

Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs

Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, General Scrutiny of the Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs portfolio

1. This paper sets out some of my priorities and recent actions related to my portfolio, ahead of my appearance before the Committee on 20 November.
2. A separate detailed paper has been provided on our Bovine TB Eradication Programme.

Brexit Preparedness

3. Brexit has been at the top of my portfolio's priorities for over three years now.
4. As I have said on a number of occasions, exiting the EU without a deal would have an immediate and long term catastrophic impact on rural communities. I am confident we have done and continue to do everything under our control to mitigate the impacts of any no deal.
5. My portfolio currently has a suite of Brexit Preparedness projects in operation (74), a significant number of which are being carried out on a UK-wide basis. I have been tracking progress on these regularly and reporting, with my colleagues, to the First Minister's Cabinet Sub Committee on EU Exit.
6. The majority of no deal preparation projects were on track for a 31st October exit. Officials will continue to work closely with Defra and other UK administrations to finalise the remaining projects, should they be needed in January. We continue to apply pressure to the UK Government for clarity on the extent of additional budget that will be made available to help manage a 'No Deal' outcome
7. The projects cover a range of sectors and needs including establishing new regulatory and operational systems as well as contingency planning. The systems developed would provide a functional, baseline system, which could be operational on day 1.
8. There are also many projects underway which impact whether we leave with or without a deal including establishing positions on future UK-wide governance arrangement and future policy such as in the areas of trade, environment, land management and marine and fisheries.
9. We have also developed contingency plans for sectors across my portfolio and tested them to ensure appropriate mitigating measures are in place for day one, including sheep, fisheries, water and food, in collaboration with administrations across the UK. These will continue to be kept under review as the leaving date changes to take into account the seasonal implications.
10. Meanwhile, the UK will be negotiating a new trade agreement with the EU and Third Countries which will have to be our main focus going forward.

There will also be major challenges to our capacity and capability. Over 7,000 functions will be returning to the Welsh Government from Brussels – the majority of those in relation to agriculture and the environment.

Climate Emergency

11. In May 2019 the National Assembly was the first Parliament in the world to declare a climate emergency. Since then we have announced further Government investment and published a series of major policy proposals, which will re-focus investment towards tackling the climate and ecological emergency.
12. We have accepted the advice of the UK Committee on Climate Change (UKCCC) to increase Wales's 2050 emissions reduction target to 95% and will ask the National Assembly to put this into law next year. We have also announced our ambition to work with UKCCC and other stakeholders to develop a more ambitious net zero target, going further than UK Government or any other UK administration.
13. Earlier this year the Welsh Government published Prosperity for all: A Low Carbon Wales, which contains 100 policies and proposals across Ministerial Portfolios to meet the first carbon budget (2016-2020) and consequently the 2020 interim target.

<https://gweddill.gov.wales/topics/environmentcountryside/climatechange/emissions/prosperity-for-all-a-low-carbon-wales/?lang=en>

14. In October we held a climate change conference in response to the Climate Emergency, where 300 people came together including business leaders, public sector and third sector. As part of the conference organisations started to pledge to take action with us to join the collective response to the climate emergency.
15. To coincide with the conference, we set out some of the things we are doing to tackle climate change:

<https://gov.wales/what-is-the-welsh-government-doing-to-tackle-climate-change>
16. We see this as a starting point towards Wales's contribution to the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP 26) which will be held in Glasgow in 2020 and the publication of our next All Wales Delivery Plan in 2021. We have committed to bring people back together again next year around the time of COP26, to share what Wales is doing with the world.
17. Tackling climate change is my overarching priority for which the majority of the activity referred to in this paper is set against.

Clean Air Plan

18. We are developing our Clean Air Plan for Wales which will support delivery of the Prosperity for All commitment to reducing emissions and delivering vital improvements in air quality, to support healthier communities and better environments.
19. The Plan will set out how we will work collaboratively across Government and sectors, bringing together existing commitments and new actions to achieve air quality improvements, and explain how air quality policy aligns with wider Welsh Government policy and the priorities and principles we will apply in delivering the Plan.
20. We will be consulting on the draft Plan in December 2019, with a view to publish the final Plan early 2020.

Sustainable Farming and Our Land (SFaOL)

21. For farming, we only have to look to the recent wetter winters and drier summers to see the impact of Climate Change. There are pressures too on our biodiversity and to ensure wider quality of our environment, our water and our air. These are things that affect everyone in Wales and again farming has a major role to play in securing a sustainable future.
22. To that end, the consultation on Sustainable Farming and Our Land closed on 30 October. My officials are currently collating and analysing the final number of responses, to which there were over 2,000.
23. In the coming months we will launch the co-design programme, to further engage with the farming sector. Any further steps afterwards will take into consideration the responses to the consultation and Brexit developments.
24. Once more is known from the UK Government about future trade deals and budget allocation, we will be able to complete the modelling required. We will do this before this consultation process can be concluded and new support arrangements put in place.
25. Many farmers will be dependent on future support and we are dependent on farmers delivering many of the outcomes we are trying to secure. I want farmers to be at the heart of this conversation.

Agriculture Pollution

26. Wide ranging evidence supports the need to take action to tackle agricultural pollution across Wales. The State of Natural resources Report 2016 (SoNARR) highlights the detrimental impact agricultural pollution is having throughout Wales. Natural Resources Wales' (NRW) current consultation on 'Challenges and Choices' further confirms agricultural pollution is one of the main reasons waterbodies fail to meet standards. The consultation lists 113

waterbodies where diffuse agricultural pollution is contributing to failure of Water framework Directive standards.

27. Poor agricultural practice is also leaving stretches of our rivers devoid of fish. Our rural communities, which depend on tourism, angling and food industries, must be protected. We must also protect the 80,000 people in Wales who rely on private water supplies.
28. Improved nutrient management is essential to reduce pollution levels. It is for these reasons I have proposed regulations across Wales to tackle agricultural pollution. As well as providing a baseline to tackle agricultural pollution, it is recognised regulations throughout the whole of Wales could help to meet other key objectives on air quality and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
29. Farms operating to the best practice standards advocated through voluntary approaches should easily be able to meet the regulatory floor. The proposed regulations are subject to the outcome of a Regulatory Impact Assessment and all available evidence. It is intended they will apply to all holdings from January 2020, with transitional periods for some elements to allow farmers time to adapt and ensure compliance.

Tree Planting

30. We acknowledge that trees are not currently being planted in sufficient numbers and recognises that increasing forestry cover is vitally important to enabling a vibrant forestry industry, countering carbon emissions and mitigating the effects of climate change.
31. Woodlands for Wales, the Welsh Government's strategy for woodlands and trees, was revised in 2018 and includes the aim of increasing woodland cover by at least 2,000 hectares per year from 2020. Tree cover in the wider environment, on farms and in the rural landscape, and in and around towns and cities should also increase.
32. The First Minister's manifesto commitment for a new National Forest will help support the aims of Woodlands for Wales, as well as priorities relating to biodiversity, commercial forestry, construction, community cohesion and regeneration, and health and well-being. The Welsh Government is considering how to maximise these economic and environmental benefits and will work in collaboration with the public sector and other partners to identify preferred sites for planting and potential demonstrator projects next year.
33. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are progressing an umbrella Woodland Creation Programme which comprises of existing programmes such as Plant! and support for the Glastir Woodland Creation Scheme, as well as new projects on the Welsh Government Woodland Estate (WGWE) such as compensatory planting for losses arising from wind farm schemes, and extending the WGWE through land acquisition. Work is underway to develop

overarching programme documentation and governance, as well as specific project plans for the new elements.

Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management - New National Strategy

34. On 24 June I launched a consultation on a new National Strategy for Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management in Wales. The consultation closed on 16 September and my officials are now working on analysing responses with a view to publishing the final Strategy in 2020. The Strategy builds on the Welsh Government commitment to invest over £350 million in flood and coastal erosion risk management over the life of this Government.
35. I announced the publication of the new flood and coastal erosion risk management (FCERM) Project Appraisal Guidance for Wales in June 2019. This provides guidance on good practice for FCERM appraisals and producing Business Cases for investment decisions in Wales.

Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)

36. From 7 January 2019, it has been a requirement that all new developments in Wales of more than one house or where the construction area is 100 square metres or more, require Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) for the management of surface water. The SuDS must be designed and built in accordance with the statutory SuDS standards published by Welsh Ministers.
37. SuDS schemes must be approved by the local authority acting in its SuDS Approving Body (SAB) role before construction work begins. The SAB will have a duty to adopt compliant SuDS so long as it is built and functions in accordance with the approved proposals, including any SAB conditions of approval.
38. The increased prevalence of SuDs is going to play a key role not only in the protection of our environment and the promotion of biodiversity, but also in our adaptation to climate change and our resilience to the risk of flood.

Marine and Fisheries

39. We have been making final preparations for the formal adoption of the first ever National Marine Plan for Wales. This is the culmination of a significant amount of work and will enable for the first time a coherent plan led approach to managing the sustainable development of our seas.
40. I also launched the first Marine Evidence Strategy, developed in collaboration with NRW. This Strategy will support the delivery of marine evidence to implement, monitor and evaluate the marine policies and plans of the Welsh Government and NRW. We look to restore and conserve marine

biodiversity, promote sustainable marine use, protect our coastlines and enhance our coastal communities.

41. In a policy area so entwined in European regulation, Brexit has dominated much of the work in this policy area. We have been putting in place the plans and resources to ensure we can continue to enforce our fisheries on day one, including mitigated against a no deal scenario. We have also been working with partners across Wales and the UK to ensure fisheries businesses understand what they need to do to be able to continue to trade. Putting in place new systems and processes where possible, while working on a contingency support scheme to help fishers cope with the changes.
42. I remain committed to developing a Future Fisheries Policy, in collaboration with stakeholders, as we exit the European Union. I consulted over the summer through the Brexit and Our Seas consultation, the first stage in a longer conversation about the future of the fishing industry and I will be making a statement in the autumn.

Food Action Plan

43. On 23 July, I launched the consultation regarding future proposals for the food and drink industry in Wales. The consultation closed on the 15 October 2019. 81 responses to the consultation were received.
44. We want to build on the achievements and successes of the previous Food and Drink Strategy and its Action Plan. In 2018 the industry achieved a turnover of £6.8bn against a target of £7bn by 2020.
45. The consultation paper set out three strategic aims: to grow our businesses; to benefit our people and society; and to create and communicate a global reputation of Wales as a Food Nation.
46. Analysis of the consultation is currently underway, and a summary response will be published as part of the normal process in due course.

Lesley Griffiths AM

Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs

November 2019