

ENVIRONMENT (WALES) ACT 2016

EXPLANATORY NOTES

COMMENTARY ON SECTIONS

Part 1 – Sustainable management of natural resources

Section 4 – Principles of sustainable management of natural resources

21. **Section 4** establishes the principles that determine how the sustainable management of natural resources is to be delivered. The principles are complementary and interlinked and are not listed in order of priority.
22. Paragraph (a) provides for an adaptive approach to decision-making. This involves generating new knowledge and seeking to reduce uncertainties, thereby allowing a decision-maker to anticipate and cater for change.
23. Paragraph (b) requires spatial scale to be considered. This includes considering the appropriate local, regional or national spatial level to address issues or to deliver opportunities. For example, linkages between ground water, surface water and rainfall within the area of a river catchment mean that impacts on any one of these can affect hydrological processes within the catchment and the benefits linked to these processes, such as clean water provision.
24. Paragraphs (c), (d) and (e) require working with appropriate sectors of society. Decisions should be made in consideration of the evidence and information gathered from relevant stakeholders and different sectors of society, including for example, local communities and the public. The term “evidence” in this context is not solely a reference to scientific evidence and would include local knowledge as well as empirical data and scientific evidence.
25. Paragraph (f) requires that benefits that are provided by our natural resources and ecosystems are identified and considered, as well as the intrinsic value of those ecosystems and resources, which is the value of natural resources and ecosystems for their own sake. All provisioning, supporting, regulating and cultural benefits (or services) should be considered, as appropriate. Information on benefits is provided at paragraph 18. For example, in forestry management, in addition to taking into consideration the provision of timber, other services such as carbon storage, habitat provision or recreational activities are also considered. Woodlands require long term management that demands careful selection of species and location for tree planting such that a range of ecosystem services and benefits can be optimised over a generation or more.
26. Paragraph (g) requires short, medium and long term consequences to be considered, including the time lags and feedback times for ecosystems to respond to our interventions. For example, proposals to introduce a new wetland to help reduce diffuse pollution from farmland would have to factor in the time for the wetland to develop the necessary biophysical conditions to control the pollution, together with the variability of water flows over time into the design and monitoring of the wetlands.

*These notes refer to the Environment (Wales) Act 2016
(c.3) which received Royal Assent on 21 March 2016*

27. Paragraph (h) requires the taking of actions which can avert significant damage to ecosystems. This provides a preventive approach within the principles of sustainable management of natural resources.
28. Paragraph (i) requires that particular aspects of ecosystem resilience are considered. This list is not an exhaustive definition but identifies for the purpose of this Part, the key aspects of resilient ecosystems.