

ENVIRONMENT (WALES) ACT 2016

EXPLANATORY NOTES

COMMENTARY ON SECTIONS

Part 1 – Sustainable management of natural resources

Section 3 – Sustainable management of natural resources

13. This section defines “sustainable management of natural resources” for the purposes of Part 1 of the Act. Section 4 describes how sustainable management of natural resources should be delivered, through the principles of sustainable management.
14. Subsection (1)(a) provides that sustainable management of natural resources is about using (or not using) natural resources (as defined in section 2) to promote the objective at subsection (2).
15. Subsection (1)(b) and (c) clarifies that sustainable management of natural resources is also about taking, or not taking, action that promotes or hinders the achievement of the objective at subsection (2).
16. Subsection (2) provides that the objective of the sustainable management of natural resources is to maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide. A resilient ecosystem is healthy and functions in a way that is able to absorb disturbance and deliver benefits over the long-term. The key characteristics of a resilient ecosystem are described in section 4(i).
17. Maintaining and enhancing the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide such as the provision of food and fibre helps to meet current and future social, economic and environmental needs and contribute to the achievement of all the seven well-being goals under section 4 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
18. The “benefits”, or services, provided by ecosystems are the tangible and intangible benefits obtained from ecosystems and natural resources and include:
 - Supporting services, for example nutrient cycling, oxygen production and soil formation. These are the services that are necessary for the production of all other services;
 - Provisioning services, for example food, fibre, fuel and water. These are the products obtained from ecosystems;
 - Regulating services, for example climate regulation, water purification and flood protection. These are the benefits obtained from the regulation of ecosystem processes; and
 - Cultural services, for example education, recreation, and aesthetic benefits. These are the non-material benefits people obtain from ecosystems.
19. An example of managing resource use, at subsection (1), is the amount, frequency and location of water abstraction from a river. To meet the objective at subsection (2) water is not abstracted at a rate faster than it can be replenished or in a manner that will have an

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

adverse effect on the wider ecosystem and the other ecosystem benefits provided by the river. Water availability is assessed not only on the impact in the short term but over the long term and on the ability of the ecosystem to provide benefits for future generations.

20. An example of subsections (1(b) and (c)) meeting the objective at subsection (2) could include managing the impact of production activities on the health and functioning of ecosystems. The use of recycled materials, for example, can help to reduce the rate at which natural resources are used in production activities, but that activity may also involve the emission of pollutants into the aquatic environment or the air, and therefore have a negative impact on the health of our ecosystems. Sustainable management includes taking action (or not taking action) to reduce potential negative impacts from activities so as to maintain and improve resilient ecosystems.