

Paul Davies MS
Chair
Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

10th December 2021

Re: Review of the Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) (Wales) Regulations

Dear Chair,

Thank you for forwarding the NFU letter to the committee. I spoke to the Clerk to the committee to correct my statement to say veterinary medicines and hormones entering into rivers.

I would like to take this opportunity to address two further points the NFU raised in their letter. Firstly, the issue of Intensive Poultry Units (IPU's) on the River Wye. I raised this as in the last ten years; there has been increasing concern that phosphate is causing algae blooms on the River Wye.

The NRW report on the Compliance Assessment of the River Wye SAC Against Phosphorus Targets shows over 60% of the River Wye and its catchments fail against targets. The report states that *Comparison of phosphorus concentrations in the Wye against targets indicate widespread failures, some of them large in magnitude. Fourteen water bodies passed their targets, 28 failed, and three were unknown.* Wildlife Trusts Wales (WTW) and other eNGO's do not agree with NRW statement that *the overall pattern of failures in the Wye does not support the hypothesis that poultry units are the main or even a particularly important reason for nutrient failures on the Wye*".

WTW would welcome receiving NRW evidence for this statement. WTW remain concerned that NRW has only 10 testing stations on the entire Wye SAC and that these are only tested once a quarter, which doesn't provide robust data. Also, the statement doesn't suggest what is causing the phosphate levels. Within this time frame, there hasn't been a significant increase in population in Powys (1991 - 119,703 to 2020 133,030). However, there has been an increase in IPU's. Today there is estimated to be 30% more nutrient within the Wye Special Area of Conservation (SAC) than is required to fertilise crops.

There is no monitoring of manure management plans, and the plans that are submitted against planning applications lack any detail. We have recommended that within the catchment, there is a need for caps on the level of phosphate and that these levels should be actively monitored and enforced by NRW. As part of the evidence, concerns were raised about the lack of resources that NRW have to monitor and investigate pollution incidences.



Wildlife Trusts Wales

Baltic House, Mount Stuart Square,
Cardiff Bay, CF10 5FH

T: (0)29 2048 0070

info@wtwales.org

www.wtwales.org



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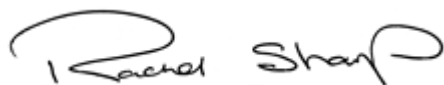
NRW must be resourced fully to undertake proactive and determined monitoring and enforcement. In particular, they should monitor compliance with the existing Slurry, Silage and Agricultural Fuel Oil (SSAFO) regulations (NRW reported that 2 out of 3 farms are non-compliant). Also, a temporary manure heap can stay in situ for 12 months, which risks leaching and run-off.

Our concern is that large agri-businesses are concentrating production in one catchment, causing a cumulative impact. It has been estimated that there could be over 20 million chickens in the Wye Catchment (no official figures are kept; this is an estimate based on the number of known IPU's). Earlier this year Avara Foods, a large egg producer, admitted responsibility for Wye catchment pollution. All of these factors raise concerns that diffuse pollution is entering into the River Wye. It's clear that further research is needed, and we are awaiting the Lancaster University's RePhokus project study of agricultural phosphorous in the Wye catchment.

Secondly, the NFU has drawn the committee's attention to bathing water quality monitoring undertaken by NRW in their letter. Bathing Water designations don't cover the whole of the Welsh coast, only 105 sites. This monitoring is only conducted between May and September and not in the winter when run-off is higher. The Bathing Water Directive classifications in 2020 were based on two microbiological parameters: *Escherichia coli* (E. coli) and intestinal enterococci, but not nutrients. I raised the point on seagrass beds as these are very sensitive habitats and have suffered significant losses and the study by University College London Historical Analysis Exposes Catastrophic Seagrass Loss for the United Kingdom highlight this. This is at a time when the importance of marine habitats in storing carbon is being recognised and leading to seagrass restoration projects in Wales. Therefore, it is critical that we ensure that pollution from any source doesn't undermine efforts to restore these blue carbon stores.

I hope this clarifies my evidence, and WEL will respond to the two further questions asked by the committee on the 7th of December, in due course. I have asked the committee clerk to ask the NFU to contact me to discuss these points, but I haven't heard back from them to date. WTW wish to work productively with all sectors to restore river ecosystems for people and wildlife in Wales and so welcome further dialogue.

Yours sincerely



Rachel Sharp
Director WTW

