

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales  
Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig | Climate Change,  
Environment and Rural Affairs Committee  
Ymchwiliad i bolisi coedwigaeth a choetiroedd yng Nghymru | Inquiry into Forestry and  
woodland policy in Wales

FWP 35

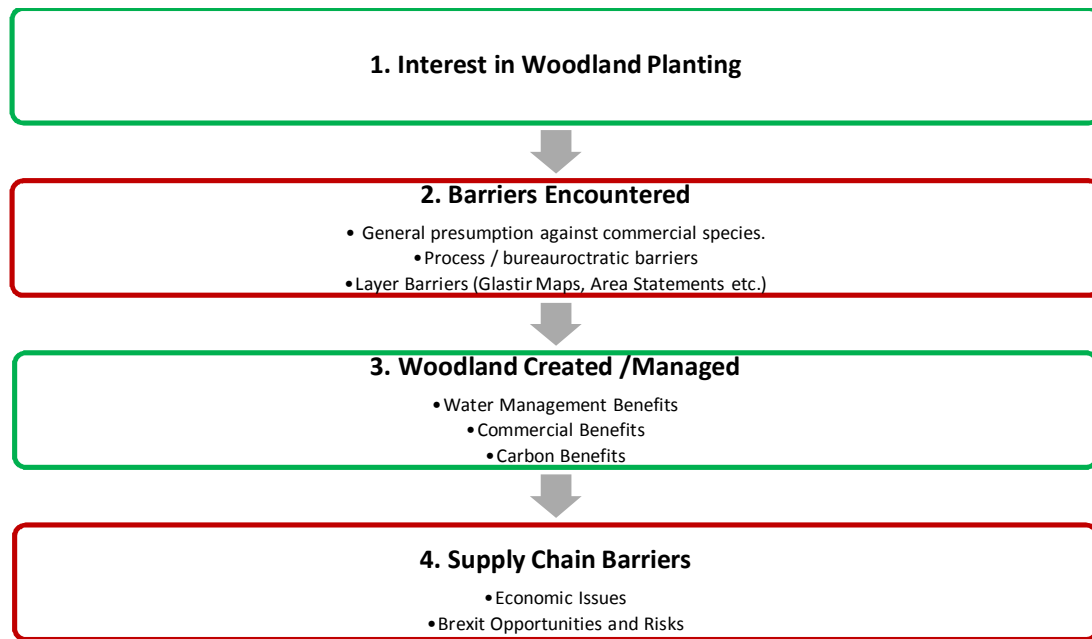
Ymateb gan : Undeb Amaethwyr Cymru  
Evidence from : Farmers' Union of Wales

Thank you for inviting the Farmers' Union of Wales to respond to the inquiry into forestry and woodland policy in Wales.

The FUW have a number of initial comments:

- The FUW are concerned over the progress made to date in achieving what is outlined in the Woodland for Wales Report. The Wales Climate Change Strategy (2010) outlines an aspiration to create 100,000 hectares of new woodland between 2010 and 2030, and the aspiration was a key recommendation of the Land Use and Climate Change Group. The aspiration required planting of 5,000ha of additional woodland cover per annum from 2010 to 2030. In 2014, Welsh Government commissioned ADAS to review the climate change target. ADAS recommended a reduction in the target to 50,000ha of woodland creation to be delivered over 25 years up to 2040. Between 2010 and 2015 just 3,203ha of woodland had been created in Wales and the latest Woodlands for Wales indicators report shows that just 141ha of new woodland was planted across Wales in the year to March 2016 - far lower than the anticipated levels set out by both the Land Use and Climate Change Group and ADAS.
- The FUW believe woodland creation and management is a key component for the rural economy. It is a sustainable industry that has a wide number of economic, social and environmental benefits, including making a significant contribution towards mitigating the impact of climate change. The outcomes from planting and managing woodland tie into wider acts and in particular help to promote many of the Well-Being Goals outlined in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- The FUW are of the opinion that the UK's transition from the EU brings with it the opportunity to reflect on current policy and to look at the best methods for delivering woodland creation going forward. The FUW believe that many of the woodland schemes to date have been complex and thus making the actual delivery of woodland hard to achieve. The FUW believe that there needs to be close communications with the policy makers and farmers, who manage some 80% of land in order to ensure any future schemes are practical and applicable for those who will often typically end up delivering. However, there is the obvious concern and challenge of securing the funding in order to achieve any goals set out by new policy, as at present funding comes from Pillar 2 – the Rural Development Plan.
- The FUW believe that an appropriate balance needs to be struck between agriculture and woodland creation, and that policies which lead to large expanses of agricultural land being planted with trees or land abandonment will have a detrimental impact on rural cultures, economies and habitats - as happened during the 20th Century.

## Steps to Woodland Creation:



### 1. Interest in Woodland Planting

- Many of FUW's members are interested in exploring opportunities to plant farm woodland, understanding that planting woodland could not only bring them a longer term source of income but also that there would be additional benefits that can support and strengthen their business. Such benefits could include; improving livestock production with shelter and biosecurity, reducing heating costs, providing timber products such as fencing, gates, wood chip bedding and fuel and reducing soil erosion or waterlogging. That said, there is little financial incentive for farmers to plant woodlands. Although farmers are often willing to plant trees, they will have reservations on planting on the most productive land as once planted will be lost permanently to production.
- The Forestry Commission estimate there is about 78,000ha of farm woodland in Wales. The latest Woodlands for Wales indicators report shows that just 141ha of new woodland was planted across Wales in the year to March 2016. This compares with an average of 658ha in each of the five years to 2014.
- More than 400ha of land in Wales is currently being assessed for Glastir Woodland Creation funding, a scheme intended to increase the area of woodland on Welsh farms, and the amount of farm woodland within the grant scheme has been falling since 2013.

### 2. Barriers Encountered

- The FUW are concerned that significant barriers exist to the creation of woodland on areas which are of little agricultural value. These barriers are can typically be seen as bureaucratic (as experienced with successive Glastir Woodland Creation schemes) and financial.
- In addition to these bureaucratic and financial barriers, there has been an under-management of woodlands in ways which reduced carbon uptake and ecological benefits for many species.

- c. The FUW feel that there is a lack of flexibility in woodland creation schemes. Looking for example at the Glastir Woodland Creation Scheme, the application process is far from straight forward – a long and drawn out process - and does not fit well to smaller farm-scale planting. The FUW suggests that every planting scheme in recent years has been accompanied by administrative barriers which have put many off.
- d. There are layer barriers that are encountered by farmers, which add additional complexity and complication to the process. The FUW feel that the Woodland Opportunities Map can often work against a farmer willing to undertake woodland planting. The FUW believe caution needs to be used when looking at species and habitat maps, arguing they are often inaccurate and never created to be used in such a way as to look at where woodland can or should be created.

### 3. Woodland Created

- a. When woodland is created, and it important to emphasise that with some 80% of land being managed by farmers in Wales it is the farmers who play an increasing role this woodland creation, there will be a number of benefits created. The table below illustrates the woodland ownership in Wales compared to the UK<sup>1</sup>:

	Wales		UK	
	N	%	N	%
<b>NRW or FC/NRW/FS Woodland</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>864</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Private Woodland</b>	<b>189</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>2296</b>	<b>73%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>306</b>		<b>3160</b>	

- b. The FUW believe that the table above shows there is much scope for Wales to increase its private woodland but emphasise that this needs to be done through a scheme that rewards farmers for their actions and that any such scheme needs to be as flexible as possible to encourage participation so that the required goals set out in the Woodland for Wales Report are achieved.
- c. The FUW state that it is important to note that there are a number of unintended negative outcomes from woodland creation and thus every care should be given to fully understanding the full impact of woodland creation. Such negative outcomes are for example impacts to biodiversity, water quality and understanding to what degree plantations have increased run-off. In addition to this, there is no real scope for woodland management which has additional negative impacts.
- d. The FUW think that there needs to be a focus of policy going forward to look at sustainable woodland management. At present this is an area that the FUW feel is being overlooked and thus the full benefits of woodland creation are not being maximised.
- e. Members also highlighted the detrimental impact visitors to the countryside were having on the well-being of others, as reported recently in terms of damage to footpaths and litter in National Parks, and fly-tipping. As such, it was felt that a Wales-wide policy to educate the general public and younger generation regarding the impacts of such actions should be implemented.

<sup>1</sup> Table made from data found here:  
[https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Ch1\\_Woodland\\_FS2016.pdf/\\$FILE/Ch1\\_Woodland\\_FS2016.pdf](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/Ch1_Woodland_FS2016.pdf/$FILE/Ch1_Woodland_FS2016.pdf)

- f. Once the barriers listed above are addressed and woodland is planted then the fundamental problem that needs to be addressed is the lack of supply chain or market for the wood and timber products.

#### 4. Supply Chains

- a. The FUW expresses concern was expressed that there is no current supply chain for the production of timber.
- b. The latest Woodlands for Wales indicators report shows that just 141ha of new woodland was planted across Wales in the year to March 2016 – 102ha of broadleaves and 39ha of conifers. The fall in new plantings is likely to have a major effect on softwood availability in Wales. On current predictions it will fall to 50% of current levels by 2045. The creation of a viable market for our timber and wood products could offer an increasing benefit in terms of using wood fuel for supplies of heat and power, as well as offering a valuable alternative to fossil fuels.
- c. The UK imports 80% of timber and wood products and whilst Wales is capable of growing, and processing quality timber, we need to do more to ensure a healthy sustainable supply. The UK was the third largest net importer (imports less exports) of forest products in 2014, behind China and Japan<sup>2</sup>.
- d. The Union feels that there is an underdevelopment in many aspects including thinning and the opportunities for diversification into woodchip etc. is severely disadvantaged.
- e. The FUW feel it is important to look at the wider supply chains for forestry too, for example over one half of the UK population had visited woodland in the last few years<sup>3</sup>, something that closely aligned with the Well-Being and Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
- f. The FUW feel that finding supply chains for wood products produced in Wales/UK could be a possible opportunity as the UK transitions from the EU. The FUW believe this is an area that should be explored in much more detail.

#### Concluding remarks:

1. The priority actions outlined in the Woodlands for Wales action plan tie into the Well-Being Goals, so there is no denying that the strategy and WfG (Wales) 2015 Act are closely aligned. However, the progress of these is questionable at this time. The FUW believe there needs to be a concerted effort to focusing future policy but welcomes the fact that woodland has the potential to create economic activity, create employment opportunities and improve the biodiversity and functioning of Wales's environment.
2. The FUW feel that the UK's transition from the EU will bring concern and challenge in that the majority of the woodland creation support comes through the Rural Development Plan and therefore any future policies post-Brexit do not, as yet, have any security for funding.
3. In contrast to the point above, the UK's transition will also bring a number of benefits in terms of formulating new policies. The FUW therefore call that there are extensive consultation periods for future woodland policies so that a practical mechanism for delivery can be achieved.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infid-7aqdgc>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infid-7aqdgc>

4. The FUW believe that any future woodland creation scheme should be flexible to encourage more farmers to engage and to reduce some of the barriers encountered in terms of planting new woodland.
5. The FUW also feel that it is important to look at the importance of having a woodland management scheme and that this will have a number of benefits for biodiversity, timber, wood etc. This also has potential for farmers to create a new market for their business which would add to their resilience which is particularly poignant as we transition from the EU.
6. The FUW believe it is vitally important to look at the supply chains associated with woodland creation, to look more to promoting the economic benefits of planting woodland.

I trust the above comments will be taken into account by the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee.