

Onshore Wind: Accelerating Peatland Restoration in Wales

We are in the midst of a climate and nature emergency.

Onshore wind is one of the quickest and cheapest ways to cut carbon emissions, a critical player in the renewable energy mix. With the right enabling actions, onshore wind capacity in Wales could triple over the next decade to speed up the transition away from fossil fuels and meet our growing need for electricity.

Harnessing the power of renewables also provides an opportunity to help restore our natural landscapes, working hand in hand to cut emissions while safeguarding and enhancing our environment. Wind farms are typically situated in remote highland areas, which often contain degraded peatlands. This overlap provides an opportunity.

Healthy peatlands are essential to meeting our net zero targets because they work like a carbon storage unit. It's estimated 90% of our deep peat is degraded. Protecting these areas is a high priority for Welsh Government and ambitious targets have been set for restoration over the coming years. However, managing the process – and paying for it – is a costly, and specialised undertaking.

Onshore wind developers offer a sustainable, private funding stream for peatland restoration, alleviating the burden on taxpayers.



Key Recommendations

In collaboration with wind developers, Welsh Government, and other statutory advisors, RenewableUK Cymru has outlined four key calls to action:

- **Provide a clear definition of deep peat that covers both depth and quality**, to address where development can occur and in what context.
- **Develop and publish detailed planning guidance on peat**, establishing a clear policy framework and 'peatland strategy' to inform early-stage discussions.
- **Develop guidance on 'Best Practice' approaches to managing and restoring peat** to standardise monitoring approaches and identify most beneficial restoration techniques.
- **Accelerate support and allocate sufficient resources for NRW** to ensure consistent and timely technical advice on peat for wind developers.

A unified approach is required to harness the significant clean energy potential of onshore wind whilst delivering vital investment in peatland restoration and protection.

Why is Peat important for Net Zero?

Peatlands, often found in areas earmarked for onshore wind, serve as critical ecosystems and play a vital role in the historic landscape. Healthy peatlands contribute to various environmental functions, including water management and the provision of habitats for animals and plants. Peatland may store up to 30% of Wales's soil carbon alone, with deep peat estimated to hold 196 million carbon tonnes – over 5 times Wales's annual carbon emissions. With Wales's peatland in a degraded state, stored carbon emissions are being released back into the atmosphere, reversing positive climate action.

To address peatland degradation, the Welsh Government initiated the National Peatland Action Programme (NPAP) with funding from 2020-2025. In its first three years, NPAP has restored approximately 1,650ha of peat, (equivalent to 1,650 rugby pitches).

The Biodiversity Deep Dive Written Statement (2022) committed to a net zero target of 45,000ha of Welsh peatland restored by 2050, half our total peatland. This means that, from 2030, at least 1600ha must be restored annually.

Public funding through NPAP beyond 2025 is uncertain. Unlocking extra capital will be crucial to meet our current restoration targets.



Net zero target of **45,000ha** of peatland restoration by **2050** - equivalent to half of Wales' peatland.

Currently restored: **1600ha** of peatland.



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