

Inquiry into Biodiversity – Public Goods Scheme

CLA Cymru: The voice of the Rural Economy

1. The CLA (Country Land & Business Association) is the representative organisation for rural businesses across England and Wales. We work closely with UK and Welsh Government as a consultee-of-choice on issues concerning the rural economy; the land-based businesses it fosters, and the wider enabling policies that support sustainable development.
2. With around 3,000 members in Wales and 33,000 in total, our members own and manage more than 10 million acres across the UK and engage in a wide range of business activities from agriculture and food to forestry and tourism as well as the gamut of businesses that support the land based industry.
3. Our membership relies on us to ensure that the voice of the rural economy is heard in the development of policy. The needs of rural community and businesses are often over-looked and under-represented in UK politics; when designing new land management policy and schemes it is important to remember the people, communities and business that underpin the delivery of beneficial environmental outcomes such as biodiversity.

Introduction

4. CLA Cymru has long been supportive of the vision of payment for public goods as laid out by Welsh Government in their Brexit and Our Land Consultation and acknowledges that biodiversity is one of a range of desirable outcomes that provide public benefit that can be delivered through effective land management.
5. A new policy based around payment for public benefit would provide Wales with an unparalleled opportunity to create sustainable landscapes and communities; deliver on their commitment to sustainable management of natural resources as well as meet many international obligations such as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Building on the excellent work of the agri-environment scheme approach of the Common Agriculture Policy, Welsh Government's proposed new Land Management Programme, especially the Public Goods schemes, has the potential to deliver more measurable, effective and targeted beneficial outcomes, biodiversity being one of them.

A Public Goods Scheme delivering Biodiversity

6. In designing and delivering the proposed Public Benefits scheme within the overarching Land Management Programme, CLA Cymru have identified several themes that will need careful consideration to make the scheme as successful as possible:

Evidence

7. It is essential that any outcome delivered through the Public benefits scheme is based on sound evidence that is shared and understood by all parties involved in delivering it.

8. Biodiversity has historically been well-studied and the target of many conservation efforts and policies. The result is that in the majority of cases, it is well-understood what is required to restore biodiversity and how land management practices are linked to biodiversity outcomes.
9. There is wealth of increasingly sophisticated evidence sources in Wales that can and should be utilised in designing outcomes for a public benefits scheme: the Glastir Monitoring and Evaluation Programme, its successor, the Environment and Rural Affairs Monitoring and Modelling Programme and new evidence sources such as the State of Natural Resources Report and the anticipated Area Statements. This abundance of evidence needs to be effectively aligned and understood in the context of existing and evolving land management practices across Wales as well as the economic and social structures of communities.
10. A missing link in the evidence base is around the valuing of public goods and biodiversity, in particular, is an area that needs considerable work. One of the anticipated successes of a public benefits scheme is the ability to reward those delivering the benefits for the true value of the outcome thus creating new and vibrant market opportunities. One of the weaknesses of agri-environment style schemes was the income foregone payment system which promoted an either or choice between traditional land management practices and “environmental outcomes”. By attributing actual value to public benefits, it overcomes this issue by creating market worth for delivering a range of different land management practices.
11. This area of evidence needs to be resolved as soon as possible to give the Public Benefits scheme ad outcomes such as biodiversity an equal footing and opportunity as current land management practices.

Prioritisation and targeting

12. Although evidence is abundant, it will be essential to prioritise and target actions, either from a biological point of view or from a value for money point of view, to achieve most for biodiversity within the constraints of available funding and opportunity.
13. Whilst CLA Cymru support the principle that a public benefits scheme should be open to all, there are natural constraints on delivering outcomes that must be understood and acknowledged (there is no value for money in paying a land manager to create a specific habitat for a wildlife species if the land in question is cut off from corridors to existing habitats and the topography and climate is unsuitable) Outcomes, especially for biodiversity, must be targeted to areas of realistic deliverability.
14. CLA Cymru has already highlighted the importance of ensuring the management of existing landscape, features, habitats, etc, that deliver public benefit. Conversely, it is also important not to constrain land managers with the maintenance of features with limited or unsuccessful ecological value. Integration is key and any successful public benefits scheme must be based on compromise and acknowledge the multiple needs and benefits from a range of diverse land management outcomes. Sustainability is the balance environmental, economic cultural and social needs.

Scheme Design and implementation

15. Scheme design should strike a balance between flexibility and prescription, making the best good practice advice and services available to land managers whilst maintaining the flexibility for them to innovate and use their own understanding of their land.
16. A results based scheme would be an effective delivery method especially for biodiversity as long as a practical set of indicator targets or results can be agreed. A primary failing of Glastir was the overly prescriptive nature of many of the options with immeasurable expectations such as percentage of grass lengths in a field being unrealistic and undeliverable.
17. The desire to deliver a beneficial outcome must not be outweighed by an unrealistic administrative burden or demonstration of that outcome.
18. For biodiversity, many benefits are best achieved at a landscape scale so collaboration between land managers should be sought but should not be constraining. Working in this manner requires facilitation and partnership and work on the basis of compromise and collaboration. Additionally, it must be acknowledged that although a landscape scale intervention must have the majority of land managers committed to delivery, it should not be prevented from continuing if small pockets of land managers in the given area are not participating. The whole should not be diminished or constrained by individual parts where unnecessary.
19. Finally, it is important that any scheme fosters a new era of collaboration and joint working between the public and private sector and acknowledges the drivers for each are different and expectations should be appropriate to each.

Monitoring and Evaluation

20. The evidence sources discussed above have already demonstrated their success in monitoring and evaluating biodiversity outcomes. GMEP in particular heralded a welcome new era of effectively measuring and demonstrating the results of agri-environmental schemes. CLA Cymru are confident that ERAMMP can continue this excellent work for the wider scope of the proposed Public Benefits scheme, in particular their remit to consider the economic and social impact of interventions.
21. Biodiversity can be a costly outcome to measure so it is important that the right balance of indicator results and measurable outcomes is struck and that opportunities to utilise up-to-date technology and latest modelling systems are utilised. Further, it is important that information is accessible and shared with the land managers delivering public benefits to foster the feeling of collaboration and also extend knowledge and understanding.
22. Lastly, it is important that any monitoring and evaluation of the proposed Public Benefit scheme is as immediate, flexible and iterative as possible so that the scope of successful outcomes can be expanded and resources directed away from less successful measures that are not delivering public benefit or value for money. As we learn more, we must be adaptable to change.