



Paul Davies MS

Chair Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

Senedd Cymru

Bae Caerdydd

CF99 1SN

22/03/2024

Dear Paul,

Thank you for your correspondence enquiring our views on the current effectiveness of operations within Drainage Districts in Wales. Please find our response below;

Feedback from our members that farm in and around Internal Drainage Districts (I.D.D) state the current management of drainage districts, which lies with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is unacceptable and distressing for many.

As mentioned in your letter, the health of I.D.D are important to maintain the productivity and fertility of agricultural land across Wales, therefore the effectiveness of their management is vital. However, due to the recent poor management, long-periods of flooding is now a common sight in these areas resulting in decreasing biodiversity and reduced agricultural productivity. In addition, overgrown weeds and collapsed ditches that block water flow are a consequence of the lack of maintenance of I.D.D's, the resulting effects can be seen at locations like the Aber Dysynni, where water levels are unable to return to their intended state which prevents wading birds from foraging.

NRW have not been commencing maintenance work on the I.D.D until much later in the season, as late as November. It is felt that I.D.D management should start sooner in the calendar year due to seasonal wet weather during the Autumn months resulting in severe damage to the land and soil structure. The difficult working conditions pose a barrier to maintenance completion with ditches being left without being cleared.

It was also highlighted that NRW should be using appropriate sized machinery for the conditionals at specific locations. Members commented that large heavy machinery was used to undertake maintenance work on an I.D.D which caused unnecessary damage to land in that area.

Members who farm on the Malltraeth I.D.D, Ynys Môn, have extreme concerns on a breach in an embankment since 2017, meaning part of the I.D.D is under water for the majority of the year. There is no funding available to restore the embankment and farmers have been refused the licence to repair the breach themselves. These members are frustrated with having to face increasing business costs due to purchasing additional forage as their silage fields are under water, even during the summer months.

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They, therefore, have to change their farming practices and potentially have to rent more land due to loss of productive land.

Moreover, the lack of management on I.D.D by NRW has negative impacts on local non-agricultural businesses like Clwb Gold Aberdyfi, who are forced to close areas golf courses due to flooding, once again losing potential earnings.

Regarding funding for the management of these I.D.D, FUW members are questioning the high administrative costs, compared with the insufficient amount spent on the I.D.D. themselves. Members felt that there is no value to be seen from the current funding and that funding intended to keep I.D.D'S in good condition is not being spent effectively.

The Land Drainage Act 1991 Section 14 declares that the duties of NRW with the management of I.D.D should include;

- to maintain existing works, that is to say, to cleanse, repair or otherwise maintain in a due state of efficiency any existing watercourse or drainage work
- to improve any existing works, that is to say, to deepen, widen, straighten or otherwise improve any existing watercourse or remove or alter mill dams, weirs or other obstructions to watercourses, or raise, widen or otherwise improve any existing drainage work;
- to construct new works, that is to say, to make any new watercourse or drainage work or erect any machinery or do any other act (other than an act referred to in paragraph (a) or (b) above) required for the drainage of any land.

Members felt strongly that NRW are currently neglecting their responsibilities in relation to The Land Drainage Act 1991 and facing no reprimand or consequences to their inaction, with the land-owners having to pay the price.

The land value of I.D.D in Wales is decreasing continuously with farmers having to deal with a constant drop in their profitability and land quality. Members clearly expressed their dissatisfaction on the management of this long standing issue and the inaction of NRW and unwillingness to co-work with land-owners to reach a practical solution to the situation.

FUW members have repeatedly called on NRW for better management for I.D.D. and communication with the land-owners stating that it is frustrating to report that there has been no direct meeting to discuss the dire situation of I.D.D since before the Covid-pandemic.

I trust due consideration will be given to the above comments and examples, I look forward to receiving any developments related to I.D.D.

Kind regards,

Elan Evans

Policy Officer

Farmers' Union of Wales