



Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF)

Minutes

Title of meeting: Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF)

Location: Microsoft Teams Meeting

Date of Meeting: 13th March 2023

Present:

Zoe Henderson, NRW (Chair)

Ceri Davies, NRW

Ruth Jenkins, NRW

David Letellier, NRW

Huwel Manley, NRW

Lee Pritchard, Wales YFC

Bernard Griffiths, FUW

Marc Williams, NRW

Sarah Hetherington, NRW

John Browne, NRW

Dennis Matheson, TFA

Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru

Hedd Pugh, NFU Cymru

Tim Kirk, Confor

Fraser McAuley, CLA

Ieuan Davies, NRW

Additional Attendees Present:

Rhys A. Jones, NRW Board Member

Kate Collins, NRW (Item 3)

Sarah Wood, NRW (Item 3)

Liz Halliwell, NRW (Item 3)

Russell De'Ath (Item 4)

Secretariat(s):

Bronwen Martin, NRW

Apologies:

Martyn Evans, NRW

Anthony Geddes, Confor

Fraser McAuley, CLA

Pre-agenda Item

1. Ruth Jenkins, NRW announced that this was Zoe Henderson's last meeting as Chair of the Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF). Ruth gave her heartfelt thanks to Zoe. On behalf of everybody, thank you for your hard work and dedication in leading this group. Zoe has been a part of this forum since 2016 and took over as Chair in 2017 and has brought everybody together every four months, both in person and virtually. Over the years, we've all faced many challenges, but we've overcome them together and have been supported by Zoe's leadership, knowledge of the sectors and her belief in the value of people working together. Zoe has challenged us all when required and encouraged us to find solutions and not just focus on the problems facing land managers and the environment. The WLMF faced the sudden lockdown and took it in our stride because Zoe continued the meetings online. Zoe is a massive advocate of land management and has provided a voice and recognised good practices and the challenges. All that work will continue, but Zoe has left a massive legacy. Ruth personally thanked Zoe for managing the group and particularly for her support and passion in this area of work. Zoe has provided a huge amount of support to individuals within the group and has always allowed time for separate discussions to make sure we get the most out of the limited time during these meetings. The WLMF has been a platform for knowledge exchange, for sharing information and Zoe has enabled us to work collaboratively and make a real difference. Ruth said the WLMF has gone from strength to strength under Zoe's leadership and the new Chairperson will have big shoes to fill, although perhaps they'll be happy for Zoe to keep her crown as 'Queen of Slurry'. Ruth said undoubtedly, our paths will cross with Zoe in the future, so this isn't a real good bye, but a farewell and a massive thank you.
2. Ceri Davies, NRW gave her thanks to Zoe for escalating the prominence of the WLMF and the important work that this group does. As a result of Zoe's enthusiasm and

commitment, there is a standing item on the NRW Board agenda for the feedback from the WLMF which has helped pave the way for the other fora to also share information about the important work that is being done elsewhere. Zoe has always raised the issues that we've been working on and also challenged us as an organisation. Zoe has helped to raise the profile in a positive way and encouraged people to work together to achieve great things. Ceri recalled some of Zoe's achievements as Chair of the WLMF over the years and thanked her for her personal time and commitment.

3. Zoe thanked the group and said she has thoroughly enjoyed Chairing the WLMF. This forum is so critical and if we don't work together, we won't have thriving agricultural and environment in Wales. Zoe also thanked the group for the beautiful flowers which arrived over the weekend.
4. Hedd Pugh, NFU Cymru thanked Zoe on behalf of NFU Cymru and for the hard work that she has done over the years, it has been a pleasure to work with her. Zoe has always listened when the farming community have shared their views and made sure they have been heard.
5. Zoe said she wanted to thank everybody that has supported her, in particular Marc and Bronwen but also those who have since moved on from NRW like Brian, Bob and Helen. Zoe said they have all done an amazing job supporting both her and the forum.
6. Zoe welcomed Professor Rhys Jones who will be the next WLMF Chairperson. Rhys is from Aberystwyth University with an interest in the uplands of Wales and has knowledge and expertise which will help this group moving forward. Rhys said he is looking forward to working with the members and building on Zoe's legacy, it will be a tough act to follow but he will try his best to draw everyone together in the same spirit of cooperation and a constructive approach to look at land management issues in Wales.

Item 1 Introductions, Apologies and Declaration of Interest

7. Zoe Henderson (WLMF Chair) welcomed all to the meeting and noted apologies.
8. No declarations of interest were raised in respect of Agenda items to be considered.
9. The group were reminded that the meeting was being recorded for the purpose of capturing the minutes and the digital file will be deleted once the meeting minutes have been compiled.

Item 2 Minutes from the last meeting, actions & matters arising

10. Once the meeting minutes have been reviewed and formally agreed they will be translated and published on the NRW website. The Group reviewed the minutes from the meeting held on 5th December 2022. Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru said there was a word missing from the second paragraph of point 65 and she would contact Bronwen after the meeting to clarify. The minutes were approved as a true record.
11. The group reviewed the outstanding actions and updates were provided. The following were of note:

- Dec AP01: Bronwen Martin, NRW to provide feedback to colleagues who facilitate the other fora groups regarding regularly updating the external NRW Website with meeting minutes.
 - This was discussed with colleagues who are involved with the other fora groups. Some forums only meet twice/three times a year. The website does not automatically get updated with the minutes because they need to be reviewed and accepted by each group before being published. Therefore, there is a slight delay with updating the website.
- Dec AP02: Bronwen Martin, NRW to share the Healthy Hillside's email address for members to contact the team directly with their feedback and suggestions for the proposed conference.
 - The conference is going to be held in June 2023 and will be a two-day event. There is a written update included in the WLMF Update Paper which was circulated prior to the meeting. The event agenda is yet to be finalised but it will likely include guest speakers, presentations and possibly a practical session on the second day. Contact details for the Healthy Hillside's team are included in the update and members should get in touch if they would like to get involved or request additional information.
 - Huwel Manley, NRW mentioned the event has been advertised in a Farming Connect publication which encouraged people to attend, and it also made people aware of the seconded Fire Officer to NRW. Rachel mentioned that Haf Leyshon, NRW attended the recent NFU Cymru LFA Board and an article has also gone into their Farming Wales publication.

12. Bronwen said she has also received a written update regarding the Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) Rivers work and will circulate this following the meeting.

AP March 01: Bronwen Martin, NRW to circulate the written SAC Rivers update.

Item 3 Beaver Update

13. Liz Halliwell, Sarah Wood, and Kate Collins, NRW joined the meeting to provide a brief verbal update regarding beavers. Beavers are part of our native wildlife and their activities can be important, they help to create rich and varied habitats and can improve species diversity in rivers and wetland areas. Potentially they can also help alleviate flooding, but we also recognise their activities can have undesired impacts.
14. Regarding the legal position of undertaking beaver reintroduction or release, they are listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act which makes it an offence to release beavers into the wild or to allow them to escape. Therefore, release of beavers, requires a licence issued under the Wildlife and Countryside Act and NRW is the appropriate authority for issuing such licences. Any release of beavers without a licence or a breach of the conditions of a licence would be an offence – the police are the enforcement authority and are responsible for investigating any alleged offences, but NRW would provide advice and guidance.
15. When NRW receive a licence application, NRW's role is to assess the information submitted and consider the effects of the reintroduction on existing wildlife and land use, amongst other things. We might refuse an application if insufficient information has been provided, or if there would be an unacceptable effect on other wildlife and land

use. When considering licence applications for any reintroduction or conservation translocation, NRW assesses the proposals against the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) 'Guidelines for Reintroductions and Other Conservation Translocations'. These are extensive guidelines that consider a wide range of issues relating to the proper implementation of conservation translocation projects.

16. Regarding the current situation in Wales for beavers, there is the Cors Dyfi Beaver Enclosure project. In 2021, NRW issued a licence to Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust for the release of a maximum of six beavers into an enclosure on the Cors Dyfi Nature Reserve. NRW undertook an extensive assessment of that licence application and looked at things like the impact on statutory sites, the competence of the staff undertaking the project, management of the operation, site security, what would happen if there was an accidental release or escape of beavers, risks, exit strategy and monitoring. Before issuing the licence, the proposed draft licence and the decision document were subject to a four-week consultation to allow members of the public the opportunity to comment. NRW received a substantial number of responses which were considered prior to the licence being issued – that project is now underway.
17. Regarding wild release proposals, it is understood that the Wildlife Trust Wales have been developing a project for the wild release of beavers into the Dyfi Catchment. However, NRW are not currently in receipt of any licence application from the Wildlife Trust, but we understand that they are planning to submit one. If/when NRW receive an application for a wild release, we will undertake a detailed assessment to ensure it follows the IUCN guidelines. We would also consider the impacts on existing wildlife, land use and consult with a wide range of technical experts within NRW. NRW would also consult with the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer regarding the disease risk assessment, which is a key part of considering a translocation project. Once that is completed, NRW would consult externally to ensure all interested parties have the opportunity to provide any additional information which might help to determine that application. This would be communicated through relevant media and all the supporting information would be published on the NRW website along with details of how to respond. This is in line with our public participation statement, which is available on the NRW website ([NRW: Public Participation](#)).
18. There is an Exeter University survey that was initiated in late February 2023. This research is being undertaken on behalf of North Wales Wildlife Trust to look at attitudes towards beaver reintroduction in Wales. We understand this research is aiming to better understand public attitudes towards beavers in Wales and they are going to use that as part of their application to NRW for the Dyfi project when it is submitted.
19. Liz discussed the NRW and Welsh Government position on Beavers in Wales. In 2015, the NRW Board agreed a broad position statement, which recognised the benefits beavers can have, but also recognised the potential risks and concerns that some stakeholders might have. More recently, the Minister for Climate Change has indicated that a clearer policy position on beavers in Wales would be beneficial. As a result, NRW has been asked to work with Welsh Government Officials to undertake a review of the available evidence to inform the development of such a position. The intention is that Welsh Government will formalise a policy position on beavers in Spring 2023. The evidence review is underway, and NRW are considering the potential impacts of beavers in the Welsh environment and within environmental policy and the legal

framework. NRW's approach is to use the published evidence reviews in England and Scotland which are two quite extensive evidence reviews. NRW are reviewing them to assess how that evidence might apply in a Welsh context and also identify any new evidence or evidence gaps. Once complete, NRW will provide the evidence review to Welsh Government.

20. Liz recalled a reference in the press recently to NRW undertaking a 'feasibility study' on beaver reintroduction in Wales. Liz clarified that is not correct and it might have been a misinterpretation of the evidence review work that NRW are undertaking.
21. Bernard Griffiths, FUW asked that if a Wildlife Trust apply for beaver release which was approved and then those beavers went on to damage trees along Network Rail land which financially impacted on their business, would the Wildlife Trust be responsible for that. Liz said once an animal has been released into the wild, it is wild and is no longer the property of somebody. Sarah Wood explained that in order for NRW to fully assess an application for a wild release, it would need to consider such scenarios where there is a risk of damage. NRW would expect the Wildlife Trust to clearly set out what would happen in those situations and to have discussions with Network Rail and other stakeholders. Sarah said in terms of the exact legal position, we would need to clarify that. The NRW stakeholder consultation on a licence application would provide an opportunity for comment on such issues.
22. Regarding the release in the Dyfi enclosure, Hedd asked if NRW keep a watchful eye to make sure the beavers don't escape and what are the implications if they do escape. Sarah Wood said in relation to the enclosure release, that application came with considerations about the risk of escape. Under the conditions of the licence, regular checks are made to make sure the beavers haven't escaped (along with consideration of recapture if they do escape). In relation to a wild release, a management plan would include the consideration of how far they would go. The Minister has indicated that she would like to see a policy framework for beavers in Wales and that's the work that Welsh Government will be taking forward after we've done the evidence review. We fully recognise that beavers in the wild may need some form of management and so Welsh Government are looking at those options as part of the forward plan. Liz clarified that with regards to beavers within enclosures, there are a clear set of licence conditions which have to be complied with (e.g., checks, reporting an escape, recapture strategy etc.) and are a very important part of the application.
23. Bernard asked if Liz or Sarah could come back to this group with an update on what the legal position would be in terms of who would be liable if a released beaver caused damage as it seems that when the Wildlife Trust are applying for these releases, they know at that time that there is a potential for damage.

AP March 02: Bronwen Martin, NRW to follow up with Sarah Wood and Liz Halliwell regarding clarification of the legal position for the liability for any damage caused by beaver release.

24. Hedd asked about NRW's policy on the reintroduction of any species because there has been talk of reintroduction of other species (e.g., white tailed eagle and golden eagle). Sarah Wood said the reintroduction of these species would require a licence from NRW before a release takes place. We have a clear process that we follow if we receive a reintroduction application which is based on the IUCN conservation

translocations framework. NRW consider each application on its merits. One of the key parts of the IUCN conservation translocation guidance is about engagement and making sure the social feasibility is considered because people could be affected so their views are gathered as part of a consultation.

25. Dennis Matheson, TFA said it is worrying that beavers are released into enclosures because of the escape risk. There are reports that beavers have caused very substantial damage to agricultural land in Northumberland and Scotland. Welsh Government are conducting a review, but a decision has to be made regarding the priority; releasing extinct species or agriculture. Dennis reminded the group that he represents the tenant farming sector and tenants could not allow the release of beavers, it would be the landlord and then who would get any compensation.
26. Rachel said we've requested an update for quite some time. NFU Cymru recently picked up on a media article following the NRW Board meeting which prompted Rachel to e-mail NRW with another update request. Regarding the work that NRW are doing with Welsh Government, Rachel asked how stakeholders and land managers can be involved in that process because they are the ones most effected by species releases. Additionally, what are the plans for engagement (e.g. public consultation).

Rachel said some of the responses NRW has made to the questions that relate to the licensing approach doesn't feel particularly strategic. We need to understand what the overarching strategy is going to be because the licence approach is usually backed up by an NGO who has had project funding. Often there are no reassurances about what happens when that project comes to an end and land managers are then left to deal with the consequences. We would like to understand what the policy is going to be, and need reassurance that there will be mechanisms in place for management (irrespective of species status) going forward. Regarding licensing, Sarah Wood said NRW are currently in a reactive space rather than a strategic space but there have been discussions with Welsh Government. NRW have a very clear ask from the Minister and the evidence review is the first step in that process. In terms of what comes next, that's still being discussed, but we want to see the evidence used in a way that sets the strategic framework for beavers with wider engagement and discussion on that.

27. Huwel said NRW are also a land manager and from an operations perspective, we also have internal consultations for licences as it is not always in the right place, and we have to consider other things like flood risk. NRW also get involved with illegal releases of other species (e.g. racoon dog) and work with Welsh Government and the police to follow up on sightings, assist with recapturing and help 'rehome' to an appropriate licensed site. Sarah Wood clarified that NRW's role for raccoon dogs is different because they are an invasive non-native species. We also have a licensing role, but it's also about the action that we and others take to remove those species if they're found to have been released. Invasive non-native species is different to the work NRW are doing on beavers.
28. Ruth said the strategic work is very important. Although on this occasion the evidence review is specifically around beavers, NRW are also interested in the wider picture around reintroductions and want future work with Welsh Government to look at issues and opportunities related to reintroduction of species and their management, in general.

29. Sarah clarified the steps NRW are doing with Welsh Government to get to a position where there is a clear policy framework for beavers in Wales. Currently, the evidence review is an internal exercise to review what Natural England and Nature Scot have done. We are also liaising with internal experts to understand whether that evidence is relevant to Wales. Regarding the next steps, we are unable to give any clarification yet, but fully understand the need for others to be involved in discussions. Rachel said NFU Cymru would like to place on record concerns of the development of a policy position. It has been described as an internal piece of work between NRW/Welsh Government but this is currently not very inclusive and we ask again by what mechanism are stakeholders (who manage 80% of the land in Wales) going to be involved in that. Sarah Wood clarified that NRW are presenting an evidence assessment building on what Natural England and Nature Scot have done and working with Welsh Government to build the process for the development of the policy. Sarah suggested that she could feedback what those next steps look like in terms of engagement and in relation to the policy development. Ruth mentioned the messages from this group can also be fed into the conversation with Welsh Government.

AP March 03: Sarah Wood, NRW to provide an update on the next steps following the evidence review for beavers.

Item 4 Nature and Us

30. Russell De'Ath, NRW joined the meeting to share an update on Nature and Us and the next steps.
31. NRW have been running a national conversation which is coming to a pinnacle through the Citizens Assembly process. The national conversation began last February and by May, over 50,000 people had visited the website and over 3000 individuals had shared their views through an online survey and a series of workshops and focus groups. The findings from the first exercise highlighted concerns about the natural environment, what they wished the future of nature in Wales to look like and how society needs to change to get there. The top three concerns were: the decline/extinction of animal and plant life, climate change and the pollution of rivers, lakes, and groundwater. Those three themes have also formed a central part of NRW's new Corporate Plan.
32. The findings were summarised in a video which is on the [NRW: Nature and Us / Nature and Us](#) website. There were nine key themes from that work: how we shop, how we travel, how we use our energy and our water within our own homes, how we use our woodlands, how we use green spaces, how we buy food, how we take our holidays and leisure time, how we manage our land and what we do with our waste. Nine statements were then developed for what the future could look like which were tested in a second round of engagement. We wanted to involve some of the voices that we hadn't yet heard from and worked with the Farming Unions and the Young Farmers to host some focus groups at the Royal Welsh Show. We also looked at involving businesses and hosted some focus groups. Initially, there were less responses from a younger audience and from black and ethnic minority communities. We wanted to draw out a more diverse range of perspectives and highlight both the areas of agreement and disagreement.
33. Regarding findings, the areas where there was most consensus were around how we need to be living in the future linked to things like how we shop, using our green spaces

and neighbourhood spaces, changing the way in which we buy food and how we deal with waste and recycling. The statements that didn't offer as much consensus were around travelling, energy and water use, how we use our woodlands and land management.

34. The Citizens Assembly has been asked to reflect on the information collected to date and answer 'what does the future look like when society and nature thrive together?'. Russell showed some illustrations that a graphic artist created to capture some of the discussions throughout the sessions. During this process we've steered the conversation to focus on the role that people have and what society can do to shape change and the way we live. The Citizens Assembly are meeting on the 18th March to help further shape the vision around the nine statements.
35. NRW are interested in how they can facilitate more of these conversations across Wales, with the aim to increase participation and involvement (e.g. developing tools that can facilitate conversations, empowering citizens and highlighting some of the key challenges that we all face across different sectors). Russell said they want to hear from members of the WLMF about particular resources that can be developed to support and enable conversations with land managers and farmers to participate in: what does it mean for them, what does change look like and how is change going to pan out? Russell said once the resources have been developed and the Assembly comes up with a final vision, we'll be keen to capture responses and reactions, both individually and collectively. It is not NRW's vision, this is a vision that's been created and generated by people in Wales. NRW will be helping to promote the Nature and Us vision over the coming months. We are really grateful for the support received so far, particularly from the Farming Unions and the Young Farmers focus groups.

AP March 04: Members to contact Russell De'Ath, NRW about developing particular resources that would help to support and enable conversations with land managers and farmers.

36. Rachel said some NFU Cymru members attended a workshop at the Royal Welsh Show last year. Looking at the nine themes and this is a vision for Wales in the future, it seems that ambiguity still exists because some things can be shaped and influenced but other things are about individual behaviour. It feels conceptual, you need to be clear about what this means and make it relevant to the audience. Russell explained this is a shared vision and there is a need to work together across Wales. The idea of finding common aspects is really powerful but equally recognising our differences.
37. Bernard was struggling to see how this is different to the process that developed the well-being goals in the Well-being of Future Generations Act and the measured variables that are used in that Act to determine whether those have been achieved. Russell said the context has changed since then and NRW have worked very closely with the Future Generations Commissioner who is keen to use this to inform the next seven years. It builds on conversations around the nature and climate emergencies in particular. We also know from the previous Future Generation Commissioner's report that the 'Resilient Wales' goal and the 'Globally Responsible Wales' goal, are the least well understood in relation to the role of the public sector and others.
38. Rachel said it would be beneficial to see how this fits into the wider jigsaw and the requirements of the Environment Act, SoNaRR, the Natural Resources Policy and the

Area Statements etc. How is it going to influence other things because it's not absolutely clear at this stage. Ruth said this is part of getting as many people involved in understanding their own role and also the opportunities.

39. Rhys asked about the statement regarding land management and the lack of consensus. Russell said the statement around land management is 'the land around me and in the countryside is used for producing a range of different foods but is also being managed for the benefit of communities. Farmers do this to reduce the impacts of flooding and to ensure our rivers and seas are clear of pollution. There's more variety in the landscape, different types of livestock, more wooded areas with different types of trees'. It is quite a vague statement in some ways, for example it doesn't talk about the type of livestock or type of trees, but it paints a picture of how the land might be changing and evolving. The comments from the farming community want to know more detail about what this looks like.
40. Zoe said this is something the WLMF will likely be returning to as it evolves. We must not have negative impacts on our communities, language, and economy in Wales and this is very important work.

AP March 05: Bronwen Martin, NRW to circulate a copy of Russell De'Ath's presentation on 'Nature and Us' along with a link to the website and contact details.

Item 5 NRW Updates

41. Prior to the meeting, the WLMF Update Paper was circulated. Members are encouraged to review the document beforehand and come to the meeting with questions.
42. Ruth mentioned the ongoing work that NRW have been doing with the Minister around the biodiversity deep dive. They are currently developing the action plan and working out who is doing what within that action plan.
43. Ruth recalled that the NRW Corporate Plan was briefly mentioned earlier on. The work that we've been doing internally and externally has helped develop the new Corporate Plan. That is due to go to the NRW Board this month to be signed off and then there will be a programme to roll that out internally.
44. Some members may have been involved in the second SAC Rivers Summit with the Ministers. There is ongoing work which NRW are doing around the action plan. NRW also have a SAC Rivers internal programme that is supporting that work.
45. NRW are in the process of signing off our Capital Programme of works. We've been running a multi-year programme with capital funding from the Welsh Government to support a multitude of different things across the Natural Resource Management agenda.
46. NRW are also in the process of putting out some additional grant work around the Peatland Programme, further information was included in the Update Paper. There is going to be a new competitive round going out soon.

47. NRW are going to be developing the new Grant Programme for the next five years of the Corporate Plan. NRW will be talking to people externally and internally to see what that programme needs to look like and the strategy around it.
48. Dav Letellier, NRW said most people will be aware of what is happening with the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS). Welsh Government are focusing on day one readiness for the scheme. They are taking a coproduction approach and NRW are advising and contributing towards the scheme. NRW are concentrating on making sure that we are also ready for day one from a resource perspective to make sure that we can enable and facilitate people to be part of the scheme.
49. Rachel mentioned the written update on the Strategic Review of Charges, which states that NRW have 'put forward several amendments to our charging proposals in light of the feedback they've received in to the consultation'. Rachel asked if NRW can confirm whether any of the proposed changes are related to schemes that impact farming. Ruth said she would look into this. Rachel said there was also talk that there would be a meeting with the stakeholders to go through the consultation and any amendments, but that seems to have gone quiet. There's a huge amount of interest in this particular consultation and the huge rate of increase that is proposed.

AP March 06: Ruth Jenkins, NRW to find out if any of the proposed changes within the Strategic Review of Charges are related to schemes that impact farming.

Update on the above action during the meeting: Ruth noted the following -

All our proposals including any post-consultation adjustments are with the Minister to decide – we are expecting that around 24th March at the latest. On the basis a decision is made at that point, we'll then issue our consultation feedback documents w/c 27th March which will inform stakeholders of the charges we plan for 2023/2024 and highlighting any changes we've made post-consultation.

50. Regarding the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations, Huwel mentioned NRW are gearing up to deliver over the coming months. This includes the recruitment of staff cross operations which will be managed by one team initially in Wales (e.g. one point of contact). Rachel confirmed there was an update on the Service Level Agreement at the recent WLMF Sub Group meeting. Subsequently, NFU Cymru has written to NRW and Welsh Government about the potential of a memorandum of understanding. There's concern about the complexity of the record keeping requirements within the regulations and a narrative has been allowed to develop of 'most farmers won't see any change'. However, we cannot underestimate the scale of the challenge to get thousands of farm businesses compliant from a paperwork record keeping perspective. The letter sent to NRW and Welsh Government is about the approach that will be adopted as a result of this service level agreement.

Item 6 Updates from FUW / NFU Cymru / Wales YFC / Confor / CLA / TFA / Welsh Government

51. **FUW:** Bernard Griffiths, FUW said they have been working on trying to introduce some amendments to the Agriculture (Wales) Bill to recognise the importance of economic resilience and sustainability in the agricultural industry.

FUW attended the Welsh Government second Phosphate Summit to look at collaborative solutions to failing Welsh SAC Rivers with the aim of enabling developers to build new homes in these catchments. The modelling suggests that agriculture is a contributor, but agriculture also has the solutions to some of the problems. All stakeholders there were asked to sign up to the action plan, which FUW duly did. Last night, there was a program on television which was demoralising because it was more sensationalism without any evidence. Since 2017, the WLMF Sub Group has been working collaboratively to find solutions and many organisations have now signed up to the Phosphate Summit action plan.

FUW also attended a recent Wales ash dieback group and guidance seems to be coming into place. Again, we asked for support for land managers to clear fell diseased ash trees and there was a hint that there may be something coming through the SFS. We also attended the Wales Wildfire Board and Charter launch.

FUW members have brought an issue to our attention which we believe is a conflict between the Sustainable Drainage Scheme (SuDS) Regulations and the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations. This is delaying the planning process because Local Authorities do not understand the conflict between them. Farmers are being forced to go through the SuDS application process which is increasing costs and delaying applications for grants. FUW have written to NRW and Welsh Government because we believe there's a need to explain to Local Authorities. Dav thanked Bernard for the letter, a response will be provided shortly. Dav explained that there are several organisations involved in this and will need to consider how to take this forward.

52. **NFU Cymru:** Rachel Lewis-Davies said NFU Cymru have very similar workstreams to FUW. The Agriculture (Wales) Bill is a key priority and there's general consensus around the need for that fifth economic objective to align with the true definition of sustainability, economic, environmental, social, and cultural. We are also pushing amendments to support new entrants in particular. We need reporting within the Bill to take account of the levels of food production and agricultural productivity, given the current challenges to global food security. We also support the need for a multiannual financial assistance plan to be built in as a requirement of the Bill. Regarding the SFS, we've submitted views in on the outline proposals. We're currently very involved with the working groups that Welsh Government has established, particularly on common land, new entrants, and tenancies. The universal tier in particular has to work for all farmers in Wales, irrespective of their land tenure.

NFU Cymru has also been involved with the phosphate work. We have submitted our consultation response to the NVZ licensing scheme and this was welcomed by our members, but we need an approach that is simple and straightforward to apply for. Our response was also supported by over 1,400 responses via an online tool that NFU Cymru developed, which shows the strength of feelings on this issue.

We are currently responding to a call for evidence on a just transition, which is very pertinent to rural areas because many of the climate change actions for Wales actually take place in a rural space. We also note that Welsh Government is consulting on renewable targets and the closing date for that is next month.

Rachel expressed her personal thanks to Zoe; it's been a pleasure to work with you and your commitment to the work of the WLMF and the Sub Group has been very

appreciated. Rachel suggested if NRW and Welsh Government want to look at a really good case study of SMNR in operation then they should look at the WLMF Sub Group on Agricultural Pollution which achieved a lot in its early days.

53. **Wales YFC:** Lee Pritchard, Wales YFC had to leave the meeting before this item.

54. **Confor:** Regarding SuDS, Tim Kirk, Confor said it is very disappointing to hear the comparison with the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations.

The woodland creation survey is only open for three weeks and we are still in a busy planting season where no one has time to deal with additional data collection.

55. **TFA:** Dennis Matheson mentioned that the current focus has been on the Tenancy Working Group and the Commons Working Group. Dennis discussed the complexities of the issues involved with both groups but said there is some agreement between the members regarding a way forward. However, it is quite clear that any changes and amendments to the SFS and to Tenancy Law will not be implemented by the time the new scheme comes in, which means there will have to be temporary measures if tenants are going to be able to participate in the new scheme or perhaps a dual scheme. There have been a large number of meetings but the groups were set up after the publication of the Outline Sustainable Farming Scheme proposals.

TFA have been represented at the Phosphate Summit, Dennis said the work of the WLMF Sub Group needs to be considered and not duplicated because it seems as though more groups are being set up and going over old ground when the work needs to be integrated.

Dennis mentioned that he recently heard an interesting radio programme discussing coastal defences. Dennis also recalled a meeting a few years ago in Aberystwyth which involved looking at the 50-year plan of what would happen to coastal defences with climate change and sea level rise – it was thought that rather than raise the sea wall, the plan would be to abandon it altogether and put up a new seawall inland. Dennis said under the then EU rules, you'd have to replace the habitat lost with new habitat and no consideration had been given whatsoever to how the land was tenured, was it tenants or owners. The radio programme was about the same thing north of Aberystwyth, where there was a plan to delist the town or village of Fairborne and let the sea overwhelm it, which sounds a bit alarming. Dennis said this links to the ongoing consultation on abandoning the Tan Lan embankment north of Llanrwst and letting that land flood – TFA are involved in that because there's no consideration being taken as to how the land is tenured, because if there's any compensation, it should go to the person farming the land and in the past it's gone to the land owner. Huwel Manley said Dennis' examples are site specific, but most of that would be in the Shoreline Management Plan and future revisions of that. NRW has just launched a consultation review on Flood Management, but the focus is about protecting homes when it comes to Welsh Government funding. There's always been that procedure or policy within Welsh Government where homes are a priority for flood protection rather than agricultural land. Unfortunately, agricultural land has fallen down the priority. The Shoreline Management Plan has been a longstanding document and is around ten years old, possibly older than that, which outlines where there is a 'hold the line' strategy around the Welsh coast and where there is a managed retreat strategy. Huwel recommended that this document is where people should look for the overall policy

setting for the protection of the coastline in Wales, including which areas will be defended with funding, and which areas will unfortunately align for retreat. Huwel suggested that this topic could be added to a future agenda.

AP March 07: Bronwen Martin, NRW to discuss with NRW colleagues about adding coastal issues and management to a future agenda.

Item 7 Any Other Business

56. Dennis thanked Zoe for all that she has done for this group and the WLMF Sub Group. It is not just Chairing the meetings; but also all the behind the scenes work to prepare for them and helping us to go in the right direction with a united front. Dennis said he was very grateful that the tenancy sector is represented as it is a minority sector within agriculture. Zoe has also been brilliant in allowing him to have his say during meetings particularly as he dials in to meetings. Thank you and wish you well for the future.
57. Bernard said thank you to Zoe – you started attending these meetings in 2016 and you chaired the first one in 2017. This will be Zoe's 19th or 20th meeting Chairing the WLMF. Zoe has always led the meetings firmly but fairly and been well informed on the agenda items. Bernard recalled Zoe Chairing some meetings suffering with COVID symptoms and on one occasion with her arm in a plaster. Bernard said a big thank you to Zoe from all of the stakeholders and we wish you good luck and good health.
58. Huwel also said thank you to Zoe and mentioned that he only dips into these meetings when Martyn P Evans, NRW is unavailable. Huwel mentioned Martyn is retiring at the end of May and there will be somebody new taking over from Martyn as a permanent attendee of the WLMF meetings.
59. Zoe said thank you everybody and will miss you all. Zoe's official leaving date is the 8th May. Rhys said he has been vetted successfully and the next stage is for it to be announced formally by Welsh Government, but was unsure of timelines. Zoe wished Rhys the best of luck and said this group will continue to thrive, will have great discussions, and continue to help shape the future of Wales in a positive way. Zoe said thank you to Bronwen and Marc who work behind the scenes to keep things on track.
60. No other business was raised.

Close meeting