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Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Newid Hinsawdd a Materion
Gwledig
Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change & Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Andrew RT Davies MS
Chair
Economy, Trade and Rural Affairs Committee

SeneddEconomy@senedd.wales

5 January 2026

Dear Andrew,

Thank you for your letter dated 20 October, regarding the issues I undertook to write on at my attendance at the General Ministerial Scrutiny session on 1 October. Please find my responses to the points raised below.

Bovine TB

Whole life restrictions on resolved standard interpretation Inconclusive Reactors (IRs)

All Standard interpretation IRs in Wales that have a negative result under standard interpretation at the re-test read on or after 1st January 2026, will remain restricted for the rest of their life to the holding in which they were found. The only permitted off movements for such animals are to a slaughterhouse or an Approved Finishing Unit (AFU). The cattle can move directly or via an approved slaughter gathering or TB dedicated sale (orange market).

Using the IR re-test date as the trigger to implement the policy change rather than the IR disclosing test, is viewed to provide a clear message and allow greater understanding by the industry.

As the permitted testing window for the retesting of IRs is between 60 and 90 days, all IRs disclosed at tests completed from 1st November will be captured in the change. It is possible that IRs disclosed at tests completed earlier may also be affected if they are not retested until on or after 1st January.

The TB policy team and CCRA communications branch have worked in collaboration with the TB Programme Board, Task and Finish Group and APHA veterinary leads to develop a communications plan along with the guidance material which will be published.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth Gymraeg sy'n dod i law 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.

The policy change was announced on 27th October 2025, allowing a 2-month lead in period. Welsh Government will use various modes of communication as set out in the communications plan below to maximise the coverage. In addition, the farming unions and veterinary practices have committed to promote this policy change using their own member/client communication channels.

Date	Event	comment
Monday 27/10/25	Announcement/Press release/social media channels	Include case study quotes from DFM, CVO and industry
Monday 27/10/25	Publish Guidance WG Website including links to general licences	Include links to a process flowchart and the summary of evidence to support policy change.
Monday 27/10/25	Publish announcement on Gov.uk and TBhub.	With links to guidance on WG website
Monday 27/10/25	Stakeholder Bulletin	With links to guidance on WG website
Tuesday 28/10/25	Welsh Dairy Show, Carmarthen	Have presence to publicise change
W/B 27/10/25	Gwlad newsletter	Link to guidance
November 2025	Article in Gwlad winter update with link to guidance	To coincide with Winter Fair
24-25/11/25	Winter Fair, RWAS Llanelwedd	Have presence to publicise change
1/01/2026	Implementation/Announcement	Social media

River pollution prosecutions

Welsh Government provided an additional £3.5m in 2025–26 to Natural Resources Wales (NRW) to strengthen regulation and enforcement capacity. This funding seeks to enable NRW to establish a dedicated Water Compliance Unit, expand multi-agency enforcement, and invest in critical monitoring equipment and pilot programmes.

The enforcement of the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations (CoAPR) is undertaken by Natural Resources Wales in accordance with NRW's Regulatory Principles and the Regulators' Code. Prosecutions are just one aspect of NRW's enforcement approach, which is proportionate to the risks posed to people and the environment and includes a range of outcome focussed actions from provision of advice and guidance with timescales to complete actions, serving notices and Formal Caution. Advice and guidance in this context are given to ensure compliance in specified time period, rather than voluntary by nature.

The available data confirms 75 formal warning letters, 12 notices, 1 formal caution and 349 instances of advice and guidance have been issued or served. There are a number of cases currently being considered for prosecution, but none have been taken forward to date. Action has been taken under other legislation where agricultural pollution has occurred. As delegated agents for Cross Compliance SMR1, NRW is obliged to report the outcome of any CoAPR inspection to Rural Payments Wales (RPW). Breaches are scored using the Verifiable Standards and financial penalties are applied.

The Welsh Government has committed £4.13m for NRW's enforcement of the Regulations since their introduction. As of 31st March 2025, a total of 847 farms had been inspected. 53% were found to be non-compliant with one or more of the CoAPR requirements on the first visit, whilst 47 % were fully compliant with the regulations. At the end of March 2025, 91 of the non-compliant farms had been brought into full compliance.

As the main reasons for non-compliance relate to infrastructure requirements, it can take considerable time for the non-compliance to be rectified appropriately. The regulatory and enforcement approach taken will help those farms achieve compliance in the appropriate timescales, to deliver the outcomes the regulations seek to achieve.

NRW's approach to enforcing the regulations is helping to drive investments. We have committed £69m for farms to invest in capital items since the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations were introduced. A further 553 farmers have been invited to submit a full application under the latest Nutrient Management Investment Scheme window, with a total grant value of £19.6m. Those investments should result in long-term improvements to water quality.

More broadly, in 2024 Natural Resources Wales undertook enforcement action in 337 water-related cases, reinforcing its commitment to minimise environmental harm wherever possible and ensuring the delivery of the best outcomes for communities and ecosystems. Further information on its enforcement work can be found in its [2024 annual regulatory report](#).

Agricultural pollution – industrial sized dairy and livestock farms

As you will be aware I published a written statement on 8 October outlining the next steps on the Review of the Control of Agricultural Pollutions Regulations. I have asked my officials to establish a new task and finish group to engage on the recommendations and inform the development of proposals. Due to the complex and technical nature of the recommendations and the importance of a collaborative approach, I will be using the experience gained from the SFS stakeholder engagement process to inform the way forward.

Whilst some of the recommendations will extend beyond the end of this Senedd term I am keen for task and finish group to identify what work can be undertaken now to support sustainable changes to the regulations. Officials have been working over the summer on preparatory work, including drafting technical specifications for work to be carried out by contractors with scientific and agronomic expertise. The specifications include exploratory work on key recommendations, including alternatives to the closed periods and the 170kg limit and soil protection measures. The Welsh Government is also engaging with the Construction Industry Research and Information Association (CIRIA) - a neutral, independent and not-for-profit body - on its review of industry guidance on best practice in relation to slurry storage for designers, contractors and agricultural operators to inform future slurry storage designs.

Final decisions will be for Welsh Ministers. However, given the importance of this work to a range of stakeholders, I will make sure the SFS Ministerial Roundtable and the eNGO roundtable are sighted on progress. Furthermore, any proposals for substantive changes to the regulations will require formal consultation and will need to be underpinned by the necessary Impact Assessments.

The enforcement approach outlined earlier will also continue, subject to annual review. We need to go further than we have before, challenge each other more than we have before, and we need to move quickly to make real improvements. We must clean up our rivers and coastal waters.

Monmouth and Brecon canal

I welcome the opportunity to reaffirm the Welsh Government's position, which remains steadfast in its commitment to protecting Wales' cultural heritage while also supporting economic growth and tourism. We are determined to work hand in hand with partners to identify and deliver sustainable solutions that will safeguard this historic waterway and secure its future for generations to come.

The Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal is recognised as a vital community asset, enriching local life through recreation, education, and wellbeing. Its preservation is essential to ensuring that it continues to serve as a source of pride for future generations.

This historic waterway contributes over £30 million to the Welsh economy and supports more than 1,000 jobs. Recognising its importance, the Welsh Government has brought together partners to find a sustainable solution that balances heritage, community, and economic priorities.

To this end, the Welsh Government and the Canal & River Trust have entered into a funding partnership for the next five years. Under this agreement, the Welsh Government will provide cover for up to £400,000 annually, while the Canal & River Trust will contribute up to £100,000 each year. Discussions will continue with other partners to secure further contributions to ensure long term resilience and sustainability of the canal.

This agreement builds on the £5 million already committed to refurbish the Manorafon pumping station, a critical investment that creates the space needed to develop long-term resilience for this precious waterway. Engagement with stakeholders will remain central as we continue to shape the canal's future.

We are proud to support this initiative and remain committed to working collaboratively to protect and enhance the Monmouthshire and Brecon Canal for the benefit of communities, visitors, and the wider Welsh economy.

Licensing to regulate the release of game birds

Gamebird releases in Wales are already subject to important safeguards. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 requires that releases within Sites of Special Scientific Interest must be consented by Natural Resources Wales. Evidence shows that activities carried out by the game shooting sector can deliver benefits for biodiversity, but that the release of gamebirds can also lead to harm, particularly where they happen in sensitive locations or at unsustainable levels. It is important we carefully consider how we develop a robust licensing approach that is right for Wales. We will need to work collaboratively across all sectors to determine the most appropriate approach for Wales.

Avian Influenza has added an additional challenge. The Welsh Government is currently introducing additional measures to Avian Influenza Prevention Zone Declaration in Wales. These are specific requirements in relation to mandatory biosecurity in the gamebird management sector, including a mandatory biosecurity checklist to be completed by all gamebird keepers. Initial risk communication has already taken place with relevant industry representatives to support the transition to the mandatory phase.

Thank you for writing to me on this important topic. I hope this information is helpful and goes
some way in answering the Committee's queries.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS

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