

Huw Irranca-Davies MS

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change  
and Rural Affairs

3 June 2025

Dear Huw,

## **Follow-up to 15 May Committee meeting**

Thank you for attending Committee on 15 May and giving evidence as part of our [Soil Health in Agriculture Inquiry](#). During our private session we discussed the evidence you provided and would like to seek some clarifications around Glastir and the Environment and Rural Affairs Monitoring & Modelling Programme (ERAMMP) results, and National Minimum Standards.

### **Glastir and the Environment and Rural Affairs Monitoring & Modelling Programme (ERAMMP) results**

As part of our inquiry into soil health we were made aware of the recent [Environment and Rural Affairs Monitoring & Modelling Programme \(ERAMMP\) results](#), reporting:

- 2 to 4 fold increase in the number of improved soils with nutrient levels above recommended levels risking leaching to water courses. 8% in arable and 17% of improved soils now exceed the recommended levels;
- overall stability in soil carbon but with an 8% loss of soil carbon concentrations in arable soils;
- 6-32% increase in soil compaction reducing resilience to drought, increasing risk of both rapid runoff and nitrous oxide emissions – the latter a potent greenhouse gas;
- 4% of soils in Wales are eroded or disturbed; and



- Glastir had few positive benefits for soil with a couple of exceptions including an increase in topsoil carbon concentrations in 3 of the 19 habitats.

The report said: “The results indicate that whilst we are no longer seeing widespread long-term declines, we do not see the transformational change required to meet WG [Welsh Government] environmental policies and objectives of the Glastir scheme.”

During the oral evidence sessions for this inquiry, stakeholders said that lessons need to be learned from Glastir and the ERAMMP results to inform the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) going forward to ensure soils are managed more sustainably.

When the Committee questioned you on the results of ERAMMP and effectiveness of Glastir you told us “it's not a scheme that we should expect or anticipate Glastir, ... to deliver a step change in soil health or soil quality, when, actually, the baselines were already in relatively good condition. This is a success story, if you like, for pastureland farming in Wales.” Your official told us that “Glastir was primarily a habitat scheme, so those are low-input systems and probably acidic systems, and the packages of bundles ... which were things like removing stock from woodland and fencing, those types of activities are not going to have a direct benefit on the soil”.

We note the first objective listed in the Glastir General Guidance was “Managing soils to help conserve our carbon stocks and reduce soil erosion.” To inform our understanding and recommendations to you, we would welcome further explanation of why you believe Glastir was a “success story”, while the ERAMMP results show a seemingly different picture against this objective?

## **National Minimum Standards**

In the Agriculture (Wales) Bill White Paper (2020) the Welsh Government proposed to:

“include powers within the Bill enabling the Welsh Ministers to create National Minimum Standards for agriculture. After the Bill receives Royal Assent, we propose to consolidate the existing legislation which currently underpins the Cross Compliance requirements into secondary legislation with limited modifications and additions where necessary”.

...

“Developing a set of National Minimum Standards would provide a clear regulatory baseline for all farmers in Wales. This would also allow agricultural regulation to be monitored and enforced consistently, facilitating a level playing field across Wales for all businesses managing agricultural land”.

...

“We propose GAEC [Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition] 4 and 5, which require farmers to maintain minimum soil cover as well as to minimise soil erosion and compaction, should be

included into the National Minimum Standards. Without doing this, there would be no statutory regulations protecting soil in Wales.”

You told the Committee on 15 May 2025 that “The GAEC 4 and 5 are expected to be included within the SFS scheme requirements.” While the Committee welcomes the inclusion of GAEC 4 and 5 in cross-compliance rules for those participating in the SFS, we would like clarification about whether these rules would not apply to farmers outside of the SFS or not?

We would also like to understand the Welsh Government’s change of approach from the Agriculture (Wales) Bill White Paper where it was proposed that NMS would be introduced to create a clear regulatory baseline for all farmers in Wales, including GAEC 4 and 5. Please could you provide some detail on the thinking behind this?

Thank you in advance for this information which will be very useful as part of our Inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew RT Davies". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Andrew RT Davies MS

Chair: Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

We welcome correspondence in Welsh or English