



**afonydd cymru**  
caring for welsh rivers

Strategic Business Plan  
**2022 • 2027**

# Introduction

Afonydd Cymru (AC) became a company limited by guarantee on the 5th of November 2008 and a registered charity three years later on the 30th of January 2012. It is the umbrella body for the six regional rivers trusts in Wales but, above all, it champions Wales' thirty-three rivers, as well as its many lakes and smaller watercourses. This is a precious resource for people, fish and a wide range of diverse species. These all depend on clean water and a healthy environment.

This is our first strategic business plan, and it will cover the period from 2022 to 2027. Since 2012, AC has led much of the on-the ground improvements to Wales' rivers, with a record spend of £1.7m in 2020 despite COVID restrictions during the pandemic. Following the sad passing of the previous Chief Executive, Dr Stephen Marsh-Smith, Gail Davies-Walsh has been appointed to lead the organization into its next phase of development. This will require AC to be ready to meet new challenges and opportunities.



**Leaving the EU** – the river trust movement has historically been reliant, at least in part, on European funding. BREXIT will cut off these funding sources for the eNGO sector so we will need to identify new funding opportunities. AC hopes to continue as a trusted deliverer for Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales (NRW) but will also look to the corporate sector and charitable trusts to expand its funding.



**Addressing the Biodiversity Crisis and aiding Green Recovery** – post pandemic, AC will support the practical delivery of resilient, sustainable and nature friendly solutions to improve river habitats, enhance biodiversity and safeguard water quality and quantity. This has the potential to create new jobs and much needed employment in rural areas and promote health and wellbeing.



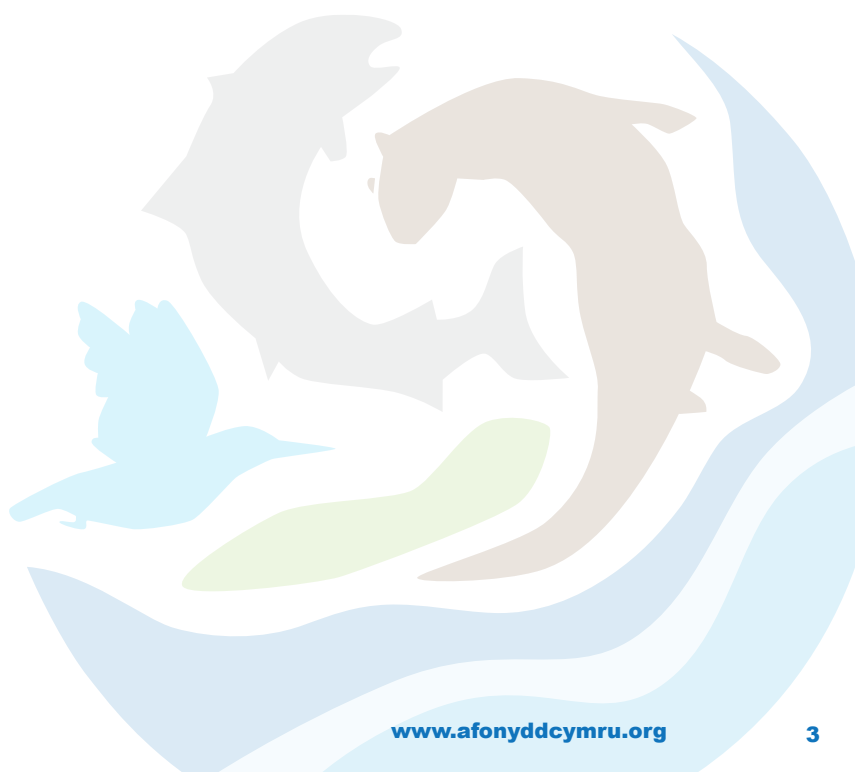
**Recent Welsh legislation** – Wales has introduced new environmental legislation: The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, The Environment (Wales) Act (2016), The Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) (Wales) Regulations 2021. AC will play its part in ensuring that these laws are implemented in a way that benefits the Welsh freshwater environment. We will also seek to influence key upcoming legislation and policy such as the White Paper on Agriculture in Wales and the new Welsh Sustainable Farming Scheme.



**Climate Change** –2020 recorded the wettest February, fifth warmest spring, hottest summer and the wettest October. Never has it been a more important time to protect our freshwaters and their biodiversity from the increasing threats of climate change. Our rivers are at increasing risk of both severe floods and droughts and iconic species such as the Atlantic salmon and sewin are being increasingly impacted.



**Peoples desire to embrace nature more** - a beneficial product of the pandemic has been peoples increased awareness of the intrinsic value of nature and its beneficial impacts on their wellbeing. AC, in line with its charitable duties, will aim to increase public awareness of, and education about, the value of Welsh rivers and still waters. It will also create opportunities for direct involvement in the management and monitoring of rivers through volunteering and citizen science.



# Our Vision

## **Our vision is for clean and healthy rivers for every community in Wales**

Considerable progress has been made over the last 30 years to clean up Wales' rivers. The river Taff, for example, was virtually lifeless and now supports thriving fish populations including salmon. In the last thirty years there has been:



A decline in industrial activity accompanied by the introduction of more stringent regulation which has reduced point source pollution.



Privatization of the water industry which has brought major investment into the treatment of both human and industrial waste.

This has resulted in considerable improvements to the water quality of our rivers. However, whilst chemical water pollution has significantly decreased in recent years, leading to increases in the ecological status of some of our rivers, the hoped for widespread improvements from the introduction of the Water Framework Directive have not been delivered.

Currently only 43% of Wales waterbodies achieve the target of Good Ecological Status (GES). The reason for these failures is partly due to historic problems that have not been resolved. These include:



Combined sewer overflows (a legacy from Victorian engineering)



Pollution from historic mining



Obstacles to fish migration caused by manmade constructions such as weirs.



However, AC considers that the greatest threats now facing our rivers are:



The increase in diffuse pollution largely due to the intensification of agriculture which is exacerbated by poor land use management.



Climate change whereby warmer temperatures and more significant rainfall events are having a damaging impact on our rivers. Welsh Government has set a target of net zero by 2050. There is opportunity here for river trusts to deliver mitigation solutions.



Deterioration of river habitat due to previous land drainage practices.

It is also being increasingly recognized that there are many chemicals entering our watercourses such as herbicides, pesticides, pharmaceuticals and microplastics which are not routinely monitored and whose impacts we have little knowledge of.

So, we believe that much still needs to be done before we have rivers that are clean enough to ensure the long-term health of humans as well as the flora and fauna that our rivers support.

Whilst public awareness of these issues is increasing, we would like to encourage much greater ownership by local communities of their river as it is only with their support and involvement that the vision for cleaner and healthier rivers will be fully realised.



# Our Strategic Outcomes and Objectives

## 1. Contributing to the improvement to Overall River Quality

We will achieve this through our continued enablement of the regional river trusts to identify and deliver improvements to Welsh rivers. Vital to this is the strategic partnership we have with NRW, funded through the Welsh Government Capital Fund, to identify and rectify issues such as habitat damage or obstructions in all key Welsh rivers.

	Objective	Target / Measure
1.1	Afonydd Cymru to help the regional river trusts to continue as the number one deliverer of river restoration in Wales	To obtain and deliver the full suite of improvement measures identified within the fisheries habitat surveys (2021), currently valued at approximately £20-25M by 2027
1.2	Fully understand and be able to evidence the state of rivers in Wales	Complete surveying of rivers and monitor changes over next 5 years
1.3	Advocate and support the reduction of water pollution in Wales	Support Nutrient Management Boards  Act as Technical Advisors to Welsh Government



## 2. An Expanded and More Effective Rivers Trust Movement in Wales with a Long- Term, Sustainable Funding Base

We will not only achieve this by continuing to provide the vehicle through which Welsh Government and NRW funds the regional river trusts in Wales, but also by identifying and obtaining new and varied sources of funding both for AC and river trusts.

Over the next five years, we must prioritise securing long-term funding. We will do this by exploring commercial and corporate markets to support natural capital delivery, develop our programmes for Green Recovery and continuing our significant improvement to rivers. We will also work with the trusts to identify the most efficient and effective structures and mechanisms for service delivery. If we can deliver more in partnership than alone, we will do so. To support this, we will seek to strengthen our Board with a trustee that brings significant financial experience and expertise.

	Objective	Target / Measure
2.1	Diversify funding sources	Secure core funding for Afonydd Cymru Co-ordinate funding opportunities to double the existing funding from Afonydd Cymru to Trusts from a wide range of funding sources
2.2	Strengthen long-term strategic funding	Secure long-term rolling funding which extends over multiple years
2.3	Seek to attract new funding and deliver a diverse range of outcomes through working with others	Develop at least 3 Strategic Partnerships
2.4	Lead delivery of nature-based solutions (NBS) in Wales	Implement NBS schemes in Wales, including multi-benefit opportunities for offsetting, as well as actions to improve water quality and regulate water quantity

### 3. Advocate to Eliminate The Current High Levels of Water Pollution

This outcome is not fully within our control, but it is so critical to our vision and to the successful delivery of our work that it must be included. Our aim is to collect evidence about the nature, severity, and extent of the problem and to call to account those responsible as well as those organisations which should set the standards, monitor, regulate and enforce. As in the past, where all else fails, we will be prepared to make legal challenges.

We will continue to focus on the three areas of agricultural pollution that we deem most damaging- slurry from cattle and pigs, soil erosion and sedimentation, and high phosphate levels particularly from intensive poultry units.

In addition, we will focus on the problem of unpermitted discharges from CSOs.

	Objective	Target / Measure
3.1	Strengthen our knowledge of water pollution	Support monitoring of Wales' rivers including establishing targeted citizen science projects with every Trust
3.2	Highlight the need to reduce pollution from wastewater	Advocate that CSOs are operated to permit by developing strategies with Welsh Water and NRW
3.3	Advocate to reduce the number of agricultural pollutions (point and diffuse) by working with Welsh Government, the agricultural community, planners, and NRW to identify sustainable land use management practices	A significant reduction from the current level of agricultural pollution incidents recorded by NRW by 2027





#### 4. **Relevant Legislation, Policy and Practice is Influenced and Challenged to Protect and Enhance Wales' Freshwater Environment.**

We will achieve this through our advocacy work either alone or through the Wales Environment Link partnership. We will continue to seek representation for the Rivers Trust movement on relevant Welsh Government and NRW working groups and will ensure that we contribute to key consultations. We will produce and publish position statements on our website.

	Objective	Target / Measure
4.1	Influence Welsh Government so that emerging legislation meets the requirements to protect Wales rivers	Ensure Afonydd Cymru has a voice at WEL, responds to relevant consultations and has a seat on relevant WG working groups
4.2	Influence Sustainable Farming Scheme	There are robust incentives within the scheme to protect and improve the water environment
4.3	Ensure Welsh rivers are included in the reversal of the Nature and Biodiversity Crisis	Working in partnership to raise the profile of issues with potential to affect biodiversity and investigate effective solutions. Continue and enhance funding streams to further connect and restore freshwater habitats. Ensure regional river trusts are at the forefront of Biodiversity Offsetting in Wales
4.4	Help to mitigate Climate Change impacts on the freshwater environments of Wales	The introduction and implementation of nature-based solutions (NBS) to: Store carbon through wetland and woodland creation and soil management. Treat effluent. Reduce water temperatures through riparian tree planting
4.5	Ensure enforcement of current and new regulations:	Campaign for effective enforcement of legislation in Wales, by WG and NRW. When necessary, apply legal review and action.

## 5. Greater Public Awareness of Rivers and the Work of the Regional River Trusts

There is much that could be done to raise public awareness of the value and issues facing our rivers. Key to this is the need to connect communities to their local river. AC and the river trusts could play a major role in bringing this about through information, education and by facilitating citizen science to monitor the state of our rivers.

AC recognises that it must improve its communications and visibility to raise our profile in Wales. We need to understand who we need to engage with, the best ways to do this and use this to develop a communications strategy. We will recruit Board members with strategic communications and community engagement expertise to help us to develop both communications and community engagement strategies. We will also continue to liaise with all those carrying out research into Wales' rivers, their ecology and the factors that affect them. AC will identify topics of research that are needed both to carry out our own work more successfully and to resolve complex issues such as sustainable ways of nutrient management in order not to pollute rivers. We will try to create opportunities and ways to support researchers and students to carry out relevant projects in the field.

	Objective	Target / Measure
5.1	To improve AC visibility in Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved website Increase media interviews year on year</li> <li>• Increase followers and interactions via social media</li> <li>• Working with high profile eNGOs</li> </ul>
5.2	To support the river trusts to be recognized by their local communities and public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secure funding for Adopt a Tributary schemes across Wales.</li> <li>• Promote Citizen Science schemes</li> <li>• Connect the public with their rivers and regional trusts</li> </ul>
5.3	Support the education of students about the management and ecology of our rivers	Afonydd Cymru becomes a hub for educational material to support the National Curriculum of Wales by 2025 (for related environmental and water topics)
5.4	Increase our understanding of Wales' rivers	Support and feed into the Wales Data Strategy for open-source data
5.5	Strengthen relationships with academia across Wales	Identify gaps in knowledge and support research into new and emerging issues on rivers