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## **Agriculture and Rural Development Committee ARD 16-02(p6)**

### **RESPONSE TO THE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT INQUIRY INTO AGRICULTURAL ENVIRONMENTAL SCHEMES IN WALES, FROM FORESTRY COMMISSION WALES.**

The Forestry Commission (FC) welcomes the mid-term review of the CAP, and proposals to move away from direct subsidies, with greater emphasis on sustainable development and the delivery of Biodiversity Action Plans. We support the idea of identifying a framework for the delivery of agri-environment support in Wales

The FC welcome the proposal for a tiered suite of schemes. If well designed they could deliver a more coherent package of support than is currently the case. The tiers could range from a "broad and shallow" scheme to meet a minimum environmental and social standards and then progressively "deeper" measures to support specific management through part-farm schemes and a whole farm / whole landscape scheme.

There is a need for these deeper measures and whole farm schemes to be more focussed on delivering real benefits in the form of measurable Outcomes. The aim should be to move away from production subsidies altogether rather than "Greening" of such measures as inevitably this involves creating a complex rules and arbitrary thresholds that make schemes extremely difficult to understand and fail to deliver the intended result. Tir Mynedd and Extensification are examples of modified production subsidies that have had unfortunate consequences for woodlands in Wales.

Woodlands cover nearly 14% of Wales and play an important role in the Welsh Countryside, providing a range of environmental, social, and economic benefits to land owners and the farming community. This role has become increasingly significant as farmers seek opportunities to diversify as a direct consequence of the recent foot and mouth outbreak, and the decline in commodity values.

However, because of their high environmental value, woodlands are subject to various regulations including: the Forestry Act; Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) Regulation, Forest Reproductive Materials Regulations. Any grant aid for woodland creation and management needs to be integrated with the application of these regulations in order to comply with the regulations and avoid inefficiencies. This, together with the fact that only around 20% of the woodlands in Wales are on farms leads us to recommend that support for planting and managing woodlands is provided by one scheme across Wales. This would in effect be a "narrow and deep" scheme and on purely forestry holding would cover all the holding. However, on farms this could act as a part-farm scheme. This woodland scheme could also form an element of any whole farm scheme in a similar way that the FC's Woodland Grant Scheme interacts with the Tir Gofal scheme.

The FC's grant schemes are under review at present and the intention is to develop a highly responsive approach to grant aiding woodland management based on long-term management plans. In conjunction with CCW we have already introduced management plans for Native Woodlands within Tir Gofal and will develop this concept further for all woodland types. These plans would ensure that grant aid for woodland management avoids a prescriptive approach and instead works to achieve clear and appropriate long-term outcomes.

The FC could apply this flexible approach to woodlands on all farms whatever their level of participation in agri-environmental schemes. The move towards GIS based information systems will improve the scope for joined up working and data sharing and further improve efficiencies. The FC sees itself as an able and active partner in the delivery of Agri-environment support in Wales and would be very keen to take part in the planning of such measures.