



Evidence paper for Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales, and Trefnydd for General Scrutiny at ETRA Committee

06/03/2024

Information provided to aid the Committee in advance of the Minister's attendance for General Scrutiny on 6 March.

Contents

1. Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) Engagement	3
Road Show Events.....	3
2. Habitat Wales Scheme	4
3. Nutrient Management Investment Scheme	7
4. OCVO	9
Animal Welfare.....	9
TB Eradication Programme.....	9
Animal Disease Policy.....	10
Borders and Animal Trade	11

1. Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) Engagement

Road Show Events

1. We continue to engage with stakeholders as we develop the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS). Having held three successful stakeholder events at the end of December 2023 with representatives from across the organisations involved in the design of the scheme, our focus turned to a series of ten roadshows across Wales specifically for farmers.
2. Over 3,200 farmers have attended these events, which ran from 14:00 to approximately 21:00, with presentations from senior officials at regular intervals throughout the day. The events were supported by Welsh Government policy and operational staff, including those from Farming Connect, Farm Liaison and officials from NRW, who were on hand to answer any additional questions.
3. The presentations provided a mechanism to communicate the content and intentions of the scheme, together with our approach to delivering it. Officials were not there to influence business decisions, rather to ensure farmers understood the proposals and had an opportunity provide feedback on what works for them and what may require changing. The events emphasised the importance of feedback through the consultation process, building on the learning and changes made through three previous consultations and two periods of co-design.
4. Attendees valued the in-person element of the events. Whilst there were a good number of questions and challenges made about the structure of the scheme, the methodology and level of payment, and the scheme rules, the opportunity to meet officials and ask questions in person was appreciated.
5. Farmers are naturally concerned about the need for change. Whilst the Universal Actions may not be new to many of them, the idea of payment for Actions is a different approach from Government. However, the majority of farmers left the meeting better informed of our intentions, and with a clearer understanding of how the scheme will apply to them.
6. Officials have also attended other stakeholder events such as the Farming Union regional conferences to promote the consultation content and encourage responses.
7. This engagement, along with the Consultation, is clearly achieving its aim of gaining valuable feedback. The feedback from stakeholder engagement and the formal consultation analysis will inform advice, along with other evidence, on the final scheme design.

2. Habitat Wales Scheme

8. The Habitat Wales Scheme is an agri-environment scheme to aid transition from the end of the long running EU funded Glastir programme in December 2023, until the launch of the Sustainable Farming Scheme in 2025, where support towards habitat maintenance is a key component of the Universal layer actions.
9. The Habitat Wales Scheme is an important continuation of our response to the nature emergency by maintaining sector support in the run up to the introduction of the Sustainable Farming Scheme. The Scheme offers an opportunity to increase the area of habitat land under management across Wales and supports the continuation of the work which has taken place through Glastir.
10. Through the Habitat Wales Scheme, we are targeting areas where the greatest environmental benefits can be achieved. This is an important step on the journey towards the Sustainable Farming Scheme and its Sustainable Land Management principles, which will support farmers to produce food sustainably, whilst addressing the climate and nature emergencies.
11. The application window for the Habitat Wales Scheme opened 29 September 2023 and closed 10 November 2023.

Expressions of Interest

12. In total, 3254 Expressions of Interest were received for the Habitat Wales Scheme and Habitat Wales Scheme – Commons. Around half of all individual Expressions of Interest were from farm businesses which did not hold a Glastir Advanced Contract.
13. In establishing the Habitat Wales Scheme, we wished to not only maintain the investment into habitat protection already made through the Glastir programme, but also to increase the area of habitat land by extending the offer of support to eligible farmers who had not previously participated in Glastir.
14. Since the first Glastir contracts were issued in 2012, Welsh farm businesses and the Welsh environment benefitted from over £336m of funding which supported the sector to contribute towards our decarbonisation and biodiversity commitments. The extension of Glastir contracts, however, precluded new expressions of interest to be considered, and new participants to join the scheme.
15. As a result, a key principle of the Habitat Wales Scheme was it should be open to all eligible farm businesses – to offer support to those who had participated in Glastir to continue their activities to benefit the environment, and to offer opportunity to those who had not previously benefitted from Glastir participation to be supported to take action to protect our environment.

16. A full breakdown of Expressions of Interest received is set out in the tables below.

Habitat Wales Scheme

Applicant	Number of Eol received	% total Scheme Eol	% Glastir Advanced participants
Individual – Glastir participant	1572	51%	77%
Individual – non Glastir participant	1516	49%	
Total individual Eol	3088		

Habitat Wales Scheme - Commons

Applicant	Number of Eol received	% total Scheme Eol	% Glastir Commons participants
Grazing Association – Glastir Commons participant	166	100%	93%

Grant offer and issuing of contracts

17. Support through the Habitat Wales Scheme started on 1 January 2024 and prospective applicants were made aware any successful contracts would be backdated to 1 January 2024 from the outset. This enabled prospective applicants to understand the process and take this into account when considering whether to submit an Expression of Interest.
18. Whilst the timing and interaction with the budget setting process for 2024-25 has impacted on the grant offer and contract issue process for the Habitat Wales Scheme, we have taken steps to keep those who submitted an Expression of Interest up to date with the next steps and what to expect at every stage.
19. Selection letters were sent to all successful applicants on 20 December 2023. This letter also explained the action required to meet the conditions of the agreement from 1 January 2024.
20. Grant offer (contract) letters were issued from 17 January 2024. To allow time for applicants to consider the detail, we have set a contract acceptance deadline of 29 February.
21. All eligible applicants have been offered a grant award. The total funding support offered through the scheme will be confirmed following receipt of all contract acceptances.
22. Similarly, the total area of habitat land supported will also be calculated once all contract acceptances have been received. Initial data from

Expressions of Interest suggests this could be in the region of around 276,000ha of habitat land on individual farm. If these figures are maintained, this would be an increase on the 207,000ha supported under Glastir Advanced contracts. Initial Expression of Interest data suggests some 114,000ha of common land would be supported through the Habitat Wales Scheme. This is similar to the 115,000ha previously supported under the Glastir Commons scheme.

3. Nutrient Management Investment Scheme

23. We remain committed, through the Co-operation Agreement with Plaid Cymru, to working with the farming community in the deployment of the regulations to improve water and air quality, taking an approach targeted at those activities known to cause pollution.
24. On 10 October 2023 we published the summary of responses for the consultation on proposals for a licensing scheme for the application of nitrogen from livestock manures; and announced the intention to introduce a time-limited approach to enable higher applications of nutrients from livestock manures where there is demonstrable crop need.
25. In line with this commitment, we have now introduced a time-limited Enhanced Nutrient Management (ENM) approach. This enables farms, where appropriate, to apply a higher amount of livestock manure to their land until the regulations are fully implemented, in January 2025. To mitigate the environmental risks associated with the temporary approach, additional requirements to protect the environment will be required by any farm applying more than 170kg of nitrogen per hectare per year from livestock manures.
26. Holdings wishing to participate in the ENM approach must submit a notification to Natural Resources Wales (NRW) by 31 March 2024 which, amongst other information, will need to include the holding's enhanced nutrient management plan. Guidance on the ENM approach is available on the Welsh Government website.
27. The ENM approach focuses on one measure only, the application of nitrogen from livestock manures in excess of 170kg per hectare per year, within a broader set of regulations. It does not impact other aspects of the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations, most of which are already in force.
28. Officials will be conducting a statutory review of the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations to conclude before April 2025. This review will provide an opportunity to understand further the effectiveness of the regulations and how the regulations interact with other sustainable land management practices. Many of the proposed alternative measures will also be considered as part of this review, as detailed in the letter of 25 May 2023, to the Chair of the Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee. Officials will be engaging with a wide range of stakeholders as a part of this review process.
29. The Welsh Government is committed to continued dialogue with the sector on the deployment of the Regulations and will continue this dialogue as we review the Regulations.
30. Since the initial Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations measures came into force, we have offered over £31m of direct support towards on-farm infrastructure investments. We have also committed £2.55m for the delivery of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the enforcement of

the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations, £1m for 2023-24 and £1.55m for 2024-25. This includes enforcements of the ENM approach.

31. In October 2022 we said we were making available up to £20m extra funding to support compliance with the regulations. In 2023, a further £3.0m was offered in via a Small Grants – Yard Coverings Scheme application window.
32. We are considering further support to be offered in 2024, this includes the potential of opening further application windows of both the Yard Coverings and Nutrient Management Investment Schemes.

4. OCVO

Animal Welfare

Licensing of Activities in Animals - Consultation

33. Programme for Government work on animal welfare enforcement and licensing policy continues to progress and having completed a targeted call for evidence to establish whether existing legislation remains sufficient, we launched a 12-week consultation on 08 December 2023. This marks the first phase of the development of a National Model for the regulation of animal welfare and explores potential licensing of animal welfare establishments, activities, and exhibits. The consultation also includes questions around the future of greyhound racing in Wales and closes 01 March.

Responsible Dog Ownership

34. Welsh Government will be running a series of events throughout 2024 to promote and support responsible dog ownership in Wales. These will follow on from the **Action on Responsible Dog Ownership summit** hosted in October 2023. We continue to work with representatives from local government, the police, public health, third sector organisations and those campaigning for both the welfare of dogs and the safety of the public.

Farmed Welfare

35. The Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Bill was introduced to the UK Parliament in December. The Bill makes it an offence to export livestock and horses for slaughter and fattening, beginning in or transiting through GB to a third country.
36. We support a ban, and the Minister for Rural Affairs laid a Legislative Consent Memorandum, for the provisions which fall within the legislative competence of the Senedd, on 19 December.

TB Eradication Programme

37. In March 2023 the Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales and Trefnydd launched a 5-year Delivery Plan.
38. Officials are currently sifting applications for the publicly appointed Programme Board and Technical Advisory Group (TAG) which will form new governance arrangements.
39. From 1 February 2024 changes to the Tuberculosis (Wales) Order 2010 mean Pre-Movement Testing of cattle or other bovine animals located in the Low TB Area of Wales are re-introduced. Post-Movement Testing is being introduced in the Intermediate TB Areas. Both measures seek to address increasing levels of disease incidence locally.

40. In Pembrokeshire an industry led, and Welsh Government supported, project developing approaches to bovine TB control, over and above the statutory measures currently used, has been established. The project focuses on identifying residual disease risk in clear testing cattle and developing a pathway for mitigating risk from cattle-to-cattle transmission. This will be through a risk-based approach involving identification and management of high-risk animals to slaughter and veterinary oversight of biosecurity practices.
41. The issue of slaughtering cattle on farm for TB purposes, particularly heavily pregnant cows and heifers has been the focus of concern by farming unions and representatives and is attracting much media coverage as aired recently in the S4C Ffermio programme. The Minister for Rural Affairs and North Wales and Trefnydd has made a commitment to commission an urgent review of the policy, and how such circumstances are managed, to be considered as a priority by the TAG. Officials are currently consulting with farming unions to gain their views and liaising with other devolved administrations to prepare the information required for the TAG to immediately consider once established.
42. The mental health of those involved in the agricultural industry is of great concern, the Welsh Government strongly encourages anyone suffering with stress or other mental health issues to speak to an expert in this field such as Tir Dewi the DPJ Foundation or the Farming Community Network.

Animal Disease Policy

43. We work very closely with the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and the other GB administrations to carry out animal disease surveillance and monitor the risk of animal disease incursions. This work allows us to prepare and implement measures to protect the health and welfare of animals in Wales.
44. Contingency planning is required by law to manage outbreaks of exotic notifiable diseases in animals. The Animal Health Act requires such plans be in place and regularly reviewed. The Contingency Plan for Exotic Notifiable Diseases of Animals in Wales describes how the Welsh Government will manage an outbreak or incident of an exotic notifiable disease of animals. The Contingency Plan and the control strategies for specific diseases, which complement it, such as the GB Bluetongue Virus Disease Control Strategy deliver these legal requirements.
45. We are required by law to test our contingency plans regularly, the last exercise took place in September last year. Animal disease outbreak exercises allow Welsh Government to ensure we are in a state of readiness and can identify gaps or improvements required to the legislation, policies, plans and structures utilised in managing an outbreak.

46. We continue to be proactive in issuing advice and communications to animal keepers, regarding animal diseases, which currently pose a higher risk of incursion, such as Avian Influenza (AI) and Bluetongue virus.

Borders and Animal Trade

Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) milestone: 31 Jan

47. The Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) sets out a risk-based approach to checks by placing live animals, products of animal origin and plants into different risk categories with the potential for a reduction or removal of checks for low risk and trusted trader commodities.
48. The BTOM improves the existing biosecurity situation by introducing risk-based controls on the vast majority of imports from the EU and its introduction is the most effective way of reducing biosecurity risk.
49. The changes coming into place on 31 January consist of the following:
 - Consignments of goods from Ireland imported into Great Britain will also need to be pre-notified on Defra's IPAFFS system.
 - Consignments of certain EU goods imported into Great Britain will require export health certification. This concerns medium risk products of animal origin, animal by products, plants and plant products and high-risk food of non-animal origin. High risk goods in these categories as well as live animals already require certification. Low risk goods in these categories will not require certification.
50. Although aspects of the border regime are devolved, Welsh Government has worked with other governments to develop coherent and consistent rules which respect our high standards of biosecurity, whilst maintaining the viability of businesses including the ports.
51. Physical checks at ports will not begin yet. They will start on 30 April for most imports, but later on goods from Ireland. Hence a date for physical checks to begin at Welsh ferry ports has not yet been set.
52. It has not yet been possible to agree a date for physical checks on goods coming from Ireland to go live, and thus when the three Welsh Border Control Posts at Holyhead, Pembroke Dock and Fishguard will open. The Minister for the Economy will make an announcement on this as soon as the date is agreed with the Scottish and UK Governments. We will ensure businesses are given ample time to prepare for this change.
53. We will have three Border Control Posts (Holyhead, Pembroke Dock and Fishguard) in Wales and are working with UK Government and Welsh Local Authorities, Port Health Authorities, Stakeholders, etc to ensure the regime – including charging - is fit for purpose for these smaller ports.