



**afonydd cymru**  
caring for welsh rivers

# Manifesto

## **2025/26**

The commitments that are needed from political parties  
if Wales's rivers are to improve under the next  
Welsh Government.





# Introduction

Afonydd Cymru (AC) is a registered charity and the umbrella body for the six regional Rivers Trusts in Wales. Above all, we champion Wales's thirty-three rivers, as well as its many lakes and smaller watercourses. With clean water and a healthy environment, these are precious resources for people, fish and a wide range of diverse species.

Faced with a myriad of pressures, the current state of Welsh rivers is very concerning. They continue to be blighted by pollution from multiple sources, by invasive species, over-abstraction and by the effects of climate change, to name just a handful of issues.

With one in six species at risk of extinction in Wales, the Senedd has declared a 'nature crisis.' And, specifically for rivers, populations of iconic fish species such as Atlantic salmon and sewin (sea trout) are declining fast and are at risk of disappearing entirely.

In the run up to the 2026 Senedd election, we have outlined the commitments we believe are required from all the political parties if Wales's rivers are to improve under the next Welsh Government.

To reverse the current, disturbing trend, we urge political parties to commit to the following....



# 1. A clear overall strategy to improve rivers

With a single environmental regulator and a not-for-profit water company structure, water management in Wales is already distinctly different to England. A new Welsh Government should set out a strategic direction for the management and regulation of rivers and for all impacting sectors, with clear evidence-based priorities and transparent, long-term solutions to deliver well-being for our future generations.

To achieve this, the next Government will need to:

- Use the upcoming restructuring of water company regulation in Wales as an opportunity to ensure clear accountability, public scrutiny of performance and legal repercussions for underperformance.
- Ensure that the long-awaited, soon to be formed Office for Environmental Governance Wales (OEGW) is properly resourced and fully independent with the same status and powers as its equivalent in England.
- Create a National Plan for Water which considers the long-term water demand in Wales to support our population, housing and industry but also ensures long-term protection and restoration of the habitat and species that depend on it. Wales's rivers must be preserved for the generations to come.

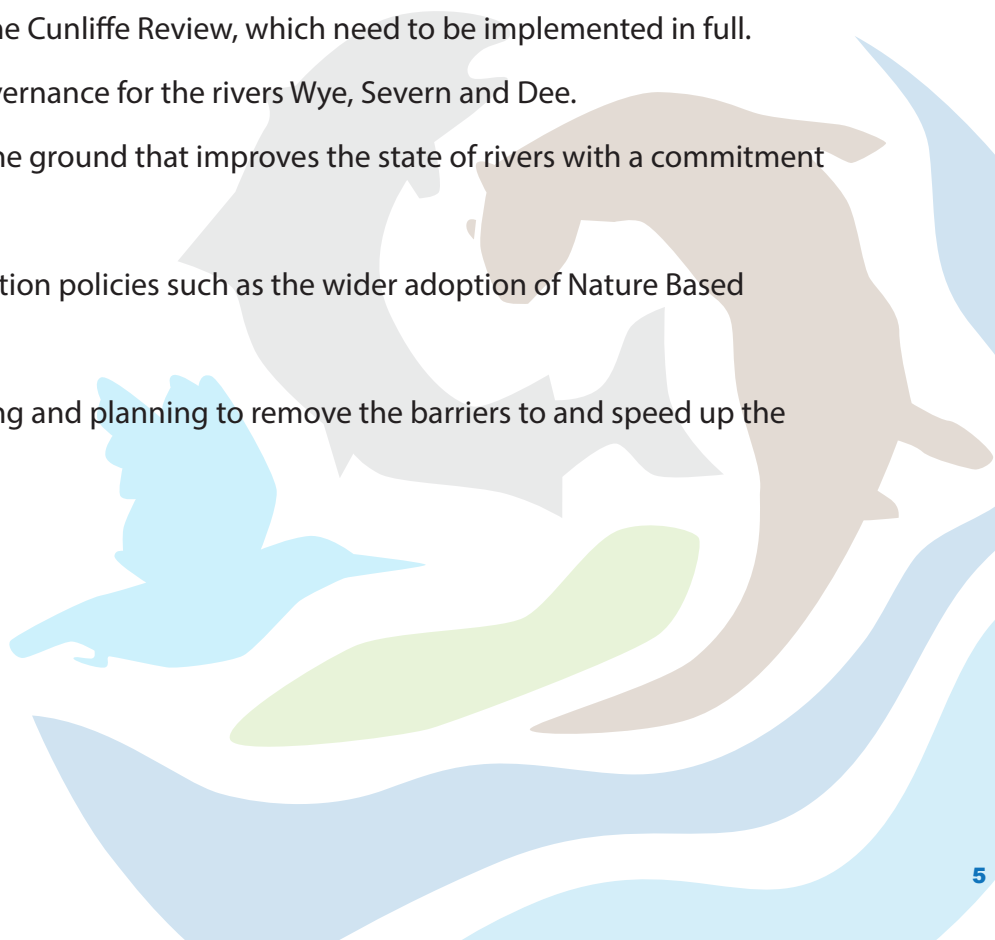


## 2. Catchment level planning, management and delivery

Every river in Wales has its own set of issues and priorities, some of which are unique. In addition to an overall strategy therefore, an effective catchment-based planning and management model is essential to deliver improvements.

To achieve this, the next Government will need to:

- Establish a river management model that is clear and consistent with robust governance but also with the flexibility to recognise the differences in each river.
- Create water management policies that prioritise long-term climate and biodiversity resilience over short-term wins. Both this and a clear overall strategy would deliver the recommendations made by the Cunliffe Review, which need to be implemented in full.
- Resolve cross-border river governance for the rivers Wye, Severn and Dee.
- Accelerate physical work on the ground that improves the state of rivers with a commitment to long-term funding.
- Adopt innovative river restoration policies such as the wider adoption of Nature Based Solutions.
- Introduce risk-based permitting and planning to remove the barriers to and speed up the delivery of restoration work.



### **3. Be tough on all polluters and make Wales the UK standard bearer for improving rivers**

The movement for devolution was driven by a desire to preserve Welsh identity, culture, language and environment, as well as to address specific economic and social challenges unique to Wales.

Our natural environment provides a new Government with an outstanding opportunity to demonstrate what devolution can deliver.

To achieve this, the next Government will need to:

- Ensure that the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regs are complied with and where not appropriate enforcement action taken.
- Extend Welsh Government's powers under the Devolution Act to Wales to provide the necessary powers to deliver improvements for rivers.
- Be at the forefront of research and evidence.
- Lead by example and align our legislation and policy to world-leading standards in areas such as soil health and chemicals.
- Ensure Natural Resources Wales is resourced to ensure effective enforcement of environmental laws and that these are applied equally across all sectors. Despite the focus on the water industry, the agricultural sector is the one having the greatest impact on rivers in Wales.
- Give Natural Resources Wales more enforcement tools including the power to issue on-the-spot fines and use civil sanctions.
- Resolve the UK Treasury structure to enable fines issued in Wales to be spent in Wales.

