



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

RESEARCH

Climate change and reaching net zero: perceptions and awareness in Wales (summary)

This report summarises the findings from a survey which explored awareness, attitudes and preferences towards different pathways to reduce carbon emissions and reach Net Zero in Wales.

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Background and Methodology

At the time of this research, Welsh Government had a commitment to reach a 95% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050, with an ambition to reach Net Zero by 2050. Following the fieldwork, in February 2021, this changed to a commitment to Net Zero by 2050, in line with the UK Net Zero target.

The aim of this research was to develop the evidence base around public awareness, attitudes and preferences towards different Net Zero pathways, and the societal change required to reach Net Zero in Wales and the UK.

As part of this, Welsh Government commissioned the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to boost the Welsh sample on the UK-wide survey in order to create a sample representative of the Welsh population. The data was collected in September and October 2020 via an online survey. Participants were the UK public, aged 18 and over. The survey used a quota sampling approach with quotas set in line with UK proportions for age, gender, region, ethnicity and social grade.

1,149 Welsh residents responded to the survey. The findings in this report are based only on the Welsh sample.

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Findings

Climate change concern and perceptions

The majority of survey respondents reported being fairly or very concerned about climate change (86%). Despite this, only 22% of respondents thought that climate change would affect the UK ‘A great deal’, and only 15% thought this for their local area. Under half (46%) of respondents thought climate change would affect other countries ‘A great deal’.

When asked how much a range of sectors contributed to the UK’s carbon emissions, the majority of respondents thought that all sectors contributed at least to some extent. The sector respondents thought contributed the most was transport, and the sector respondents thought contributed the least was agriculture. Over four fifths (82%) of respondents perceived transport to contribute to carbon emissions ‘a great deal’ compared to 55% who perceived the same about agricultural emissions.

Net Zero knowledge and support

The majority (84%) of respondents had at least heard of the Net Zero concept before. Just under three fifths (57%) reported knowing a little or a fair amount; only 8% reported knowing a lot about it.

The majority (80%) reported that they strongly or somewhat support the UK commitment of reaching Net Zero by 2050. Over two thirds (68%) responded that they strongly or somewhat support the Wales Net Zero commitment of reaching 95% reduction in emissions by 2050, with an ambition to reach Net Zero by 2050.

At the time of data collection the Wales Net Zero commitment was a 95% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050, and an ambition to reach Net Zero by 2050. Since data collection, this has now changed to a commitment to Net Zero by 2050, in line with the UK Government target.

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Perceptions of carbon-reducing changes and technologies

Respondents were given a list of potential changes to society which could be made to reach the Net Zero target (for example greener industry, lower transport emissions, greener energy supply) and asked to state whether they would like to see this change. Across most of the listed changes to society, over 7 out of 10 of respondents would like to see some or a lot of a change. Waste reduction had the highest percentage (84%) of respondents who wanted to see a change. However, greener diets is an exception to this. The percentage of respondents who would like to see some or a lot of this change is relatively low (47%) and approximately one-quarter (25%) of respondents would not want to see any or much of this change.

Respondents were provided with descriptions of greenhouse gas removal technologies and renewable energy supplies (as options to help reach Net Zero) and asked how positively or negatively they feel about them. The majority of respondents were positive about these two options with slightly more respondents being positive about wind/nuclear energy supply (72%) than greenhouse gas removal technologies (67%).

Likelihood and perceptions of lifestyle changes

When asked how likely they thought a range of lifestyle changes would be to occur over the next few decades, energy efficiency was seen as the most likely to occur (67% perceived this as extremely or somewhat likely). The consumption of half as much meat and dairy was perceived as the least likely to occur (44% reported this as extremely or somewhat likely).

Respondents were then asked how likely they would be to make a variety of changes in their own lives. Responses were mixed. Around half (53%) said they were at least somewhat likely to reduce their thermostat temperature, and use less heating (50%). Avoiding planes for holiday and business trips was likely to occur for four-in-ten respondents, although the impact of coronavirus restrictions should be considered here. Respondents were least likely to buy an electric car

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or switch to a low-carbon heating technology, with both being viewed as likely by only a third of respondents.

Perceptions of the future

At least half of the respondents view a Net Zero future as better for well-being, health and the economy. The positive impact on well-being and health was most certain among respondents (77% and 80% responding ‘better’ respectively). The impact on the economy was less certain; with 51% responding better, but just under a third (28%) responding worse.

The percentage of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that the way we live our lives will need to change substantially to address climate change was considerably higher (84%), than respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that technology will help reduce most of our carbon emissions (41%).

Perceptions of responsibility, public engagement and climate assemblies

Over half of all respondents thought that the general public, businesses and industries and Government all have a lot of responsibility to reduce carbon emissions and reach Net Zero. When asked who they thought was most responsible, Government was selected by the highest percentage of respondents (39%), followed by businesses (33%) and lastly, the general public (18%).

The majority of respondents viewed it as important to be informed about what the Government is doing with regard to Net Zero and to be given a say in what the Government is doing. This was viewed as at least moderately important by 85% and 87% of respondents respectively

When asked about the UK Climate Assembly, 64% of respondents either did not know about this or knew hardly anything about it. Based on the description given to them, the majority of respondents (60%) thought citizen assemblies (like the Climate Assembly) were a good thing.

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Conclusions

Both the high level of awareness of the concept of Net Zero and the high levels of support for the Net Zero target suggests the public has knowledge about Net Zero and supports the targets. This support for reaching Net Zero targets can also be seen in the public's desire to see a variety of societal changes to reduce carbon emissions

Respondents viewed Net Zero targets as positive for wellbeing, health and the economy which provides further support that the public have a positive attitude towards Net Zero.

Whilst respondents would like to see carbon-reducing changes implemented to society, they were relatively less certain, on average, that these changes would be made over the next few decades and were less likely to make these changes within their own lives.

In particular, changes to diets were perceived as relatively less favourable when compared to other changes. It was not within the scope of this research to identify the reasons for this, but it is likely due to a combination of factors. This is something to be explored in future research.

The findings from the Wales sample were generally very consistent with the findings from the UK as a whole, suggesting there are few differences in attitudes to Net Zero and climate change among the devolved administrations.

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Views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government

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