



# Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF)

## Minutes

**Title of meeting:** Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF)

**Location:** Welsh Government Offices, Aberystwyth

**Date of Meeting:** 6<sup>th</sup> February 2019

**Present:**

Zoe Henderson (NRW Board Member & WLMF Chairperson)

Hedd Pugh (NFU Cymru)

Rachel Lewis-Davies (NFU Cymru)

Tudur Parry (FUW)

Bernard Griffiths (FUW Land Use Policy Officer)

Dennis Matheson (Tenant Farmers Association)

Anthony Geddes (Confor)

Tim Kirk (Confor)

Sian Thomas (Young Farmers Association)

Bob Vaughan (Sustainable Land Farming & Forest Manager, NRW)

Martyn Evans (Head of South West Wales Operations, NRW)

Meinir Wigley (Marketing & Events Manager, NRW)

Helen Haider (NRW)

**Additional Attendees Present:**

Chris Blake, NRW (Board Member, items 5-9 only)

Russell De'Ath, NRW (item 2 only)

Nichola Taylor, NRW (Item 2 only)

David Arnott, Bangor University

**Secretariat:** Helen Haider (WLMF Agri-pollution Co-ordinator, NRW)

**Apologies:**

Ruth Jenkins (Head of Natural Resource Management Policy)

Ceri Davies (NRW Executive Director for Evidence, Policy and Permitting)

Brian Pawson (Senior Agriculture Advisor)

## **Item 1 Introductions and apologies**

1. Zoe Henderson opened the meeting by welcoming Sian Thomas (YFC) to the forum. Anthony Geddes was congratulated on his new role within Confor. Tudur Parry, Chair of the FUW Land Management Committee was welcomed to his first meeting of the forum.
2. David Arnott, a PhD student from Bangor University was also welcomed to the meeting. David is in his final year of a PhD funded through the FLEXIS project and is researching renewable energy systems and the impact of policy change and carbon budgets on Wales. The aim of David's attendance at the meeting was to get to know the relevant stakeholders and understand their visions for land use change.
3. Russell De'Ath (NRW) and Nichola Taylor (NRW) were welcomed to the forum as part of the discussion on Area Statements.

## **Item 2 Presentation and discussion on area statements**

4. NRW staff provided an introduction on Area Statements and how the work of the WLMF links to this, offering potential strategic oversight of the processes that will direct subsequent actions on the ground. An analogy was given of a sewage works treating the phosphates within effluent at a substantial cost, whereas reducing the amount of phosphate entering the system would ensure they do not get discharged into the sewerage system in the first place.
5. The role of the WLMF could take a view on the 'bigger picture' - working out the challenges we face before moving onto developing the solutions to assist with the development of area plans.
6. Russell De'Ath then gave a presentation on Area Statements, which are due to be published this time next year. Significant work is taking place to look at emerging themes and develop these at a local level, collating existing evidence on natural resources and on the ecosystems themselves. The Area Statement process will need significant input from stakeholders including the development of suitable networks, policies and opportunities, especially in light of Brexit.
7. The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 established a new way of looking at the sustainable management of natural resources (SMNR) and gave NRW a key role in the

development of Area Statements. This work links to Welsh Government's National Resources Policy (NRP). NRW are working collaboratively with Welsh Government (WG) to develop national priorities within the NRP. There will be 7 Area Statements (6 terrestrial and 1 marine) produced for Wales. The Wellbeing Plans produced by the Public Service Boards (PSB's) also set clear objectives for each place to achieve wellbeing goals within Wales.

8. Within the Area Statements, the emerging themes have been based on national challenges, but better understanding is needed of the issues on the ground. Tackling biodiversity decline and health inequalities are two examples of these emerging themes. These themes have been formulated following discussions at a local level and at PSB meetings. Farming organisations are not currently represented on the PSB's, although the membership of these varies across Wales. WLMF members suggested that the membership of the PSB's needs to be broadened to include representation from land managers, though it will be difficult for the representative organisations to resources attendance at all seven groups. Alternatively, the WLMF could provide a mechanism to gather views and feed them into the Board to ensure adequate cover of the land management aspects. Farmers currently manage some 80% of the land in Wales, with a further 13% managed by foresters.

***AP February 01: Explore whether it's possible to either expand membership of the PSBs to include representation from the farming and forestry sectors or identify the role the WLMF can fulfil in providing a mechanism to cover land management aspects (Martyn Evans, NRW)***

9. NRW have been asked to identify both the opportunities and the barriers to embedding the SMNR programme. The impact of post-Brexit land management reform is a potential barrier to persuading land managers to engage as they do not know what will happen once the Common Agricultural Policy no longer applies. There are a lot of unknowns in terms of the future land management programme, but the Welsh Government have used the Brexit and Our Land process to set out a clear vision of what their expectations are for the future. Confor expressed that they were unclear as to how they could contribute to the Area Statements process whilst there remained issues within the forestry planning process which were causing barriers to new woodland creation.
10. Russell De'Ath described the work that has taken place to map opportunities such as green spaces, woodland creation etc. An example of how these could help to improved wellbeing was provided along with the datasets that could be used to identify opportunities. Prior to the mapping being undertaken, work took place to develop logic chains which are used to determine what data could be mapped to give the best proximation as to whether conditions were likely or unlikely. For example, when looking at the potential for water filtration through soils and vegetation, logical assumptions can be made that the rougher the vegetation the greater the potential for water infiltration. Other factors can then be built in such as slope and rainfall.
11. Maps showing the location of existing woodlands have been supplemented with an indication of where there are potential opportunities to develop new woodland. These maps do not display what is actually happening on the ground, nor are they being used to make decisions, but are useful as a way of starting conversations with others. NRW

do not have access to the data that sits behind the maps and the cost implications of applying the opportunities identified are not being considered.

12. It was mentioned that Exeter University has developed a map-based tool (Natural Evaluation Valuation Online or NEVO) to inform decisions that affect the natural environment of England and Wales. The opportunity maps being developed as part of the area statement process have no statutory status and are intended to function as an advisory tool rather than be a constraint. The importance of developing local maps in a way that reduces the risk of any surprises was highlighted as was the need to overcome other issues in relation to the tree planting process.
13. The question was raised as to whether people living in rural, mountainous areas can receive more health benefits and whether the maps should focus more on urban areas. An example was given of Swansea and Neath/Port Talbot and the potential opportunities to tackle health inequalities, biodiversity decline, climate change and air quality and improve rural land management. Within the Burry Inlet there are opportunities to engage with local landowners as part of a public goods approach that will deliver benefits to both the European designated sites and commercial fishing via the sustainable management of natural resources. By contrast, NRW manage 60-70% of the land in Neath Port Talbot on behalf of the Welsh Government, so in this case it is for the statutory sector to grasp the opportunities.
14. Discussion took place regarding the barriers to investment. Woodland management has been profitable in the past, but re-stocking rates are not being maintained. Dennis Matheson highlighted that tenant farmers (currently responsible for 27% of the agricultural land in Wales) often cannot make any changes without seeking permission from the landlord. NRW have raised the issue of tenant farming with WG as part of seeking to ensure that the policy drivers are adopted everywhere to achieve the outcomes WG want to see. The need to create a level playing field approach to Area Statement work was stressed by WLMF members. In particular, food production needs to form part of the approach otherwise this creates a barrier to delivering the desired benefits.
15. It was suggested that an Engagement Plan for Areas should be developed to ensure continued participation, with land managers seen as partners who can secure the necessary buy-in. It was confirmed that national communications plans are being considered in addition to local communications plans.
16. No specific local targets for Area Statements have been established as yet, only higher-level targets such as 'reducing biodiversity decline'. The targets set will include those for water quality, air quality, woodlands and SSSI favourable condition. As a result, WLMF members discussed how the success of the Area Statement process can best be measured. It was suggested that landowners should be included in a separate Partnership Delivery Forum (PDF) with each member of the PDF's then engaging with their own organisational channels. The need for a formal consultation on the Area Statement process was also highlighted. Confor representatives felt that success would have been demonstrated if members were excited by the opportunities presented rather than being in fear of the process. The need to use clear, non-threatening language in all communications was also emphasised.

***AP February 02: Develop an Area Statement Engagement Plan and establish a working group within 1 month (Bob Vaughan & Russell De'Ath, NRW)***

### **Item 3 Minutes from the last meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2018 and any matters arising**

17. A study is currently being undertaken by Exeter University with input from Roisin Campbell-Palmer (Scottish beaver expert). NRW staff emphasised that they would welcome any information that WLMF members may have on reports of beaver sightings.

***AP February 03: Report any sightings of beavers to NRW (All)***

***AP February 04: Provide an update on the beaver project at the next WLMF meeting (Bob Vaughan, NRW)***

***AP February 05: Translate and upload the WLMF minutes from October onto the landing page on the NRW website (Helen Haider, NRW)***

***AP February 06: Clarify whether any progress has been made on AP16 from the last meeting viz: Check whether Farming Unions will be invited to join the working group on intensive farming which has been convened by Public Health Wales (Brian Pawson & Alison Soper).***

### **Item 4 Terms of Reference and Membership**

18. It was confirmed that the minutes and agendas from WLMF meetings are now being published on the NRW website.

### **Item 5 NRW Update**

19. **Organisation Design:** NRW are currently undertaking a process of matching staff to roles within the proposed new structures. Competitive matching is more of an issue within Operations owing to the need to restructure across the six new areas. By April, approximately 1400-1500 of NRW's 1800 staff will be in their new roles. It is anticipated that c.300 roles will remain unfilled at this stage so any staff still without a post will be able to apply for these. This is an unsettling time for staff who may be uncertain about their future role. However, the new NRW structures will provide a more effective, efficient and agile organisation focussed on the delivery of SMNR across Wales and more able to tackle the challenges likely to arise in the coming years. The forestry part of NRW is being split into six areas and this process has a longer implementation phase. Managers for this part of the business will be in place by mid-February. Splitting forestry harvesting into six local areas will help to streamline processes and will help to further integrate forestry activity into the rest of NRW. This approach will also ensure that the expertise of forestry staff can be focussed within the six local areas.

***AP February 07: Circulate contact details of NRW's key forestry managers to all WLMF members (Martyn Evans, NRW)***

20. **Water Update:** The Wales Water Management Forum (WWMF) met on 5th December 2018 for the first time and was chaired by Ruth Jenkins of NRW. The approach is modelled on the WLMF, although the WWMF replaces the former River Basin Liaison Panels. The new grouping is also picking up on wider issues.

The next meeting of the WWMF will take place on 9th April and the WWMF is looking for a representative who can link to the WLMF. The initial meeting focussed on establishing the Terms of Reference and the progress that has been made on Area Statements. There is some overlap between the objectives and the membership of the WLMF sub-group on agricultural pollution and the WWMF, especially since healthy catchments are critical to managing the water environment. WWMF members have expressed the importance of developing a better understanding of the various stakeholder fora now operating across Wales. As a result, NRW is taking forward an action to map out existing groups now in existence.

***AP February 08: Identify a representative who attends both the WLMF and the WWMF to act as a link between the two forums (Helen Haider, NRW)***

In September 2018, NRW published the Water Framework Directive (WFD) Cycle 2 Interim Classification for freshwater. This enables NRW to review progress at the mid-point in the second WFD cycle (2015-2021). By comparison to the 2015 data there is a 5% increase in water bodies meeting good or better status. However, many of the increases are attributed to changes in the nature of what was monitored, the frequency of monitoring, other methodological changes and the rolling forward of data. The Interim Classification and a set of frequently asked questions are available externally on the Water Watch Wales web site. It is expected that the interim marine classification will be published in the winter of 2018.

Planning for Cycle 3 of river basin planning is currently in progress. The overarching approach was set out in NRW's Working Together consultation, which was published in June 2018 and closed in December 2018. As part of the consultation process, NRW asked for feedback on the work programme, timetable and process for working together. NRW are now reviewing the 25 responses received. FUW were thanked for their input into the third cycle planning.

Welsh water companies submitted plans to Ofwat to make significant investments to address their environmental impacts in the period 2020-24. These included improvements to sewage treatment work improvements to meet water quality requirements; investigations and measures to reduce spills from combined sewer overflows; improvements to fish passage along rivers; investigations to better understand the risk from invasive non-native species, and changes to the flows downstream of reservoirs. Every five years, OFWAT sets price limits that enable water companies to finance the delivery of services to customers in line with relevant environmental standards and requirements. Ofwat's current price review (PR19) will conclude in 2019.

***AP February 09: Provide update regarding the outcome of OFWAT's PR 19 review to all WLMF members (Bob Vaughan, NRW)***

A number of other water related projects are also ongoing, including the LIFE project on the River Dee. NRW are now awaiting the results of the full application submitted to

the European LIFE fund in January 2019. The outcome of this should be known by the end of February. The species and habitats for the River Dee and Bala lake SAC are reported to be in unfavourable condition due to human induced changes in hydraulic conditions (including weirs) diffuse pollution, invasive non-native species and changes in biotic conditions. The project aims to rehabilitate and restore natural processes, features and physical habitats.

Water Resources Management Planning is taking place to ensure water abstraction is managed in a sustainable way. WG and NRW are progressing discussions with water companies on how water resources planning should evolve within Wales so as to account for the needs of other water users outside of the water industry. In 2018 there were severe consequences on water resources due to the prolonged dry weather causing reduced groundwater levels and spring flows which then impacted on private water supplies, fisheries and forestry. NRW is now carrying out a 'lessons learned' review in relation to the organisation's response to the period of dry weather that took place during July 2018 -September 2018. This exercise should help to improve the planning process and promote greater resilience in future. NRW have been regulating rivers flows from reservoirs in such a way as to increase flows, reduce water temperatures, ensure water companies are following their drought plans and carrying out abstraction license compliance work to enforce flow restrictions.

NRW are currently bringing most exempt abstractors into the licensing system. A number of current exemptions (ranging from private supplies of > 20m<sup>3</sup> to breweries) are in place, but these are due to come to an end in 2020. This will allow NRW to better manage water resources and help to balance the needs of all abstractors and the environment. There is a need to let people know regarding these changes and the requirement for an abstraction license if taking > 20m<sup>3</sup> per day of water.

***AP February 10: WLMF members to relay the message regarding the changes to the abstraction licensing process via their organisational networks (All)***

21. **NRW Shooting Review:** The use of firearms on WG land will cease at the end of March 2019 and existing leases will not be renewed. All lease holders have been notified of this change.
22. **NRW Customer Survey:** NRW are managing a programme of work incorporating sixteen separate projects to improve their communication with internal and external customers. The work includes improvements to the NRW website and ensuring that a consistent standard of customer service is provided. A customer listening framework has been set up to test services and WLMF members may be approached to take part in this.

***AP February 11: Circulate link to NRW customer strategy to WLMF members (Meinir Wigley)***

## **Item 6 Feedback from the WLMF Agri-Pollution Sub Group**

23. The WLMF sub-group last met on 14th January with a further meeting scheduled for 11th February. Work continues on the five key themes identified within the sub-group's Interim Report on Agricultural Pollution. The sub-group continues to liaise with Welsh Government (themselves part of the group) and have fed into the Brexit and our Land

consultation. A WLMF Sub-Group Action Plan is in preparation. This will describe how the recommendations within the Interim Report are being taken forward. It is anticipated that the Action Plan will be complete by the end of March 2019.

24. A bid for additional funding to take forward the group's work has now been submitted to the Welsh Government. In addition, the membership has been extended to include Wales Environment Link (WEL).
25. On November 14th, 2018 the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs announced that new agricultural regulations to control the management of nutrients would come into force in January 2020. The WLMF sub-group were not involved in making this decision but has signalled its interest in working with Welsh Government on developing aspects of the new regulations. The nature of the regulatory landscape is one of the five key themes within the sub-group's interim report on tackling agricultural pollution.
26. NRW has employed eight new agricultural officers to carry out visits to dairy farms in Wales. Their contracts have now been extended until July 2019 and bids have been made to WG to extend them further. The data collated from these visits will provide a useful insight into existing levels of compliance with the current regulatory framework. Members of the WLMF sub-group are working with NRW to ensure that there is no duplication of advisory roles across different organisations, thereby increasing the number of farms that can be visited. It is hoped is that the contracts of all of agricultural officers can be further extended so that all dairy farms in Wales can receive at least one visit by the time the project comes to an end.

## **Item 7 Brexit and Our Land (BAOL)**

27. It was thought unlikely that the Welsh Government would announce their response on the outcome of the BAOL consultation until July 2019. NRW have submitted a full response to the consultation and have established a policy position on land management schemes which has now been shared with Welsh Government. WLMF members expressed concern over the need to ensure that there is something in place to support farmers should there be a hard Brexit.
28. NRW are continuing to support NFU Cymru, FUW and Dŵr Cymru in developing a farmer-led voluntary approach to nutrient management. It is hoped that this can take the form of a new assurance scheme, the requirements of which will sit above the regulatory floor. A combination of this kind of voluntary approach and regulation should deliver a better outcome than would be the case if either of these were deployed in isolation.
29. NRW has a duty under the Environment Act to prepare and publish Area Statements and the timeline for publication is by early 2020. The transition to the new land management arrangement post-Brexit will not begin before 2020. WLMF members raised concerns about the definition of land managers and whether non-farmers would now be able to access funding under the new scheme. Also, those farmers who are in the bottom quartile in terms of economic performance may struggle to continue to operate in future owing to the likely reduction in the levels of funding available under the new scheme.



## Item 8 NRW Woodland Creation Programme

30. NRW's Woodland Creation Programme is currently in development and will cover:

- Taking forward NRW's action plan to improve the rate of new woodland creation.
- New Woodland Planting Project (to compensate for the woodland lost via the energy delivery programme). A land acquisition and woodland planting project is awaiting approval from WG.
- Other land acquisition to increase the size of the Welsh Government Woodland Estate (funded from timber income).
- Centenary celebration project (commemorating 100 years of British forestry and the end of World War 1. NRW are undertaking a scoping exercise for the project, and subject to internal approval, expect to launch the details of the initiative this summer.
- Plant! – more effort is being made to plant additional trees under this scheme (to plant a tree for everyone born or adopted in Wales since 1st January 2008).
- Verification role for Glastir Woodland Creation and PAWS restoration schemes (on behalf of WG/RDP Glastir technical assistance).

31. There are two new expression of interest (Eoi) windows to apply for woodland creation grants. NRW are supporting Welsh Government in taking forward new planting schemes. Ancient woodlands are also being restored. It was recommended that education and forestry should be invested in.

32. Concerns were raised regarding the lack of training of forestry staff in NRW. NRW has a training programme for forestry staff and a number of new staff now working in the forestry teams were encouraged (and have been successful) in gaining chartered forester status.

33. The group discussed the barriers preventing further woodland creation. There are particular concerns regarding the remediation costs and the lack of support and investment. Delays are being experienced due to applications for new woodland creation not being progressed quickly enough. It was suggested that a plan is drafted with costings which can be presented to WG as a possible solution. Confor asked for NRW help in exploring what the barriers are to new woodland creation so that they are better placed to approach the Minister regarding this issue.

34. Welsh Government have agreed to invest additional funding in Section 16 agreements, to encourage those landowners with special sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas) to undertake enhanced management.

35. Concerns were raised by NFU Cymru regarding WG proposals to plant more trees in Wales and whether agricultural land would need to be sold to allow for afforestation. The intention is not to force farmers to plant trees but rather to help them see the

benefit and value of planting trees. The importance of ensuring the planting takes place in the right place was highlighted.

***AP February 12: Explore further what the concerns are with regards to NRW forestry staff training (Martyn Evans, NRW/Anthony Geddes, Confor)***

***AP February 13: Circulate revised NRW policy on education and forestry to members (Bob Vaughan, NRW)***

***AP February 14: Provide case file on unsuccessful Glastir woodland creation schemes to Bob Vaughan, NRW (Anthony Geddes, Confor)***

***AP February 15: NRW to liaise with Confor regarding the barriers to woodland creation (Bob Vaughan, NRW/Anthony Geddes, Confor)***

***AP February 16: Create, with a group of WLMF members, a cohesive plan for woodland creation to take to WG (Chris Blake, NRW/Bob Vaughan, NRW)***

## **Item 9 AOB**

36. Geraint Davies is now on the NRW board and is an active farmer.

***AP February 17: Speak to NRW chair and ask if Geraint Davies can attend a future WLMF meeting (Zoe Henderson, NRW)***

37. NRW are to appoint Prys Davies, Director of Corporate Strategy & Development, who until recently held a senior role in Welsh Government.

38. Members would like to know NRW's position in relation to farm plastics.

***AP February 18: Circulate NRW's position on farm plastics to all WLMF members (Bob Vaughan, NRW)***

39. NFU Cymru have been asked to comment on RSPB's State of Birds consultation. Clarity is needed as to whether NRW are a partner in this and the need to ensure a 'no surprises' approach.

***AP February 19: Clarify whether NRW are a key partner in the RSPB State of Birds consultation (Bob Vaughan, NRW)***

***AP February 20: Identify suitable dates for the next 3 WLMF meetings (Helen Haider, NRW)***

## **Close meeting**