

Hydrogeology of Wales: Management and regulation of groundwater

From Earthwise

[Jump to navigation](#) [Jump to search](#)

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



 Licence exempt area (2012)

The abstraction licence exempt area (as at 2012). P859287.

Background

Groundwater sources have been important drinking-water supplies to communities across Wales for many centuries. The location of settlements with easy access to groundwater resources is no coincidence and historic springs can be seen at the centre of towns and villages.

Prior to the implementation of the *Water Resource Act, 1963* groundwater and surface water sources were typically managed by local water boards and district councils, which totalled over twenty in Wales in the early 20th century. This localised approach did allow co-ordination of resources even on a catchment scale. The *Water Resources Act, 1963* recognised the importance of water resource planning and also introduced the abstraction licensing system. Water resources in Wales were managed by the Wye, Usk, Glamorgan, South-west Wales, Gwynedd, Dee and Clwyd and Severn river authorities. Due to the low-yielding nature of the aquifers across west, mid and north-west Wales these areas were subsequently designated in the late 1960s via Statutory Instrument, as exempt from groundwater abstraction licensing (**Figure P859287**).

The subsequent *Water Act, 1973* abolished the Water Resource Board and river authorities and combined their functions into regional water authorities, defined by catchment boundaries and responsible for the supply of drinking water, sewerage, water quality and pollution prevention.

Regulation of groundwater in Wales was the responsibility of the Welsh National Water Development Authority (renamed Welsh Water Authority in 1977) and the Severn Trent Water Authority.

The *Water Act, 1989* enacted the privatisation of the regional water authorities, creating water supply and sewage treatment utility companies. Their regulatory functions passed to a new organisation, the National Rivers Authority, the detailed functions of which were set out in the *Water Resource Act, 1991*. The Welsh Water Authority became Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water and is the principal supplier of drinking water and sewerage. Severn Trent provides the same function in the Severn Valley corridor in mid-Wales, with Dee Valley Water providing drinking water within the River Dee corridor in north-east Wales.

The *Environment Act, 1995* resulted in the formation of a statutory body, Environment Agency Wales, responsible for the management and protection of groundwater in Wales. On the 1st April 2013 a new regulatory body called Natural Resources Wales for formed combining the roles of Environment Agency Wales, Countryside Council for Wales and the Forestry Commission Wales.

Hydrogeology of Wales - contents

[Summary](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Geology and Groundwater](#)

[Topography, climate, land use and natural resources](#)

[Groundwater regulation](#)

[Issues](#)

[Precambrian and Cambrian](#)

[Groundwater occurrence in the Precambrian and Monian Supergroup](#)

[Groundwater occurrence in the Cambrian](#)

[Ordovician and Silurian](#)

[Groundwater occurrences](#)

[Groundwater studies](#)

[Groundwater chemistry](#)

[The Old Red Sandstone](#)

[Groundwater occurrences](#)

[Groundwater chemistry](#)

[Carboniferous](#)

[Carboniferous Limestone](#)

[Marros Group](#)

[Modelling the South Wales Coalfield](#)

[Coal Measures facies](#)

[Groundwater quality in the South Wales Coalfield](#)

[Permo-Triassic and Jurassic](#)

[Vale of Clwyd](#)

[Cheshire Basin, Dee catchment](#)

[South Wales](#)

[Quaternary aquifers](#)

[Groundwater occurrences](#)

[Afon Teifi](#)

[Upper Lugg catchment](#)

[Afon Cynffig coastal plain](#)

[Whiteford Sands](#)

[Newborough Warren](#)

Management and regulation of groundwater

[Groundwater abstraction](#)

[Need for management](#)

[Groundwater pollution](#)

[Management tools and future issues](#)

[References](#)

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[Category](#):

- [Hydrogeology of Wales](#)

Navigation menu

Personal tools

- Not logged in
- [Talk](#)
- [Contributions](#)
- [Log in](#)
- [Request account](#)

Namespaces

- [Page](#)
- [Discussion](#)

Variants

Views

- [Read](#)
- [View source](#)
- [View history](#)
- [PDF Export](#)

More

Search

Navigation

- [Main page](#)
- [Recent changes](#)

- [Random page](#)
- [Help about MediaWiki](#)

Tools

- [What links here](#)
- [Related changes](#)
- [Special pages](#)
- [Permanent link](#)
- [Page information](#)
- [Cite this page](#)
- [Browse properties](#)

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- [Privacy policy](#)
- [About Earthwise](#)
- [Disclaimers](#)

