

Lesley Griffiths AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Materion Gwledig a Gogledd Cymru, a'r Trefnydd
Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Paul Davies MS
Chair: Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee
Senedd Cymru

SeneddEconomy@senedd.wales

16 January 2024

Dear Paul

Thank you for your letter of 3 January containing follow up questions relating to my attendance at the Committee on 13 December for General Scrutiny. Please find my responses below.

Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS)

- Can the Minister set out how she will be engaging with the farming industry with regard to payment rates, to ensure buy-in and participation in the SFS scheme to assure its success?

My officials have organised a series of 10, in person events across Wales during the consultation period, to provide an opportunity for farmers to ask questions about the proposed scheme design and payment methodology. This includes the Universal Baseline and Stability payments.

I have proposed, in the consultation, a farmer who joins the Scheme and who received a BPS payment in 2024, could also receive a Stability Payment, which is additional to the Universal Baseline Payment received under the Scheme. The Stability Payment will help farmers make the transition from one system of support to another and provide additional financial support in advance of the Optional and Collaborative Actions of the SFS becoming available. The payment is also expected to provide continuity for BPS applicants who previously claimed for common land, the inclusion of SSSI areas and organic status (which is being considered for possible introduction in 2024). The Stability Payment will provide certainty for farmers who join the Scheme about their overall level of support during the Transition Period.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Lesley.Griffiths@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Lesley.Griffiths@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Similar farmer engagement events are expected to be repeated following the consultation, once the final decision on the Scheme design and payment rates has been made. These events, which will be supported with the detailed Scheme guidance, will include opportunities for farmers to ask about payment rates and understand the potential impact on their businesses.

Applying lessons learnt from implementing the Habitat Wales scheme (HWS)

- Can the Minister provide a list of lessons learned from designing the HWS that will be considered for finalising and implementing the SFS?

Once all contracts have been issued in January and accepted by successful applicants, we will then be able to reflect on the development and delivery of the Habitat Wales Scheme and consider how lessons learned can be used as the Sustainable Farming Scheme is finalised.

From the development and application process, the greatest lessons have come from the use and presentation of data to prospective applicants. We are actively looking at the issues encountered in the early days of the application window and how these may be addressed in future delivery.

Launching this Scheme was a significant achievement. Based on the initial data taken from Expressions of Interest, over 276,000ha of habitat land could potentially be supported on individual farms. This is far greater than the 206,830ha supported under Glastir Advanced contracts. Of this, over 22,800ha is woodland habitat.

As I stated above, there are lessons to be learnt as we move towards the implementation of SFS. We need to ensure we get the underlying data right for SFS and ensure farmers and officials have the necessary time to consider and capture data correctly.

This year, RPW will be carrying out a data confirmation exercise, which will include ground truthing the habitat data sets and other landscape features, such as trees, woodland and hedges, to produce new online maps for SFS. We will be working closely with Natural Resources Wales and farmers in the completion of this work. Officials will also be giving farmers the opportunity to update business and land tenure details in readiness for the roll out of SFS.

Agricultural Pollution Regulations

- Members look forward to receiving that update on the assessment of proposals for alternative measures as soon as possible, given that the enhanced nutrient management approach is a temporary measure put in place for the 2024 calendar year.

As indicated in my evidence to the Committee on 13 December, any update on the alternative measures proposals may not be available until well into the year. My letter of 25 May 2023, to the Chair of the Economy, Trade, and Rural Affairs Committee on this matter sets out the current position. I will be happy to provide an update once my officials have had opportunity to undertake further work in relation to the proposals and consider them in the context of the 4-year review of the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations.

Animal Disease

- Members welcome the proactive work being done, and would appreciate seeing the summary report of the recent table-top exercise and workshops, once completed, to help understand any gaps in preparedness and how these are being addressed.

The Exercise London Plane Report will be completed following the final Livestock Movement workshop on 07/02/2024. We hope to receive the final report later in February.

- Members would appreciate receiving more information in particular about preparedness and vaccine stocks available for Bluetongue viral disease given the recent detection in England.

We continue to work closely with APHA and other GB / UK animal disease policy teams on preparedness for Bluetongue. To note there is no vaccine (in the UK or Europe) for BTV-3, the strain of the Bluetongue virus that has been detected in England (since mid-November).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lesley Griffiths". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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