

ARD COMMITTEE – WEDNESDAY 19 JUNE 2002

**REPORT OF THE MINISTER FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

**TB in Wildlife**

1. At the last meeting, the former Minister for Rural Affairs agreed to provide details of testing for TB in wildlife.
2. There are two DEFRA funded projects looking into the prevalence of *M.bovis* infection in wild mammals other than badgers currently under way:

**Project 1. "Risk to cattle from wildlife species other than badgers in areas of high herd breakdown risk"** ( Central Science Laboratory (CSL), in collaboration with Veterinary Laboratory Agency (VLA)

This study is collecting data on the distribution, frequency and pathology of *M.bovis* infections in wild mammals in cattle TB hotspots. Researchers are collecting and examining wild mammal carcasses (excluding badgers, but including wild deer) from sources such as gamekeepers, farmers, pest control contractors, veterinary surgeries or anyone else who may come across wild mammal carcasses (e.g. road kills). This is then followed by tissue culture and spoligotyping of isolates.

The project, costing £608,000, commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2000 and is scheduled to end on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2002. Some 3,000 carcasses have been collected and examined so far.

**Project 2."Risk to cattle from *M.bovis* infection in wildlife species other than badgers"** (Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, Oxford University)

This project aims to quantify the prevalence of infectious individuals for each species of wild mammal present at defined farms and to model the risk to cattle posed by each species.

Live sampling of wildlife is being carried out on randomly selected ‘triplets’ of 1 ‘control’ and 2 ‘case’ farms outside the Randomised Badger Culling Trial areas. ‘Case’ farms are those with at least one confirmed TB incident since 1997 and more than 2 reactors since 1994. ‘Control’ farms are those with no history of TB since 1994. Farms in Staffordshire and Carmarthenshire have been selected.

Fresh road kills are included and live badgers, if trapped, are also sampled.

The project, costing £1.2m, commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1999 and is scheduled to end on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2004

3. The interim results of both surveys remain confidential until the contractors have submitted their final reports to DEFRA.

### **Statutory Registration of Tourist Accommodation**

4. At the Committee meeting on 29 May, members asked about the implications of the statutory registration of tourist lets.

5. The Wales Tourist Board (WTB) is keen to see a Statutory Registration Scheme for tourist accommodation providers introduced in Wales. They feel that this is the best way to ensure minimum standards in accommodation provision and compliance with all legal requirements. WTB believes that this is in the long-term interest of the industry, as it will improve the overall quality of our tourism product. WTB research has shown that customers want this level of reassurance.

6. The Assembly Government has asked the WTB to consider the issues involved in introducing such a scheme and to consult fully with the industry.

7. A report on the implementation of a scheme is due to be submitted by the WTB to the Assembly Government next month (July).

### **Employment in the forestry industry in Wales**

8. The Welsh Forestry Multiplier Study (November 1999) concluded that the Welsh forestry industry directly employed 4000 people in Wales, producing a gross output of over £400 million and a disposal income from employment of some £61 million, much of it into the rural economy. The study was undertaken for the Forestry Commission and WDA by the Welsh Economy Research Unit in Cardiff, the Welsh Institute of Rural Studies in Aberystwyth and the School of Agriculture and Forest Studies at Bangor.

9. The aim of current spending on grant aid for forests and woodlands (which amounted to just over £3 million in 2001/02 through the Forestry Commission) is to sustain this level of employment in the sector. The Action Plans being developed through the Woodland Forum that I chair (following the launch of the Wales Woodland Strategy) will result in spending being targeted towards social, economic and environmental programmes. However, gains in employment cannot be made unless organisations

work in partnership to achieve common objectives. This is what the Woodland Forum seeks to address and I will be reporting further to the Committee as the Forum working groups present their Action Plans later in the year.

### **Intermediate Labour Market (ILM)**

10. The Forestry Commission is engaged with partners in developing a series of partnership groups throughout Wales under the ILM initiative. The programme seeks to build on people's existing skills to bridge the gap and enable them to enter (or return to) the labour market. It also aims to build on individual skills and match these skills with local labour demands. So far, three such partnerships have been established, one in North Wales, jointly with WCVA and the National Trust, and two in South Wales, jointly with BTCV, one in the Afan Forest Park, near Neath, and one in Caerphilly and Cwmbran. Two further partnerships are under discussion in Ceredigion and Powys.

### **Cydcoed – woods for all**

11. The Cydcoed Objective 1 project, started last year with the aim of giving access to woodlands and green spaces for deprived communities, is exceeding its anticipated targets for the period to December 2003. As a consequence, the Forestry, Countryside and Coastal Management Regional Partnership has approved a bid to extend the project into the latter half of the Objective 1 period. A bid for Phase 2 is now to be put to WEFO for this extension.

12. The former Minister for Rural Affairs attended an event on 14 June at Glyncorrwg, in the Afan Valley, to mark the single biggest grant to a community group under the project. Grant aid totalling some £500,000 (from the EU and match funded by the Assembly) has been allocated to the Glyncorrwg Ponds Co-operative to enable them to develop an outdoor pursuits and mountain bike centre. The project will create new permanent jobs in the Afan Valley and will provide world class recreational facilities, giving a much needed boost to this disadvantaged area.

### **Coed y Brenin festival**

13. Forest Enterprise Wales hosted a mountain bike event on 20/21 April at Coed y Brenin in Snowdonia, funded through the Rural Recovery Plan. This followed on from a similar highly successful event in Gwydyr Forest last autumn. 1500 people attended the event over the two days bringing an estimated £50,000 into the local economy. A whole range of people attended, from mountain bikers to family groups. They came from all over Wales and beyond, as well as from the local Dolgellau area.

14. With funding provided by the Assembly Government, Forest Enterprise Wales has been able to develop a number of similar facilities throughout Wales to the extent that Wales is now ranked second in the world (according to recent reports) for the standard of our mountain bike trails, mainly on Assembly owned land. Local contractors in the Dolgellau area are also developing a degree of specialism in building these trails that is in demand throughout Europe and into the USA.