

Ruth Jones MP
Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee

27 January 2026

Dear Ruth,

Thank you for your letter dated 15 January 2026 and for the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's inquiry into *The environmental and economic legacy of Wales' industrial past*. The letter, addressed to our Chief Executive, has been shared with me to respond on their behalf. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) welcomes the Committee's focus on the long-term impacts of historic industrial activity and the progress made in addressing land contamination across Wales. Our response below sets out the information we hold in response to your queries, with clarification on our statutory role, and the wider regulatory framework within which contaminated land is identified, assessed and, where necessary, remediated.

1. Is there a list detailing all contaminated industrial sites in Wales, their location and the pollutants present?

Under Part 2A of the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) 1990, local authorities are the lead regulators for contaminated land. They have a statutory duty to:

- identify and inspect potentially contaminated land
- determine whether land meets the legal definition of "contaminated land"
- secure remediation where unacceptable risks to human health or the environment are identified

Each local authority maintains its own prioritised list of potentially contaminated sites as part of its inspection strategy. These lists are not held centrally by NRW.

Part 2A EPA1990 provides a specific legal definition of contaminated land, and all statutory criteria must be met before a site can be formally determined. The regime is intended to be used only where no other appropriate mechanism exists, such as the planning system, voluntary remediation, or other pollution prevention regimes (e.g., Environmental Permitting Regulations).

Please refer to the following published datasets relevant to Wales' industrial legacy:

- [Historic Landfill Sites | DataMapWales](#).
- This dataset should be used in conjunction with the [Historic Landfill Sites points dataset](#) which is the most comprehensive dataset for recently expired, surrendered, or revoked landfill sites.

Part 2A EPA1990 also places a responsibility on NRW as the appropriate agency to prepare and publish a report on the state of contaminated land. NRW were most recently requested to carry this out in October 2013 by the Welsh Government Minister for NRW: [The State of Contaminated Land in Wales](#). The aim of this report was to present key facts and figures gathered from the local authorities across Wales on contaminated land sector activity. In particular, it presents information on statutory duties carried out under Part 2A EPA1990 since its introduction in Wales on 1 July 2001 until 31 December 2013. As of this date NRW have not received a request to carry out a further 'state of contaminated land' report from Welsh Government.

In addition, NRW holds information on the legacy of historic metal mining - further detail is provided in Annex A – Abandoned Metal Mines.

2. What risks do these pollutants pose to human health, if any?

Risks to human health are assessed on a site-specific basis by the relevant local authority as part of its statutory inspection strategy. Local authorities draw on specialist expertise as required. Where risks relate to controlled waters exist, NRW provides technical advice and guidance, but the local authority remains the lead regulator under Part 2A legislation.

Where risks relate to human health, local authorities typically consult public health bodies rather than NRW. The Drinking Water Inspectorate regulates water companies' compliance with drinking water standards and advises local authorities on private water supplies.

3. What tests are currently performed to identify, monitor and control these pollutants?

Testing and monitoring requirements are determined by local authorities, based on the characteristics of each site and the receptors potentially at risk. These may include:

- desk-based assessments of historic land use
- intrusive investigations (soil, groundwater, surface water and gas sampling)
- risk assessments to identify significant pollutant linkages
- monitoring to confirm whether remediation is required or effective

Most historically contaminated sites in Wales are addressed through the planning system, which is the primary mechanism for investigating and remediating land affected by past industrial activity. When NRW is consulted it provides technical advice to planning authorities on risks to controlled waters.

NRW also:

- monitors and reviews permitted landfill sites to ensure operators comply with environmental permits
- provides technical guidance to prevent pollution
- takes proportionate enforcement action where rules are breached
- offers a charged discretionary advice service to developers and landowners undertaking voluntary remediation

4. What plans are in place to remediate these sites?

Mechanisms for dealing with historic contamination

Contaminated land in Wales is addressed through several established mechanisms:

- Planning system – the main route for investigation and remediation.
- Voluntary remediation – supported by NRW's discretionary advice service.
- Part 2A EPA1990 – used where no other suitable mechanism exists.
- Special Sites – where statutory criteria are met under Part 2A, NRW becomes the lead regulator. Two Special Sites have been designated in Wales since 2001.

Further detail on the remediation challenges and ongoing work associated with historic metal mines is provided in Annex A – Abandoned Metal Mines.

Historic landfill sites

Most landfill sites in Wales are historic and predate modern permitting requirements. These sites are not regulated by NRW. Local authorities are legally responsible for identifying and assessing risks from such sites and taking appropriate action where necessary under Part 2A legislation.

NRW works closely with local authorities, landowners and communities to monitor and review legacy sites, providing technical advice where risks to controlled waters are identified.

Coastal landfill sites and Marine Protected Areas

NRW is currently delivering a three-year investigation, funded by the Welsh Government Nature Networks Programme, to understand the potential impacts of coastal landfill sites on Wales's Marine Protected Area (MPA) features. This work:

- builds on earlier 2022–23 evidence gathering funded through the MPA Network Management Grant Scheme
- was informed by the MPA condition improvement programme
- focuses initially on a pilot area in the Dee Estuary
- aims to improve the evidence base, assess potential risks, and identify possible management measures and priority actions

This project does not involve active remediation, nor does it provide funding for site-specific interventions. Its purpose is to build the evidence base needed to inform future decisions by government and partners on the scale of risk, potential management options, and where resources may need to be focused.

The published 2023 report is available here: [Investigating the impact of landfill sites at the coast on Marine Protected Area features in Wales.](#)

We hope this assists in clarifying NRW's role in advising on and regulating aspects of land contamination in Wales, particularly where controlled waters are at risk. Most landfill sites in Wales are historic and were established long before modern permitting requirements existed. As a result, this is not an issue that can be resolved through regulation alone. NRW's role is to use the evidence we hold to guide where attention and resources should

be directed, and to advise on the funding and collaborative action that will be needed going forward.

As explained, the statutory responsibility for identifying and determining contaminated land rests with local authorities, and most remediation occurs through the planning system rather than through Part 2A EPA1990. However, we remain committed to supporting local authorities, Welsh Government and UK Government in understanding and addressing Wales' industrial legacy.

Yours sincerely,



Steve

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Wales

[Redacted contact information]

Croesewir gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg a byddwn yn ymateb yn Gymraeg, heb i hynny arwain at oedi.

Correspondence in Welsh is welcomed, and we will respond in Welsh without it leading to a delay.



**Welsh Affairs
Committee**

Thursday, 15 January 2026

Ceri Davies
Chief Executive
Natural Resources Wales

Request for Information: List of contaminated former industrial sites in Wales

Dear Ms Davies,

The Welsh Affairs Committee is currently conducting our inquiry, *The environmental and economic legacy of Wales' industrial past*. Within this, we are examining the progress that has been made in the remediation of former industrial sites and the support that the UK Government can offer. Members are particularly interested in the long-term impact of historical pollution from these sites both on local communities and the natural environment.

As part of our inquiry, it would be pertinent to understand what information Natural Resources Wales collects and holds on former industrial sites. In particular:

- Is there a list detailing all contaminated industrial sites in Wales, their location and the pollutants present?
- What risks do these pollutants pose to human health, if any?
- What tests are currently performed to identify, monitor and control these pollutants?
- What plans are in place to remediate these sites?

I would be grateful for any information you could provide in response to these questions by 5 February, possible.

Yours sincerely,

Ruth Jones MP
Chair of the Welsh Affairs Committee