

Hydrogeology of Wales: Introduction - groundwater regulation

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This page is part of a category of pages that provides an updated review of the occurrence of groundwater throughout Wales.

Author(s): N S Robins and J Davies, British Geological Survey

Contributor(s): D A Jones, Natural Resources Wales and G Farr, British Geological Survey

The Water Act 1989 converted ten previously existing regional Water Authorities in England and Wales into privatised water and sewerage undertakings and created the National Rivers Authority as the new environmental regulator. The National Rivers Authority was subsumed into the newly formed Environment Agency in 1996. Several separate statutes, including the Water Act 1989 and the Water Resources Act 1963, were consolidated into the Water Resources Act 1991 to become the main statutory framework for the duties and powers of the Environment Agency. On the 1st April 2013 Environment Agency Wales was replaced with a new regulatory body, Natural Resources Wales. Natural Resources Wales combines the roles of Environment Agency Wales, Countryside Council for Wales and the Forestry Commission Wales.

Natural Resources Wales has a duty to secure the proper use of water resources. It is responsible for monitoring groundwater level and quality at 180 and 250 monitoring points respectively, and carries out additional monitoring work in the vicinity of groundwater-dependent terrestrial ecosystems. It issues licences for abstractions that exceed $20 \text{ m}^3 \text{ d}^{-1}$ in order to regulate taking water from the environment, and to determine the volume that can be taken over a given period of time. Some rural areas of Wales remain license exempt because of the prevailing poorly yielding aquifers. Natural Resources Wales is also responsible for maintaining or improving the quality of fresh, marine, surface and groundwater and aims to prevent or reduce the risk of water pollution wherever possible, and to ensure that it is cleaned-up should pollution occur which could affect ecosystems or people.

Water quality standards for both public and private supply have been tightened in recent years and consolidated within the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations (2000). Some of the European directives have been implemented as Statutory Instruments whilst others became law as part of the Pollution Act, Part II. The Natural Mineral Waters Regulation (Statutory Instrument No. 1540 of 1999) provides for the recognition and exploitation of Natural Mineral Waters (as bottled groundwaters), their chemistry and potability.

The protection of surface and groundwater from pollution is provided for by the Environmental Permitting Regulations (2010), which define the requirements of sanitary landfill and other potentially hazardous activities.

The ongoing implementation of the Water Framework Directive ([European Community, 2000](#)) includes a need to assess the pressures and impacts affecting groundwater bodies with a view to determining the degree to which they are at risk from failing to meet Article 4 objectives. The Article 4 objectives in turn require that groundwater bodies achieve good chemical and quantitative status by the year 2015. Part of the assessment of whether a groundwater body is 'at risk' involves an evaluation of the likelihood that polluting activities will cause deterioration of the water quality in the groundwater body, to the extent that it will fail to have good chemical status by 2015.

The main water company operational in Wales is Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water. Since May 2001, Dŵr Cymru has been owned by Glas Cymru, a non-profit-making company, whose operational surplus is returned to customers as an annual dividend — £18 in the 2005/2006 fiscal year and up to £19 the following year. Dŵr Cymru is a management company with a small staff complement. Many of its service departments are contracted out, most to other UK water companies, including Thames, Severn Trent and United Utilities.

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