive or reduce negative impacts?

Information will be published bilingually, and alternative formats will be available on request. Consultation responses will be monitored for evidence of any unintended impacts.

RELIGION, BELIEF OR NON-BELIEF

19. What evidence is available and what is its source? Include the findings from any engagement.

Evidence gathered through policy development, stakeholder engagement, development of the Regulatory Impact Assessment and consideration of justice impacts has not identified any link between the proposals and religion, religious belief, philosophical belief or non-belief. The proposed Bill concerns animal welfare protections for seals and hare and regulates conduct towards wildlife rather than religious practice or belief.

20. Is any evidence unavailable or uncertain?

No specific evidence has been identified regarding the religious beliefs of individuals who may engage in activities affected by the legislation. However, no aspect of the proposals appears capable of creating differential impacts based on religion, belief or non-belief.

21. Who have you engaged with, why and how?

Engagement has been undertaken with animal welfare organisations, conservation bodies, enforcement partners, Natural Resources Wales and stakeholders affected by the proposals. No concerns relating to religion, belief or non-belief were identified during policy development. Consultation responses will provide a further opportunity for any relevant issues to be raised.

22. How has evidence affected your proposal?

As no equality issues relating to religion, belief or non-belief have been identified, no amendments to the policy proposals have been required for this protected characteristic.

23. What are the likely impacts of the proposal?

No direct or indirect impacts have been identified. The proposals are expected to affect all individuals equally regardless of religion, belief or non-belief. Any benefits associated with improved animal welfare and public confidence in wildlife legislation are expected to be experienced across society as a whole.

24. What steps will you take to enhance positive or reduce negative impacts?

Consultation materials, guidance and communications will remain accessible and inclusive. The Welsh Government will continue to consider consultation responses and monitor for any unintended impacts that may emerge.

SEX

25. What evidence is available and what is its source? Include the findings from any engagement.

Evidence from policy development, stakeholder engagement and impact assessment work has not identified any indication that the proposals would affect people differently because of their sex. The proposed offences and associated protections apply equally to all individuals.

26. Is any evidence unavailable or uncertain?

There is limited information about the sex profile of individuals who may become subject to enforcement action. However, no evidence has been identified suggesting differential impacts by sex.

27. Who have you engaged with, why and how?

Engagement has included enforcement bodies, conservation organisations, animal welfare organisations, land management interests and stakeholders potentially affected by the proposals. No sex-specific concerns were identified.

28. How has evidence affected your proposal?

No evidence has emerged suggesting the need for sex-specific policy adjustments or mitigations.

29. What are the likely impacts of the proposal?

No direct or indirect impacts have been identified. The proposals regulate particular activities involving wildlife and are not expected to affect individuals differently because they are male or female. Any wider benefits are expected to be shared across society.

30. What steps will you take to enhance positive or reduce negative impacts?

The legislation and accompanying guidance will apply equally to all individuals. Consultation responses will be considered for any evidence of unintended effects.

GENDER REASSIGNMENT

31. What evidence is available and what is its source? Include the findings from any engagement.

No evidence has been identified through policy development, stakeholder engagement or impact assessment work to suggest the proposals would affect transgender people or people undergoing gender reassignment differently from others. The proposals concern wildlife protection measures and animal welfare offences.

32. Is any evidence unavailable or uncertain?

No specific evidence has been identified relating to gender reassignment and the activities affected by the proposed Bill. However, there is no obvious pathway through which the proposals would create differential impacts.

33. Who have you engaged with, why and how?

Engagement has focused on stakeholders with expertise in wildlife management, conservation, animal welfare, enforcement and land management. No issues relating to gender reassignment were identified through engagement.

34. How has evidence affected your proposal?

No amendments to the proposals have been required as a result of evidence relating to gender reassignment.

35. What are the likely impacts of the proposal?

No direct or indirect impacts have been identified. The proposals are expected to affect people equally regardless of gender identity or gender reassignment status.

36. What steps will you take to enhance positive or reduce negative impacts?

Consultation and communication activities will remain inclusive and accessible. The Welsh Government will continue to consider consultation feedback and any emerging evidence.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

37. What evidence is available and what is its source? Include the findings from any engagement.

No evidence has been identified that people will experience different impacts because of their sexual orientation. The proposals regulate conduct relating to wildlife and do not affect services, rights, opportunities or eligibility criteria associated with sexual orientation.

38. Is any evidence unavailable or uncertain?

No specific evidence is available regarding sexual orientation and participation in activities affected by the proposed Bill. However, no relationship has been identified between sexual orientation and the operation of the proposals.

39. Who have you engaged with, why and how?

Engagement has focused upon policy and operational stakeholders affected by the proposals. No concerns relating to sexual orientation have been identified.

40. How has evidence affected your proposal?

No changes to the policy proposals have been required in relation to sexual orientation

41. What are the likely impacts of the proposal?

No direct or indirect impacts have been identified. The proposals are expected to affect all individuals equally regardless of sexual orientation.

42. What steps will you take to enhance positive or reduce negative impacts?

The Welsh Government will ensure consultation materials and communications remain inclusive and will keep the assessment under review as further evidence emerges.

PREGNANCY AND MATERNITY

43. What evidence is available and what is its source? Include the findings from any engagement.

Evidence gathered during policy development has not identified any connection between the proposals and pregnancy or maternity. The proposed Bill does not affect employment rights, maternity rights, healthcare provision or entitlement to public services.

44. Is any evidence unavailable or uncertain?

No evidence has been identified suggesting people who are pregnant or on maternity leave would experience different effects from the proposals.

45. Who have you engaged with, why and how?

Engagement has focused on wildlife, enforcement and animal welfare matters. No concerns relating to pregnancy and maternity have been identified during engagement activities.

46. How has evidence affected your proposal?

The evidence reviewed has not indicated a need for policy modifications relating to pregnancy and maternity.

47. What are the likely impacts of the proposal?

No direct or indirect impacts have been identified. The proposals are expected to affect individuals equally regardless of pregnancy or maternity status.

48. What steps will you take to enhance positive or reduce negative impacts?

Consultation materials and opportunities to engage will be made accessible to all individuals, including those who are pregnant or have caring responsibilities.

MARRIAGE AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIP

49. What evidence is available and what is its source? Include the findings from any engagement.

Evidence gathered through policy development and stakeholder engagement has not identified any connection between the proposals and marriage or civil partnership status. The proposals concern wildlife welfare offences and do not affect legal status, family arrangements, access to services or employment.

50. Is any evidence unavailable or uncertain?

No evidence has been identified suggesting that people who are married or in civil partnerships would experience different impacts from the proposals.

51. Who have you engaged with, why and how?

Engagement has been undertaken with stakeholders affected by the policy proposals, including conservation, enforcement and land management interests. No concerns relating to marriage or civil partnership have been raised.

52. How has evidence affected your proposal?

No changes to the policy proposals have been required in relation to marriage or civil partnership.

53. What are the likely impacts of the proposal?

No direct or indirect impacts have been identified. The proposals are expected to affect all individuals equally regardless of marital or civil partnership status

54. What steps will you take to enhance positive or reduce negative impacts?

No specific mitigation measures are required. The Welsh Government will continue to monitor consultation responses and stakeholder feedback for any evidence of unintended impacts.

PUBLICATION AND MONITORING

55. How will you monitor and evaluate progress on the equality issues identified in this EqlA?

This is a consultation-stage Equality Impact Assessment and will be reviewed as consultation responses are received. Particular attention will be given to any evidence suggesting impacts on protected groups, barriers to participation in consultation exercises, accessibility of communications and guidance, and any equality issues arising from enforcement or licensing arrangements.

If primary legislation is considered appropriate, following implementation equality considerations will be monitored through stakeholder engagement, feedback from enforcement partners, consultation responses, public correspondence and any post-implementation review activity. If evidence emerges of unintended impacts on protected groups, appropriate mitigating measures will be considered.

AUTHORISATION

Declaration by the Deputy Director / Senior Responsible Officer (SRO):

I am satisfied that the impact of the proposal has been properly assessed and recorded in accordance with guidance, and that the requirement for publication has been duly considered.

Signature:  Naomi Matthiessen

Department: Landscapes, Nature and Forestry, CCES

Date: 14/08/2026

2. Children's Rights Impact Assessment

1. Policy objectives

- The Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill would form the first stage of a wider programme of wildlife law reform in Wales. The proposed Bill contains two measures intended to improve animal welfare: the creation of a new offence of intentional or reckless disturbance of seals and the introduction of a statutory close season during which it would be unlawful to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take hare. The proposals seek to reduce avoidable animal suffering; address identified gaps in the legislative framework and support responsible interaction with wildlife through proportionate and enforceable legal protections.

2. Gathering evidence and engaging with children and young people

- The proposed legislation will have no direct impact on babies, children and/or young people. Evidence gathered during policy development, including the Regulatory Impact Assessment, stakeholder engagement and Justice System Impact Identification work, has not identified any specific impacts on babies, children and/or Young People. The proposals regulate conduct towards seals and hare rather than access to services, employment, education, housing or benefits.
- Direct, planned engagement with key stakeholders will include discussions about likely impact on different demographics, including babies, children and/or young people. During the course of this engagement, further evidence will be sought to inform whether any direct engagement with children and/or young people is required.

3. Analysing the evidence and assessing the impact

- Limited demographic information is available about the people who may disturb seals, kill, injure or take hares or be subject to enforcement action, however more information is being sought during the consultation process.
- In relation to the UNCRC articles:

Article 12 (Respect for the views of the child) The White Paper is open to the public, and children and young people have the opportunity to express views on wildlife welfare issues. Engagement with stakeholders and experts will highlight if any impacts are envisaged and where appropriate, direct engagement with children and young people will be undertaken.

Article 29(1)(e) (Respect for the natural environment) The proposed measures may indirectly support the principles contained within Article 29 by reinforcing expectations regarding the responsible treatment of wildlife and respect for the natural environment.

Article 31 (Leisure, play and cultural activities) The proposed legislation is not expected to affect children's ability to participate in recreational, cultural or outdoor activities. Any impact would be indirect and positive through the protection of wildlife that children may experience as part of recreation, tourism or outdoor learning.

- Having considered the UNCRC articles, any effects are likely to be indirect and positive, whilst recognising opportunities to promote respect for wildlife and the natural environment. Following the White Paper and further engagement with key stakeholders, this impact assessment will be reassessed and a decision taken on whether a full Children's Rights Impact Assessment is required to support the passage of the proposed bill.

4. Communicating with Children and Young People

- Direct, planned engagement with key stakeholders will include discussions about likely impact on different demographics. If any impacts are envisaged, appropriate engagement with children and young people will be undertaken.

5. Monitoring and Review

- As outlined above, further information on any impacts on babies, children and/or young people will be sought during the consultation period and through direct engagement with stakeholders. The views gathered will inform further policy development and inform if any specific engagement before any final decisions will be taken. This impact assessment will be kept under constant review throughout this process.

3. Health Impact Assessment

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) Template

Name of decision:

Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill

Purpose /aim of decision:

Proposed legislation to improve animal welfare

SECTION B: Rationale for not conducting a HIA:

- i.e. The proposed decision is not of a strategic nature about how the Welsh Ministers is to exercise their functions.

The Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill would form the first stage of a wider programme of wildlife law reform in Wales. The proposed Bill contains two measures intended to improve animal welfare: the creation of a new offence of intentional or reckless disturbance of seals and the introduction of a statutory close season during which it would be unlawful to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take hare. The proposals seek to reduce avoidable animal suffering, address identified gaps in the legislative framework and support responsible interaction with wildlife through proportionate and enforceable legal protections.

SECTION C:

Deputy Director Statement of Assurance

I hereby confirm that I, Naomi Matthiessen, am satisfied that the proposed decision to which the assessment relates *is not* of a strategic nature about how to exercise the functions of the Welsh Ministers.



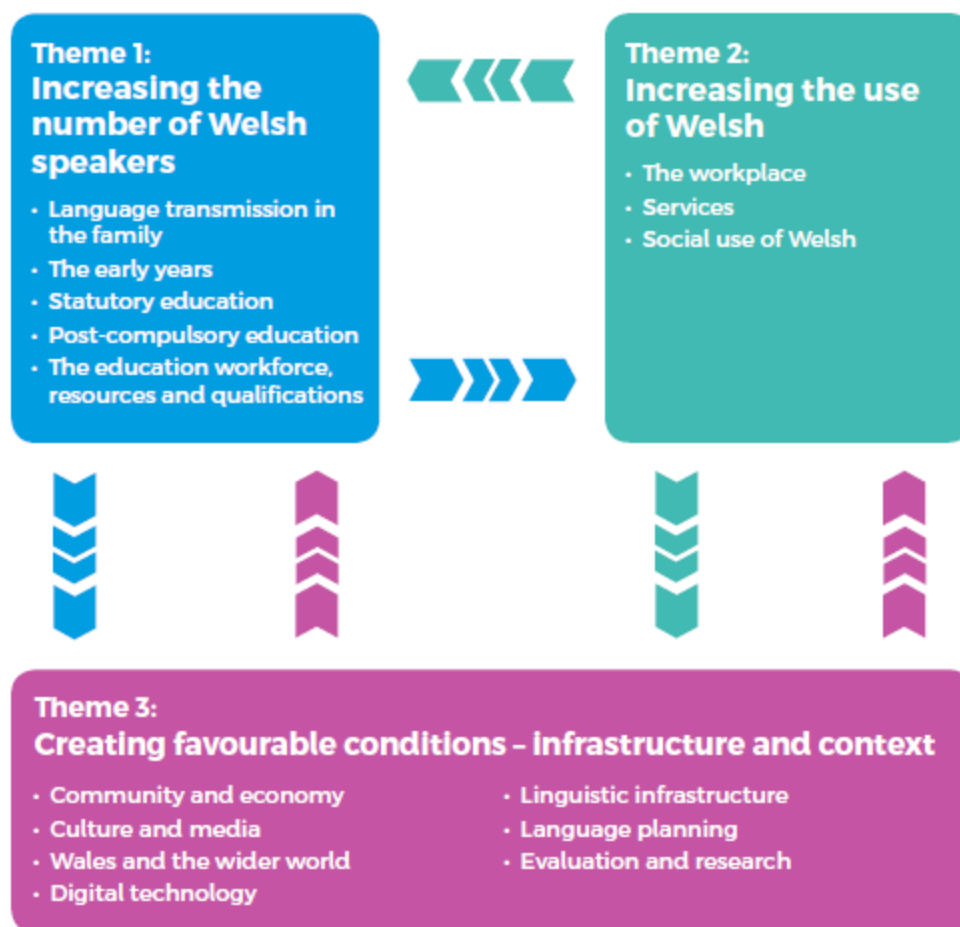
4. Welsh Language Impact Assessment

Cymraeg 2050 is our national strategy for increasing the number of Welsh speakers to a million by 2050 and substantially increasing the use of the language.

A thriving Welsh language is also included in one of the 7 well-being goals in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

We also have a statutory obligation to fully consider the effects of our work on the Welsh language. This means that any Welsh Government policy should consider how our policies affect the language and those who speak it.

The *Cymraeg 2050* strategy has three themes:



The headings under each theme outline the scope of activities that can affect the language.

As a general rule, if your policy has the potential to impact on people, it will impact in some way on Welsh speakers and therefore on the Welsh language.

1. **Welsh Language Impact Assessment reference number: 02/08/2026**
2. **Does the proposal demonstrate a clear link with the Welsh Government's strategy for the Welsh language? – *Cymraeg 2050* s and the related *Work Programme* for 2021-2026?**

The proposed Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill does not have a direct strategic link to the core aims of Cymraeg 2050, which focus on increasing the number of Welsh speakers, increasing the use of Welsh in everyday life and strengthening the conditions that support Welsh-speaking communities. The Bill is primarily an animal welfare and wildlife management measure which introduces a new offence of intentional or reckless disturbance of seals and establishes a statutory close season during which it would be unlawful to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take hare.

However, the proposed Bill has an indirect link to the Welsh Government's wider commitment to promoting and supporting the Welsh language because it will be delivered within the framework of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 and the Welsh Language Standards. Consultation documents, guidance, communications and any public-facing materials arising from the legislation will be made available in Welsh and English. This will help ensure Welsh speakers can engage with the policy, understand their responsibilities and access information through the medium of Welsh.

The link with Cymraeg 2050 is supportive and indirect rather than a direct contribution to the strategy's headline aims.

3. **Describe and explain the impact of the proposal on the Welsh language and explain how you will address these impacts in order to improve outcomes for the Welsh language. How will the proposal affect Welsh speakers of all ages (both positive and/or adverse effects).**

Overall impact

Overall, the Bill is expected to have a minimal direct impact on the Welsh language. The intention is for the legislation to focus on improving animal welfare through wildlife protection measures and not directly affect Welsh language rights, Welsh-medium education, Welsh-speaking communities or opportunities to use Welsh in everyday life.

The principal Welsh language considerations would arise through implementation. Any consultation documents, public information, guidance, awareness raising materials and supporting communications issued alongside a Bill would be available in Welsh and English. It is important that Welsh speakers are able to access information regarding the offences, enforcement arrangements and responsible wildlife management practices as easily in Welsh as in English.

How will the proposal affect the sustainability of Welsh-speaking communities?

No direct impacts on the sustainability of Welsh-speaking communities have been identified.

The Bill does not affect:

- housing;
- employment opportunities;
- population movement;
- community infrastructure;
- land ownership patterns; or
- economic factors that typically influence the sustainability of Welsh-speaking communities.

The proposals apply across Wales and are not expected to affect Welsh-speaking communities differently from other communities.

Some indirect benefits may arise in rural and coastal communities where wildlife and the natural environment form an important part of local identity, recreation and tourism. Improved protection for seals and hare may contribute positively to public appreciation of Wales's natural heritage, including in areas where Welsh is widely spoken.

How will the proposal affect Welsh-medium education and Welsh learners of all ages, including adults?

No direct positive or adverse impacts have been identified for Welsh speakers, or learners, of any age.

The Bill does not affect:

- Welsh-medium schools;
- further or higher education;
- adult Welsh language learning;
- curriculum content; or
- educational provision.

There may be limited indirect opportunities for the Bill to support wider environmental and wildlife awareness through educational materials or public communications, which may be made available bilingually. However, this is not a primary aim of the proposed legislation.

The Bill does not affect:

- opportunities to speak Welsh;
- opportunities to learn Welsh;
- Welsh language transmission within families;

- access to Welsh-medium education; or
- access to Welsh-language public services.

Any benefits of improved animal welfare and wildlife protection will be experienced equally by Welsh speakers and non-Welsh speakers. The main consideration is ensuring Welsh speakers of all ages can engage with consultation exercises, guidance and communications through the medium of Welsh.

How will the proposal affect services available in Welsh?

The Bill is not expected to reduce the availability of services in Welsh.

Any guidance, consultation documents, public information, explanatory materials and communications produced by Welsh Government in relation to the proposed legislation will continue to be available in Welsh and English in accordance with Welsh Language Standards requirements.

Where Natural Resources Wales, enforcement agencies or Welsh Government communicate with stakeholders and the public regarding any future implementation of the proposed legislation, Welsh language obligations will continue to apply.

Overall, the proposal is expected to have a neutral impact on Welsh-language service provision.

How will you ensure people know about services available in Welsh and can access them as easily as they can in English?

The Welsh Government will ensure that:

- consultation materials are published bilingually;
- any guidance and explanatory materials are available in Welsh and English simultaneously;
- Welsh language versions are clearly signposted;
- Welsh speakers can engage with consultation processes through the medium of Welsh; and
- any public-facing communications arising from implementation continue to comply with Welsh Language Standards requirements.

This approach will ensure that Welsh language information remains accessible and available on an equal basis with English language information.

What evidence/data have you used to inform your assessment, including evidence from Welsh speakers or Welsh language interest groups?

This assessment has been informed by:

- the policy development work supporting the proposed Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill;
- the Regulatory Impact Assessment;
- stakeholder engagement undertaken in developing the proposals; and
- other Welsh Language Impact Assessments completed in relation to animal welfare issues which found no significant positive or negative impacts on the Welsh language from comparable animal welfare legislation.

The public consultation will provide an opportunity for Welsh speakers and Welsh language organisations to provide additional evidence.

What other evidence would help you to conduct a better assessment?

Additional evidence from:

- Welsh speakers;
- Welsh language organisations;
- rural and coastal communities;
- environmental organisations operating through the medium of Welsh; and
- consultation respondents

would help determine whether there are opportunities to increase the use of Welsh within communications, engagement activities and any future implementation of the proposed legislation.

How will you know if your policy is a success?

From a Welsh language perspective, success would mean:

- no reduction in the availability of information in Welsh;
- Welsh speakers are able to engage with consultation and any implementation processes as easily through Welsh as through English;
- all public-facing materials are published bilingually in accordance with Welsh Language Standards requirements;
- no adverse impacts on Welsh-speaking communities emerge through implementation; and
- consultation responses do not identify significant negative impacts on opportunities to use Welsh.

Overall, the Welsh Government expects the proposed Bill to have a neutral effect on the Welsh language while ensuring Welsh speakers continue to access information and engage with the legislation on an equal basis with English speakers.

5. Biodiversity Impact Assessment

The Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales contains six objectives to reverse the decline of biodiversity which should be used to assess the impacts on biodiversity. They can also help develop and guide actions to comply with the S6 duty. They have been simplified as a set of questions to guide you through the impact assessment.

These questions should be considered whether your proposal has a land management element or not, although some will be particularly relevant if your policy area relates to land management in any way.

You should take a pro-active approach to considering the potential impacts on biodiversity – this is one area where unintended consequences are often overlooked, either through lack of awareness, or because it is difficult to assign a monetary value to biodiversity. Moreover, the duty requires that we positively seek opportunities to maintain and enhance biodiversity, both directly (where the intervention involves land management or construction), and indirectly (for example, where there may be an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity). In completing this assessment consider how enhancing biodiversity and promoting resilience of ecosystems contribute reciprocally to the aims of your policy or project.

You will need to record decisions and impacts arising from this assessment.

Embedding biodiversity

1. How will your proposal integrate biodiversity into decision making?

- **Have you considered the impacts and positive opportunities for action for biodiversity at the early stages of thinking or project design?**
 - **What impacts will procurement have on biodiversity, including global biodiversity?**
 - **Are products sourced sustainably?**
 - **Does your project include the use of materials or practices harmful to biodiversity?**
- **Does it require partners and beneficiaries to consider the impacts and opportunities for positive action for biodiversity at the early stages of thinking and project design?**
 - **Is the consideration of biodiversity a requirement of funding applications and project specifications?**
 - **Does your evaluation of these seek to ensure that biodiversity is maintained and enhanced?**

The proposed Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill has incorporated biodiversity considerations from the earliest stages of policy development. The Bill would introduce two animal welfare measures: the introduction of a statutory close season for hare during which it would be unlawful to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take hare and the creation of a new offence of intentional or reckless disturbance of seals. While both measures are primarily intended to address identified animal welfare concerns and legislative inconsistencies, biodiversity implications have been considered throughout policy development.

The proposal does not involve procurement, construction, , habitat alteration or the use of materials that could adversely affect biodiversity. Nor does it create any activity that would be expected to damage ecosystems or other species. The measures specifically relate to human interactions with hare and seals and seek to reduce avoidable animal suffering. The policy has been developed in a manner consistent with the Section 6 Biodiversity Duty by considering opportunities to maintain biodiversity and promote ecosystem resilience.

Although the provisions are not designed as species recovery measures, protecting breeding hare during the close season and reducing harmful disturbance of seals may contribute positively to maintaining populations and improving breeding success. These benefits are expected to arise without adverse effects on other flora or fauna. The legislation does not require partners or beneficiaries to undertake biodiversity actions directly but does support wider biodiversity objectives through improved protection of native wildlife species.

2. Has your proposal ensured biodiversity is accounted for in business decisions?

- **Has it considered whole of life costs which include the value of biodiversity and natural resources within the cost benefit analysis, even if this is an informal process?**
 - **Have you thought about how enhancing biodiversity can help deliver across WG's activities for example, to support active recreation, education, flood prevention, and local food growing. (For example, green roofs help to provide wildlife habitats, reduce energy consumption and improve drainage systems.)**
- **Has it considered the long term costs of degradation of biodiversity and natural resources, and the potential for savings for health and well-being, flood risk etc?**
- **Can it encourage partners and beneficiaries to take these costs and savings into account?**

The proposal recognises the value of biodiversity and healthy wildlife populations as part of Wales's natural environment. While the Bill does not impose significant costs on businesses generally, it acknowledges that biodiversity and ecosystem health deliver wider social, cultural and environmental benefits which should be considered in decision making.

The proposed legislation seeks to prevent animal welfare harms associated with seal disturbance and the killing of hare during their breeding season. Although the Bill is not driven by population decline concerns, preventing unnecessary disturbance of seals and protecting hare during periods when dependent young may be present may contribute indirectly to maintaining healthy populations. This helps avoid longer-term biodiversity losses and associated environmental costs.

The proposal does not involve land-use change, infrastructure development, resource extraction or activity that would be expected to affect ecosystem services, flood prevention, carbon storage or other natural resource functions.

3. How does your proposal improve understanding and raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity, encouraging others to act?

- **Can you work with partners and beneficiaries to promote understanding of biodiversity?**

- **Can you promote the benefits of access to biodiversity through the delivery of public goods and services such as social care, community development, health and recreation?**
- **Can you provide, or source, specialist training where necessary?**
- **Can you link to other communications strategies and initiatives for biodiversity, for example award schemes, local events?**

The Bill has the potential to make a positive contribution to public awareness of wildlife welfare and biodiversity. By establishing clear legal protections for seals and hare, the proposed legislation reinforces the principle that wild animals should be treated responsibly and respectfully. This may contribute to a greater public understanding of the importance of wildlife and the role people play in minimising disturbance and harm.

Implementation of any legislation is likely to involve public information and awareness-raising activity regarding responsible wildlife watching, responsible recreation and lawful wildlife management practices. This provides opportunities to promote broader biodiversity messages and encourage positive behaviours which benefit wildlife and ecosystems.

The proposals may also support existing conservation, wildlife crime prevention and biodiversity awareness initiatives delivered by Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales and conservation organisations.

Improving our evidence, understanding and monitoring

4. Have you used the best available evidence of biodiversity to inform your proposal and this assessment?

- **You must have regard to**
 - **the lists of species and habitats of principal importance published under Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act**
 - **the State of Natural Resources Report**
 - **any relevant area statement published by NRW.**
- **If your proposal is in regard to construction or land management directly or indirectly, it should reference biodiversity records available through**
 - **Local Environment Record Centres**
 - **Atlas of Living Wales**

Yes.

The assessment has been informed by:

- evidence gathered during development of the proposed Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill;
- scientific and policy evidence relating to seal disturbance;
- evidence relating to hare welfare and breeding biology;
- consideration of Wales's biodiversity duties;
- relevant wildlife legislation;
- stakeholder engagement with conservation, wildlife management and enforcement bodies; and
- wider biodiversity principles reflected in the State of Natural Resources Report and Section 6 Biodiversity Duty guidance.

Grey seals and hares are both recognised as species of principal importance for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in Wales under section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, however the proposals relate to animal welfare and are not expected to result in changes relating to biodiversity.

The proposals do not authorise site-specific land management activity and therefore do not require reference to local habitat records, Local Environmental Record Centres or site-level ecological surveys.

5. Have you used up to date knowledge of the key impacts on biodiversity to make evidence-based decisions?

- **Do you know what the drivers of change and key negative factors are which could arise from your proposal?**
- **Are you satisfied that these do not apply or have been avoided?**

Yes.

The proposals have considered known pressures affecting both species.

For seals, available evidence indicates that disturbance can affect behaviour, breeding success and maternal care, including situations where pups may become separated from mothers or breeding sites may be abandoned. Although grey seal populations are not currently considered endangered, unmanaged increases in disturbance could adversely affect local populations in Wales. The proposal therefore seeks to reduce this risk before more significant impacts arise.

For hares, the proposals recognise welfare concerns arising from killing hares during the breeding season when dependent leverets may be present. The measure is not intended as a population recovery initiative. Shooting for population management would continue to be available outside the close season and no overpopulation impacts are expected. No evidence has been identified suggesting the proposals would have negative consequences for other species, habitats or ecosystems.

6. Can your proposal contribute to our body of knowledge for biodiversity?

- **Can it support citizen-science initiatives, and monitoring schemes?**
- **Have you ensured that any biodiversity data collected is made publicly available?**

The proposed Bill does not establish biodiversity monitoring or data collection requirements. However, implementation may improve understanding of wildlife disturbance issues through enforcement activity, reporting and ongoing engagement with conservation organisations and wildlife management stakeholders.

Any information gathered regarding disturbance incidents, breeding impacts or compliance may contribute indirectly to future evidence gathering and policy development concerning wildlife welfare and biodiversity.

Governance and support for delivery of biodiversity action

7. Can your proposal support biodiversity action in any way?

- **Can staff get involved in practical action?**
- **Can you fund action directly, or indirectly?**
- **Can you support partnerships and/or collaboration for local and community-based biodiversity action?**

Yes.

The proposed Bill supports biodiversity action indirectly through stronger protection for native wildlife species. The seal disturbance offence may help reduce harmful disturbance of breeding seals, while the hare close season may reduce welfare impacts on breeding adults and dependent young.

The legislation also complements the work of conservation organisations, wildlife crime enforcement partners and public bodies involved in promoting responsible behaviour around wildlife.

Although the Bill does not provide funding or create biodiversity projects directly, it supports wider efforts to safeguard native species and encourages responsible interaction with wildlife.

8. Can your proposal help to build capacity for biodiversity action?

- **Can you support skills acquisition and training?**
- **Does your proposal ensure the appropriate level of qualifications of those involved in decision making regarding biodiversity?**
- **Can your proposal fund capacity building for biodiversity action?**

The Bill does not create formal biodiversity training programmes, qualification requirements or funding arrangements.

However, any implementation may enhance the ability of enforcement partners, wildlife crime officers and relevant public authorities to respond to wildlife welfare offences through clear legislative powers. Awareness raising associated with any legislation may also support understanding of responsible wildlife interactions among members of the public and stakeholder groups

9. Have you recorded decisions and actions to maintain and enhance biodiversity?

- **A report on what the public authority has done to comply with the duty must be published by the end of 2019 and then every three years after this date.**

Yes.

This Biodiversity Impact Assessment records how biodiversity considerations have informed policy development and demonstrates consideration of the Welsh Ministers' duty under Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016.

The assessment concludes that the Bill is expected to have a neutral to minor positive effect on biodiversity through improved protection of native wildlife, without creating identified risks to habitats, ecosystems or other species. The proposals are primarily animal welfare measures but may contribute indirectly to maintaining biodiversity and promoting ecosystem resilience.

If your proposal concerns construction or management of land and/or sea, please also consider Questions 10 – 16:

The Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill is not a construction, development, land management or marine management proposal. It does not authorise activities, allocate land, alter habitats or establish management regimes for land or sea. However, because the Bill introduces protections relating to wild terrestrial and marine species, consideration has been given to Questions 10-16 to ensure any implications for species, habitats and ecosystem resilience have been fully assessed.

Safeguarding species and habitats of principal importance

10. Is all legislation complied with to ensure protection of marine and terrestrial species and habitats?

- **Has any requirement for licences, monitoring and/or enforcement been considered and actioned?**
- **Has any requirement for EIA/SEA/HRA been identified and actioned?**
- **Have any impacts or opportunities for positive action for Section 7 species and habitats been identified and actioned?**

Yes.

The proposals have been developed within the existing framework of wildlife, animal welfare and environmental legislation. The proposals are intended to strengthen protections for wild animals by introducing a seal disturbance offence and a statutory close season for hare. The proposed legislation would complement existing protections rather than replacing or weakening them.

The proposed Bill anticipates, in the main, incorporating licensing requirements that exist in connection with some other species, land management controls, and does not alter planning processes or environmental assessment regimes. No requirements for Environmental Impact Assessment, Strategic Environmental Assessment or Habitats Regulations Assessment have been identified as a result of the proposals themselves.

Opportunities for positive action have been identified in relation to improving protection for native wildlife species, particularly through reducing disturbance to seals during sensitive periods and reducing welfare impacts associated with the shooting of hare during the breeding season. No adverse effects on protected habitats or other Section 7 species and habitats have been identified.

11. Does the proposal seek first to maintain and enhance biodiversity?

- **Have you selected the option which avoids loss and/or damage to biodiversity, and promotes the resilience of ecosystems?**
- **Only where the balance of environmental, economic, social and cultural benefits¹ provided by your proposal is such that there may be some loss of**

¹ Taking proper account of the benefits and intrinsic value of natural resources, including biodiversity, and ecosystems

habitat or species, have you sought to enhance biodiversity elsewhere on the site, or, where there is no other option, offsite?

- **Does your proposal contribute to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity across Wales?**

Yes.

The proposals are primarily intended to improve animal welfare rather than deliver biodiversity recovery. However, the measures have been designed in a way that avoids adverse effects on biodiversity and may contribute to maintaining biodiversity across Wales.

The seal disturbance offence seeks to reduce activities which can interfere with natural behaviour, breeding success and pup survival. While there is currently no evidence of a conservation concern affecting grey seal populations at a UK level, unmanaged increases in disturbance could adversely affect local Welsh populations over time. The measure therefore acts as a preventative safeguard against avoidable pressures.

Similarly, the hare close season seeks to address animal welfare concerns rather than population decline. Nevertheless, preventing the killing, injury or taking of hare during the breeding season may contribute to maintaining local populations and breeding success. Population increases beyond sustainable levels are not anticipated because lawful population management will remain available outside the close season.

No habitat loss, species loss or ecosystem damage is anticipated as a result of the proposals

Increasing the resilience of our natural environment

12. Does your proposal contribute to building the resilience of our ecosystems?

- **Does it work with nature, and consider the use of nature-based solutions first and foremost?**
- **Are any nature-based solutions native and bio-diverse?**
- **Can it restore or contribute to the restoration of degraded habitats?**
- **Can it contribute to building resilient ecological networks of habitats?**
- **Does the proposal improve site management to improve habitat or species condition at any scale? e.g. planting native species, providing wildflower areas for pollinators, leaving areas of unmown grass; and improving connectivity between valuable habitats?**

The proposed Bill may make a minor positive contribution to ecosystem resilience through the protection of native wildlife species.

Reducing disturbance of seals may support normal breeding behaviour and successful rearing of pups. The proposal therefore helps reduce a pressure which, if left unmanaged, could affect resilience of local seal populations. Similarly, the hare close season may support successful breeding and recruitment of young animals into local populations.

The proposals do not involve habitat restoration, nature-based solutions, ecological network creation or site management activities. Equally, they are not expected to adversely affect ecosystem functioning or resilience. Protecting seals and hare in the

manner proposed is not expected to have consequential effects for other species, habitats or ecological communities.

Overall, the contribution to ecosystem resilience is expected to be minor but positive.

13. Does your proposal contribute to the creation of new habitat?

- **Does your proposal support the creation of new habitats, such as local orchards, native hedges, wildflower meadows or other areas of native, bio-diverse green space?**
- **Can habitat creation contribute to developing resilient ecological networks?**

No.

The Bill does not involve habitat creation, habitat restoration, land-use change or environmental enhancement works. The proposals focus on animal welfare protections relating to two wild species and do not create new terrestrial, freshwater or marine habitats.

While the legislation may contribute indirectly to maintaining healthy wildlife populations, it is not expected to result in the creation of new habitat or ecological networks

Tackling key pressures on species and habitats

14. Will the proposal have any negative impacts on habitats or species through

- **change in land use?**
- **causing air, water, light, noise or vibration pollution?**

No negative impacts have been identified.

The Bill does not authorise development, construction, land use change, marine development or habitat modification. The proposals do not create sources of air, water, light, noise or vibration pollution and are not expected to result in direct or indirect harm to habitats or species.

No evidence has been identified that protecting seals from disturbance or introducing a hare close season would adversely affect other wildlife species, flora or fauna.

Overall, the biodiversity impact is assessed as neutral to minor positive

15. Has all legislation regarding the pressures on species and habitats been complied with? This would include:

- **Pollution control**
- **Invasive non-native species**
- **Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems**
- **Climate Change etc.**

Yes.

The proposals have been developed having regard to existing wildlife, environmental and animal welfare legislation and are intended to support biodiversity, wildlife welfare and responsible interactions with wild animals. The Bill does not reduce or remove any existing

environmental protections and does not conflict with existing controls relating to pollution, invasive non-native species, habitat protection or climate change obligations.

The proposals are intended to address specific welfare concerns relating to seals and hare while remaining consistent with wider environmental protection frameworks operating in Wales.

16. How will any negative impacts be mitigated?

- **Have whole system approaches and native, bio-diverse nature-based solutions been used to reduce pollution and mitigate climate change?**
- **Does your proposal employ best practice for the sustainable management of agriculture, fisheries, forestry and construction?**
- **Does your proposal include action to support pollinators?**

No negative biodiversity impacts have been identified and therefore no specific mitigation measures are required.

The proposals are expected to have a neutral to minor positive effect on biodiversity through improved protection of wild animals and responsible wildlife management. They do not involve activities that would require habitat compensation, biodiversity enhancement measures, pollution controls or nature-based mitigation.

The impact of the legislation will continue to be monitored through stakeholder engagement, any implementation planning, consultation responses and any future post-implementation review. If any unintended biodiversity impacts emerge, they can be considered through future policy development and review processes.

In Summary

The proposed Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill is primarily an animal welfare measure rather than a species conservation initiative. However, the proposals are expected to have a neutral to minor positive effect on biodiversity through improved protection of native wildlife species, while no adverse impacts on habitats, ecosystems, flora or other fauna have been identified.

6. Rural Proofing Impact Assessment

Describe and explain the impact of the proposal on rural people, businesses and communities.

The proposed Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill contains two measures intended to improve animal welfare: the introduction of a statutory close season for hare during which it would be unlawful to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take hare and a new offence of intentional or reckless disturbance of seals. The Bill applies across Wales but has particular relevance to some rural and coastal communities because the activities affected by the proposals predominantly occur in those areas.

Overall, impacts on rural people, businesses and communities are expected to be minimal. The Bill does not create new services, impose significant administrative burdens or require major changes in land management practices. The principal effects are expected to arise through improved animal welfare protections and greater clarity within the legislative framework governing interactions with wildlife.

The hare close season may affect a small number of landowners, farmers, sporting interests and others involved in hare management. During the close season, persons wishing to undertake control activity for specified purposes, including the prevention of serious crop damage, may need to apply for a licence. While this introduces a limited administrative requirement, the proposal does not prevent necessary management activity where justified. The proposal is designed to address animal welfare concerns associated with killing hare during their breeding season and is not intended to prevent legitimate population management. Lawful shooting would continue outside the close season and overpopulation is not anticipated.

The seal disturbance offence may affect some recreational users such as walkers and dog owners, wildlife tourism operators, photographers, fishing operations, and vessel operators operating in coastal areas. However, the proposal is intended to encourage responsible behaviour around wildlife and is not expected to prevent legitimate recreational, commercial or tourism activities where these are undertaken responsibly.

The proposals may provide indirect benefits for rural and coastal communities by supporting public confidence in wildlife protection and contributing to the welfare of species that form part of Wales's natural heritage.

How will the proposal affect the lives of rural people, positively and negatively?

Positive impacts may include:

- improved welfare protections for wildlife found in rural and coastal areas;
- greater clarity regarding lawful interactions with hare and seals;
- support for responsible wildlife management and wildlife tourism;
- reinforcement of Wales's reputation for high animal welfare standards; and
- potential benefits to public enjoyment and appreciation of wildlife.

Potential negative impacts are limited.

A hare close season would prevent the shooting of hares during a defined period of the year for individuals who currently undertake such activity. It would be an offence (subject to a number of exceptions and the possibility of obtaining a licence) to shoot hare during the close season, but this would not prevent shooting outside that period were otherwise lawful. No significant adverse impacts on rural livelihoods, agricultural productivity or land management are expected.

Will access be an issue for rural people? If yes, what will be done to overcome barriers to access?

No access issues have been identified.

The proposed Bill does not affect access to public services, transport, healthcare, education or employment opportunities. Information relating to the legislation, guidance and consultation materials will be made available digitally and through existing communication channels. Alternative formats will be available on request where required.

How has the proposal taken account of the needs of rural people, for example older populations, housing issues and language requirements?

The proposals have been developed to be proportionate and apply consistently across Wales. They do not affect housing, healthcare, education or other services often associated with rural proofing considerations.

Welsh language requirements will continue to be respected through bilingual consultation materials, guidance and public communications. Information about any legislation that may be introduced as a result of the proposals will be available through Welsh and English in accordance with Welsh Government standards.

The proposals are not expected to impact differently on older people living in rural communities.

Will the proposal lead to new services being opened or existing services being closed? How will you maximise positive impacts and mitigate negative impacts?

No.

The Bill does not create new public services and does not require the closure or reduction of existing services.

Positive impacts will be maximised through clear guidance, accessible communications and stakeholder engagement during any implementation. Any potential negative impacts will be mitigated through awareness-raising, proportionate enforcement and clear explanation of the scope of the new offences.

Does the policy require the purchase or use of land? Have you considered rural factors such as land value, availability or restrictive designations?

No.

The Bill does not require the purchase, acquisition or use of land and has no implications for land values, land availability, agricultural tenancy arrangements or land-use designations.

The proposals regulate behaviour towards wildlife rather than ownership, management or development of land.

Will the proposal work in difficult terrain such as narrow roads and mountainous areas? If not, how will barriers be overcome?

Yes.

While some seal haul-out sites and coastal locations are remote and may present practical challenges for monitoring and enforcement, similar challenges already exist for wildlife crime and regulatory activity in rural and coastal areas. Enforcement authorities will continue to use established reporting, investigation and evidence-gathering processes, and the effectiveness of the offences is not dependent on permanent physical access or infrastructure.

No barriers have been identified that would prevent the legislation from operating effectively in remote or difficult terrain.

Is the proposal relevant to SMEs or micro-enterprises?

The proposal may be relevant to some farmers and a limited number of small rural businesses including wildlife tourism operators, wildlife photography businesses, recreational activity providers and some sporting interests.

No significant costs to SMEs or micro-enterprises have been identified.

Responsible wildlife tourism activities are not expected to be adversely affected and may benefit from clearer expectations regarding interactions with wildlife. The legislation does not require businesses to obtain new equipment, premises or infrastructure.

No specific support arrangements are considered necessary.

The results of the consultation will help inform further considerations.

Does the proposal depend on infrastructure such as road, rail, broadband or mobile connectivity?

No.

The legislation does not depend on transport infrastructure, digital connectivity or telecommunications infrastructure in order to operate effectively.

Information and guidance will be made available through a range of communication channels to ensure accessibility for stakeholders located in more remote rural and coastal areas.

How does the proposal help tackle poverty in rural areas?

The Bill is not intended as an anti-poverty measure and is not expected to have a direct effect on poverty, income levels or the cost of living.

The proposals do not impose significant costs on households and are not expected to affect employment opportunities or access to services.

By supporting wildlife welfare and public confidence in Wales's natural environment, the legislation may contribute indirectly to the attractiveness of rural and coastal areas for recreation and tourism, but any economic effects are expected to be limited.

What contact have you had with rural stakeholders?

Policy development has included engagement with stakeholders likely to be affected by the proposals, including conservation organisations, animal welfare organisations, Natural Resources Wales, enforcement partners and stakeholders with interests in land management, rural activities and wildlife.

The public consultation will provide a further opportunity for rural stakeholders, including landowners, farmers, rural businesses and representative organisations, to provide evidence on potential impacts and implementation considerations.

No evidence has been identified to date suggesting significant adverse impacts on rural communities.

What evidence have you used to inform your assessment, including evidence from rural people or their representatives?

This assessment has been informed by:

- development of the proposed Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill;
- stakeholder engagement undertaken during policy development;
- evidence relating to seal disturbance;
- evidence relating to hare welfare and breeding biology;
- the development of other Impact Assessments; and
- consideration of impacts on land managers, coastal users, tourism operators and rural communities.

What other evidence would inform the assessment?

Additional evidence from:

- farming organisations;
- rural representative bodies;
- land management stakeholders;
- coastal communities;
- wildlife tourism operators;
- shooting organisations; and
- consultation respondents

would help inform the final assessment of rural impacts and identify any implementation issues requiring further consideration.

Summary

Overall, the proposed Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill is expected to have minimal impacts on rural people, businesses and communities. Any effects are likely to be limited, proportionate and concentrated on a small number of activities involving hare management and interactions with seals, while wider benefits are expected through improved wildlife welfare and responsible engagement with Wales's natural environment.

7. Sustainable Land Management Impact Assessment

The proposed Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill is not primarily concerned with agriculture and does not regulate farming practices, land management, agricultural support or food production. Nevertheless, the proposed close season for hare would make it an offence to carry out an activity that is commonly undertaken on agricultural land, by making it unlawful to kill, injure or take hare during a specified period. of the breeding season, except under licence for specified purposes, including for the prevention of serious crop damage. As the proposal may affect activities carried out on agricultural land, it is capable of engaging the Sustainable Land Management duty under the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023.

By contrast, the proposed seal disturbance offence has very limited relevance to agriculture, agricultural land or ancillary agricultural activities. The assessment therefore focuses predominantly on the hare close season proposal when considering the SLM objectives.

SLM Impact Assessment:

Question 2: Describe and explain the impact of the proposal on agriculture, or other activities carried out on land used for agriculture, or ancillary activities, against the SLM objectives of the Agriculture (Wales) Act 2023.

Please provide evidence / your consideration against each of the SLM objectives:

1. To produce food and other goods in a sustainable manner

The proposed Bill is not expected to have a significant impact on agricultural production or the sustainable production of food and other goods.

The principal measure relevant to agriculture is the proposed introduction of a statutory close season, during which it would be unlawful to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take hare. Hare are commonly found on agricultural land and the proposal may therefore affect some landowners, farmers and others involved in hare management. However, the proposal does not regulate agricultural practices, land use, cropping systems, livestock production or agricultural support arrangements.

The measure is intended to address an identified animal welfare concern by preventing the killing of hare during the breeding season when dependent young may be present. It is possible that, as a result, there might be an impact on the production of food, for example where hare are eating and destroying crops. Consideration of such a scenario has been given during the policy development, and the proposal is that Farmers and land managers experiencing serious damage to crops during the close season would be able to apply for a licence. This introduces an additional administrative step for a relatively small number of land managers who may wish to control hare during the close season, but the proposal does not prevent population management where there is a legitimate need.

As lawful shooting would continue to be permitted outside the close season, and the proposed legislation would include exceptions and a licensing mechanism for

specified purposes including the prevention of serious crop damage, no material impacts on agricultural productivity, food production or the ability of land managers to produce other goods sustainably are anticipated.

2. To mitigate and adapt to climate change

The Bill is not expected to have a direct effect on climate change mitigation or adaptation.

The proposals do not significantly alter agricultural production systems, land management practices, greenhouse gas emissions, carbon sequestration, energy use or resource efficiency. No impacts on climate adaptation have been identified.

The measures are focused on animal welfare rather than climate policy.

Accordingly, the impact against this objective is expected to be neutral.

3. To maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide

The proposed Bill may make a minor positive contribution to this objective.

Although neither measure has been developed as a species conservation initiative, both proposals may support the resilience of native wildlife populations. The close season for hare may contribute to successful breeding by reducing the risk of pregnant animals with dependent young being shot during the breeding season. The seal disturbance offence may reduce activities that adversely affect breeding behaviour, pup survival and the successful use of haul-out sites.

Grey seal populations are not currently considered threatened from a conservation perspective. However, evidence suggests that unmanaged disturbance can affect breeding success and pup welfare. The proposal therefore provides a preventative mechanism to reduce avoidable pressures.

No adverse effects on other species, habitats or ecosystem functions have been identified, and the measures are not expected to result in changes to land management, habitat condition or biodiversity elsewhere.

Overall, the Bill is expected to have a neutral to minor positive effect on ecosystem resilience.

4. To conserve and enhance the countryside and cultural resources and to promote public access to and engagement with them, and to sustain the Welsh language and promote and facilitate its use.

The proposed Bill may make a modest positive contribution to this objective.

Hare and seals form part of Wales's natural heritage and are species with which many people engage during recreation and visits to rural and coastal areas. By supporting improved animal welfare standards and responsible interactions with

wildlife, the Bill may contribute positively to public appreciation of the natural environment.

The proposals do not restrict public access to the countryside or coast and are not expected to affect recreational enjoyment where activities are undertaken responsibly.

The Bill is not expected to have a direct effect on the Welsh language. Welsh language considerations will continue to be addressed through bilingual consultation materials, guidance and communications in accordance with Welsh Government requirements and commitments.

Overall impacts against this objective are expected to be minimal but broadly positive.

Question 3: Consider how your policy will be implemented in the way that best contributes to achieving the SLM objectives (so far as consistent with the proper exercise of the function).

Please provide evidence / your consideration against each of the SLM objectives:

1. To produce food and other goods in a sustainable manner

If a decision is taken to proceed with a Bill, implementation will seek to ensure that the legislation operates proportionately and does not create unnecessary burdens for farmers, land managers or rural businesses.

The close season for hare has been designed to address animal welfare concerns while maintaining a proportionate approach to legitimate land management needs. Existing population management activities will be able to continue outside the close season and, during the close season, the proposals include exceptions to the new offence and a licensing mechanism that will be available for specified purposes, including the prevention of serious crop damage. Clear guidance and stakeholder engagement will support understanding of the licensing arrangements and compliance with the legislation.

This approach enables the policy objective to be achieved without adversely affecting sustainable agricultural production.

2. To mitigate and adapt to climate change

No specific implementation measures are required under this objective because the Bill is not expected to have direct climate impacts.

Any implementation will focus on delivery of the animal welfare objectives whilst ensuring that no avoidable barriers are created for land managers or rural stakeholders.

3. To maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide

Implementation will support this objective through proportionate protection of native wildlife species.

The seal disturbance offence will provide a framework for reducing harmful disturbance, particularly around breeding activity and pup welfare. The hare close season will reduce welfare risks associated with shooting during the breeding season. Together these measures may support healthy wildlife populations without requiring changes to wider land management practices.

Guidance and communications will promote understanding of responsible behaviour towards wildlife and support compliance, should legislation be brought forward.

4. To conserve and enhance the countryside and cultural resources and to promote public access to and engagement with them, and to sustain the Welsh language and promote and facilitate its use.

Should legislation be brought forward, any associated implementation will seek to support continued responsible enjoyment of Wales's countryside and coastline while improving protections for wildlife.

Public guidance and communications will explain the purpose of the legislation and encourage responsible interactions with wildlife. Materials will continue to be available bilingually, supporting engagement through both Welsh and English.

The proposed legislation does not aim to affect public rights of access or responsible recreational use of rural and coastal areas, and implementation will seek to ensure the measures remain proportionate and accessible to those affected.

Summary

The proposed Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill is not primarily an agricultural policy and is expected to have only limited interaction with the Sustainable Land Management duty. The principal relevance arises from the proposed hare close season, which may affect activities undertaken on agricultural land. Overall, the Bill is expected to have neutral to minor positive effects against the SLM objectives by improving animal welfare and supporting responsible management of native wildlife without adversely affecting sustainable agricultural production, ecosystem resilience, rural communities or public engagement with the countryside.

8. Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening

The proposal has been considered against the requirements of the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Wales) Regulations 2004.

The proposed Wild Animal Welfare (Wales) Bill would introduce two targeted animal welfare measures: a new offence of intentionally or recklessly disturbing seals and a statutory close season for hare. The proposed Bill would not allocate land authorise development, establish a framework for development consent decisions or provide for programmes of works. Its primary purpose would be animal welfare.

The proposed Bill would not establish a framework for future development consent and would be principally concerned with animal welfare.

On the basis of the policy proposals currently under consideration, no significant environmental effects of the type normally associated with plans and programmes requiring Strategic Environmental Assessment have been identified. The current assessment is therefore that a full Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required at this stage.

This position will be kept under review during and following consultation. Consultation responses and any additional evidence received, including evidence relating to environmental effects, protected sites, species management, licensing requirements or implementation impacts, will be considered before a final conclusion is reached. The conclusion will be reflected in the Integrated Impact Assessment accompanying the introduction of any Bill that is taken forward.

9. Habitats Regulations Assessment Screening

The proposal has been considered against the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

The proposed Bill would introduce a new offence relating to seal disturbance and an offence in respect of the intentional or reckless killing, injuring or taking of hare during a close season. Both offences prevent activities rather than authorise development, physical works or land-use change. No pathway has currently been identified by which the provisions themselves could result in likely significant effects on the qualifying features of a Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area or Ramsar site.

The proposed offences would be subject to certain exceptions, and the proposals would also enable certain activities that would otherwise constitute an offence to be authorised through the existing licensing framework under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. However, the availability of licensing under that framework would not itself authorise any activity. Any future licence application would be considered separately by the relevant licensing authority and, where relevant, would remain subject to the requirements of the Habitats Regulations, including screening and Appropriate Assessment where required.

On the basis of the policy proposals currently under consideration, the current assessment is that an Appropriate Assessment, being the stage following screening, is not required. No likely significant effect on a Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area or Ramsar site has been identified in relation to the proposed Bill itself.

This position will be kept under review during and following consultation. Consultation responses and any additional evidence received, including evidence relating to environmental effects, protected sites, species management, licensing requirements or implementation impacts, will be considered before a final conclusion is reached. The conclusion will be reflected in the Integrated Impact Assessment accompanying the introduction of any Bill that is taken forward.