

Carl Sargeant AM
Minister for Natural Resources
Welsh Government

Rebecca Evans AM
Deputy Minister for Farming and Food
Welsh Government

8 July 2015

Dear Carl and Rebecca

Water quality

On 10 June 2015 we held a short evidence session on water quality in Wales. The focus of the session was primarily on riverine water quality.

A range of issues were raised with us and I would be grateful if you could provide a coordinated response to them in writing.

Once we have considered your response we will write to you again with our conclusions.

Biodiversity

The RSPB told us that improving water quality for the needs of wildlife is absent from the new Water Strategy for Wales. They were of the view that the Strategy should be amended to take account of this.

Q1: Are you willing to consider amending the Strategy along these lines?

General Binding Rules (GBRs)

Stakeholders expressed general support for the use of GBRs, so long as they don't duplicate existing regulation. We heard that they should bring together existing rules in a simple and understandable way, and be supported by advice and



support services. We note that the Environment Bill doesn't mention GBRs; yet the Water Strategy says that the Welsh Government will consider introducing them.

Q2: I would be grateful if you could set out your position on the use of general binding rules to improve water quality.

Poultry

We heard that clarification and guidance is needed in relation to the regulation of poultry units under 40-thousand birds and that potentially more stringent regulation and enforcement may be necessary. Additionally, the evidence we received suggests that more work may be needed to evidence pollution levels from poultry farms.

We received additional correspondence from a member of the public who is concerned about a particular proposal for a poultry farm in Powys (published as a paper to note for our meeting on 8 July 2015). Whilst we appreciate that you are unable to comment on a specific planning issue, the information provided offers an illustration of some of the concerns that exist around the regulation of poultry units under 40-thousand birds.

Q3: Can you please set out your view on the planning, permitting, regulation and enforcement arrangements in relation to poultry farms under 40-thousand birds?

Q4: Do you believe that more evidence is needed to understand the nature and extent of pollution from poultry farms?

Agriculture

We heard that the RDP offers a great opportunity to improve water quality. It will be important that, from the outset, the need for a collaborative approach is emphasised to make sure programmes meet water quality objectives.

In terms of Glastir, there is a concern amongst stakeholders that that the focus is on a targeted approach via Glastir Advanced and that opportunities to address water quality issues through the entry-level scheme may be missed. Additionally, we again heard calls for a part-farm scheme. There was a view that the Sustainable Production Grant could be used to improve farm infrastructure to the benefit of water quality. Again we heard calls for a simplified application process.



Q5: Without straying into the broader points raised in relation to Glastir, we would be grateful if you could set out how you believe the RDP and Glastir will deliver improvements to water quality.

Outreach Service

Land managers work better when there is a trusted one-to-one relationship in place. We heard the suggestion that Farming Connect could be extended to provide more specific advice to land managers on preventing pollution of water courses under the new RDP. However, we also heard questions over whether NRW should be doing this (as with former CCW Tir Gofal field officer role). NRW, conscious of financial constraint, appear unlikely to be able to offer this type of support and are encouraging partnership working with the Third Sector. This will, of course, have resource implications for Third Sector organisations.

Q6: Can you please set out the steps the Welsh Government is taking to ensure that land managers receive the advice and support they need to contribute to the improvement of water quality in Wales?

Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES)

We heard some evidence that suggested that PES could play an important role in encouraging land management practices that lead to improved water quality.

Q7: Can you set out your view on the role that PES could play in improving water quality in Wales?

Q8: When do you expect PES to be a realistic and viable option for both buyers and sellers of ecosystem services in Wales?

Mining legacy

Tackling water pollution from disused mines in Wales is an enormous and extremely expensive challenge. We heard that NRW has a plan in place but that the delivery of this plan is constrained by funding.

Q9: Can you set out the action Welsh Government is taking to address the issue of water pollution from mines in Wales and an estimate of the costs involved?



Compliance with the WFD

In 2012 NRW reported that only 37% of the water bodies in Wales had ‘good ecological status’. This figure increased to 42% in 2014. NRW has stated that by 2015 it expects 50% of the water bodies in Wales to have ‘good ecological status’.

The European Commission has warned Member States that if they fail to implement the changes required to meet the targets set out in the WFD they could face potential legal action. In a report, published in March 2015, Member States were told that the Commission could pursue infringement cases if more isn’t done to implement strategies aimed at improving the chemical and ecological status of their water bodies.

In written evidence Dŵr Cymru states that in 2015–2020 it will be implementing around £1.7billion of investment which includes a ‘major programme of environmental improvements’ that will support delivery of EU obligations.

Dŵr Cymru says that it supports the ‘farsighted’ policy of the Welsh Government and NRW to target finite resources at ‘quick wins’, working towards the 50% of water bodies at good status by 2015. It says that this leaves Wales in a more positive situation than England, where progress has been slower.

However, Dŵr Cymru notes two concerns going forward. Firstly, Dŵr Cymru can only do so much. It states that the water bodies where it plans to invest are under a variety of other pressures (physical modifications, diffuse pollution from agriculture and water from abandoned mines) and that it worries that ‘unless something is done to reduce these other impacts, there will be little to show for our customers’ investment.’

Secondly, Dŵr Cymru will be making investments in the second WFD cycle (2015–2021) in the hope that remaining parties will reduce their impact by 2027. It says:

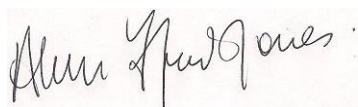
‘In deciding what should or should not be done during the WFD’s second cycle, Welsh Ministers and NRW will need to try to keep the third (final) WFD cycle in Wales at a manageable scale. There is a real danger that all the harder – and more expensive – problems will be stored up for the final (third) cycle and will be unaffordable for all parties.’

Q10: Can you please provide us with more information in relation to the timing of infrastructure investment needed to meet the WFD targets and what steps you are taking to keep the level of actions and investment needed during the third cycle ‘at a manageable scale’?



Thank you for your consideration of the above questions. I look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "Alun Ffred Jones" in a cursive style.

Alun Ffred Jones AM

Chair of the Environment and Sustainability Committee

