



**BRECON AND RADNOR
BRANCH**

25/3/19

Dear Petitions Committee,

We are most grateful to you for making the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee aware of our petition and would very much welcome a response from the CCERA committee.

Thank you for giving us the chance to respond to the Minister for EERA's reply to your questions following our previous submission.

We regret that Minister Lesley Griffiths did not give any further information to clarify her statement (14/11/18) about measures to regulate agricultural pollution.

We are very pleased to hear from Minister Lesley Griffiths that a Working Group to improve planning with respect to intensive agriculture is to be established but the information she has provided leaves us with various concerns.

1. What will the working group consider?

1.1 There is no title for the Working Group and nor do the terms of reference clarify exactly what the working group will consider. Is this planning matters for:

"all intensive agricultural developments" ?

"intensive livestock-farming developments"?

"intensive poultry-farming developments"?

1.2 Will the interpretation of "*intensive*" be sufficiently broad to deal with environmental concerns? To give a local example: there has been an application for a (just under) 2,000 animal pig-rearing enterprise in Powys (P/2015/1152) where pigs finishing over 80Kg are reared in an "*all in – all out*" cyclical scheme allowing 1m sq. per pig. The number of just under 2,000 neatly avoids the NRW permitting threshold of 2,000. The applying agent advises the LPA that this is "*not intensive*"..

2. Will the working group be publicly accountable?

2.1 It seems that the environmental concerns of the public and stakeholder NGO organisations can only be brought to the table at the discretion of participants who include:

- Farming Industry representatives
- LPAs
- NRW
- Welsh Government

There is no mention of:

- Non-Governmental Stakeholder Environmental Organisations

- representatives of the general Welsh public
- independent scientists.

We are concerned that solutions will be too strongly governed by political pressure. The short-term interests of the farming industry will not be adequately counterbalanced by any other interests. There is likely to be a strong lobby for industry self-regulation but we have seen that this is not working and will not work whenever short-term agricultural profits are at stake. In particular, overriding longer-term environmental issues concerning biodiversity, air, water and soil quality will not get the consideration they need for survival of the rural economy and ultimately of the human species.

2.2 We have frequently drawn the Petitions Committee's attention to the fact that NRW addresses impacts on designated sites and European Protected Species but impacts on vulnerable habitats, wildlife populations local nature reserves, which should be protected by LPA planning procedures, are ignored. The Working Group should find an environmental expert to represent these interests.

2.3 The impacts on rural communities will not be represented. We have not yet seen an application in Powys refused because of impact on residents and, as we described before, public objections or support for planning applications are no longer published in Powys.

2.4 Other important issues such as the tourist industry, landscape change, air quality impact on health and pressure on rural highways issues (which do not concern NRW), will not be adequately represented.

2.5 We suggest that :

- **Wales Environmental Link and/or Welsh Wildlife Trusts**
- **at least one independent scientific expert, with relevant experience**

be invited onto the working group so that there is better public accountability.

Also that a means of hearing from "grass roots" people and of assessing the impact of existing intensive livestock units on rural communities is developed to aid the Working Group's deliberations.

3. Will the working group really engage key decision makers in LPAs?

3.1 The minister has cited the Brecon Beacon National Park Authority and the Pembrokeshire Coast NP Authority as the only bodies expressing an interest. It sounds as though Powys LPA has been advised to get involved. As this is a big issue for Powys, we trust that the attendee will be an experienced person from an appropriately senior level of decision-making.

3.2 While we warmly welcome Powys' participation, our communications with the Petitions Committee have repeated several times that so far the Chief Planner's letter does not seem to have made any difference at all to Powys planning decisions.

4. Will there be measures to oblige LPAs to improve?

4.1 Better informed planning will have financial implications for LPAs and require better specialised staffing and external advice.

LPA's make essential income out of planning application fees and the public have frequently questioned whether the consistent approval of intensive livestock units is influenced by economic interests in ensuring more applications keep coming through. It will be an impossible uphill struggle to change practice unless LPAs are helped with expertise and finance.

4.2 Experience of LPA response to the Chief Planner's letter of 12/6/18 persuades us that LPA's will not heed generalised planning advice unless effective measures are put in place to oblige them to do so and even then there will have to be some meaningful objective criteria against which to measure decisions. The Working Group should recognise that the public has no effective recourse for planning

failures which directly affect them because the legal costs of challenging planning decisions are exorbitant.

5. How will the work of the “working group” be integrated with that of the “intensive agriculture health working group” ?

5.1 These two groups were mentioned in the 8/1/19 Welsh Assembly exchange below. We do not know which group will consider the impacts of ammonia, dust particles and the combination of these with increased traffic emissions on the health of rural or urban residents.

5.2 We have written to the Welsh Government for clarification about these two groups on 6/3/19 and our query was forwarded to the WG Planning Department but so far we have received no reply. We do not know whether there are yet one or more working groups on agricultural pollution as mentioned by Lesley Griffiths in her statement of 14/11/18. The public can be forgiven for feeling excluded and that they do not know exactly what is going on.

Brecon and Radnorshire Branch: Campaign for the Protection of Ruarl Wales

8/1/2019 Welsh assembly

Russell George AM

Can I thank you for your answer, First Minister, and wish you a happy new year and every success in your new role? I did raise this with the previous Cabinet Secretary for planning, in regard to IPUs, and I had an answer that was entirely satisfactory, because the then Cabinet Secretary confirmed to me that the chief planning officer would write to all local planning authorities offering that guidance, and I was pleased with that. Can I now suggest that Welsh Government officials, Natural Resources Wales and officials from the Welsh Local Government Association and local planning authorities do convene a meeting together, to discuss how this new guidance is implemented in practice, because there are overlapping factors, such as air pollution, water pollution and manure management plans? When I've spoken to NRW, they have certainly said that they would welcome such a meeting as well. Is this something that you would consider?

First Minister

*I thank the Member for that supplementary question and for his introductory remarks. I've seen the letter that was sent as a result of his previous discussion with my colleague Lesley Griffiths. And he will have seen that, in that letter, it ends by inviting interested parties to come forward to take part in the more detailed work, to see whether specific guidance is necessary in relation to intensive poultry units. **I'm pleased to be able to tell him that two groups have been established as a result. The first, an intensive agriculture health working group, has already met, and that involves Public Health Wales and NRW, together with the Welsh Government. That will inform the work of a second group, which will look at the overall approach of planning authorities in dealing with the sorts of matters that Russell George has identified in terms of nitrate pollution, odorous emissions and the cumulative impact of those things. That second group will meet with the intention of publishing a new guidance note in these matters by the end of this calendar year.***

Interesting reading:

<https://climateandcapitalism.com/2019/03/19/broiler-chickens-the-defining-species-of-the-anthropocene/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/mar/22/ukmiss-almost-all-2020-nature-targets-official-report-admits>