



# Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF)

## Minutes

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

**Location:** Microsoft Teams Meeting

**Date of Meeting:** 5<sup>th</sup> December 2022

**Present:**

Zoe Henderson, NRW (Chair)

Dominic Driver, NRW

Marc Williams, NRW

Sarah Hetherington, NRW

Dennis Matheson, TFA

Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru

Hedd Pugh, NFU Cymru

Anthony Geddes, Confor

John Browne, NRW

Bernard Griffiths, FUW

Tim Kirk, Confor

Fraser McAuley, CLA

Ieuan Davies, NRW

Teleri Fielden, FUW

Huwel Manley, NRW

**Additional Attendees Present:**

Haf Leyshon, NRW (Item 2)

Hannah Hughes, NRW (Item 2)

Dr Richard Kipling, Sustainable Food Trust (Item 3)

Marianne Fisher, Monmouthshire County Council (Item 4)

Abigail Sanders (Item 4)

Nick Thomas, NRW (Item 5)

Jenifer Day, NRW (Item 5)

Joel Rees-Jones, NRW (Item 5)

**Secretariat(s):**

Bronwen Martin, NRW

**Apologies:**

Ruth Jenkins, NRW

Martyn Evans, NRW

David Letellier, NRW

Lee Pritchard, Wales YFC

Bernard Griffiths, FUW

## **Item 1 Introductions, Apologies and Declaration of Interest**

1. Zoe Henderson (WLMF Chair) welcomed all to the meeting and noted apologies. Zoe also welcomed the guests.
2. No declarations of interest were raised in respect of Agenda items to be considered.
3. The group were reminded that the meeting was being recorded for the purpose of capturing the minutes and the digital file will be deleted once the meeting minutes have been compiled.

## Item 2 Minutes from the last meeting, actions & matters arising

4. Once the meeting minutes have been reviewed and formally agreed they will be translated and published on the NRW website. The Group reviewed the minutes from the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2022. The minutes were approved as a true record.
5. Zoe pointed out that the NRW external webpages for some of the fora groups are not regularly updated. Particular reference was made to the Wales Fisheries Forum webpage where the agenda/papers have not been updated since 2021.

***AP December 01: Bronwen Martin, NRW to provide feedback to colleagues who facilitate the other fora groups regarding regularly updating the external NRW Website with meeting minutes.***

6. The group reviewed the outstanding actions and updates were provided. The following were of note:
  - AP Sept 06: Members to contact Marc Williams, NRW with any feedback or suggestions regarding the proposed Wildfire Conference/Extreme Weather planning workshop.
  - Hannah Hughes and Haf Leyshon, NRW work on the Healthy Hillside Project and provided a brief verbal update. It is proposed that a Land Management and Wildfire Conference will be held around March 2023. Feedback is welcome on when would be the appropriate time and who might be interested in attending. It will look at alternative land management techniques that feed into the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS), collaborative projects and opportunities in terms of wildfire risk reduction across Wales. Haf requested members to provide feedback about:
    - 1) When would it be appropriate
    - 2) How best to do it
    - 3) Where best to do it

Dominic Driver, NRW said it is a really good idea and get to learn from the Healthy Hillside Project. March could be in the middle of the wildfire season itself, so perhaps consider the timing. It might be better later in the year and just to log that we are really quite worried about the upcoming wildfire season because of the probability of industrial disruption in the fire service at that time, along with climate change, a mild winter, and the dry summer. Haf mentioned the Healthy Hillside Project finishes in June, so it gives us very little time to run a conference and do the final write up of the whole 2-year project. Haf acknowledged that March is a very busy time for farmers with lambing.

Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru reiterated that March would be difficult for people with livestock to attend. If you have got some learning to share you could put that into a short article and NFU Cymru could disseminate it through the Farming Wales publication because it is an area that farmers would be interested in reading about. Haf thanked Rachel for this suggestion and shared the Healthy Hillside contact details.

**AP December 02: Bronwen Martin, NRW to reshare the Healthy Hillside's email address for members to contact the team directly with their feedback and suggestions for the proposed conference.**

Huwel Manley, NRW discussed some of the risks and issues around wildfire. Huwel referenced the farming industry and asked realistically what more can be done to try and cut fire breaks amongst open land and enclosed land. Huwel suggested any conference and actions out of that need to be activated and done prior to the bird nesting season. Haf said the conference will showcase a programme of land management techniques throughout the year rather than cramming it all into a certain timeframe. Haf mentioned that there will be a Fire Officer seconded to NRW within the next couple of months who will be looking at this in greater detail and looking to engage with as many people as possible in order to gain feedback and to support conversations with Welsh Government about the SFS.

### **Item 3 Presentation: Global Farm Metric (GFM)**

7. Dr Richard Kipling (Sustainable Food Trust) joined the meeting to provide a presentation about the Global Farm Metric (GFM) and the revised framework.
8. Richard described the GFM which was put together to provide a common language for sustainability, a holistic view of sustainability (e.g., environment, economic and social) and to help farmers look at how it affects them with outcomes-based indicators. The GFM is independent of a particular farming philosophy, it does not look at practices, but looks at outcomes in order to get that holistic overview.
9. This has developed over time and has been trialled. A research tool was developed based on the public goods tool which was developed at Organic Research Centre and at Reading University. That research tool was a proof-of-concept assessment.
10. This year has involved a development process for the Global Farm Metric, which started with the systematic collection and analysis of the trial feedback from farmers. Part of this was carried out in Wales with Monmouthshire County Council the 'Space for Local Production Project'. That trialled the GFM on 11 farms in Wales and there has also been trials in England as well. GFM Development process:
  - Systematic collection and analysis of trial feedback from farmers (SFLP project)
  - Collect views of farm advisors on sustainability assessments and barriers to engaging with farmers on sustainability (SFLP project)
  - Use of findings to clarify issues, farmer and advisor needs, and GFM role and aims
  - Develop coherence and value of GFM assessment
  - Literature reviews to identify improved indicators across GFM categories and sub categories (33+)
11. Richard gave an overview of some of the feedback and the results they got from the work with the farm advisors. This was based on a survey and workshop which was facilitated through Farming Connect. They were able to identify common themes from the engagement sessions and then looked at the challenges which an assessment might help with.

12. Richard summarised the different parts of an assessment and discussed some of the solutions for the challenges. They also identified some issues with an assessment which related to practical limitations, interests, knowledge limitations and cognitive limitations. There is a danger that these types of barriers can make sustainability seem more complicated and make people less likely to be wanting to be involved.

13. Richard said they started to look at the Global Farm Metric and sustainability assessment in general as part of a process where the framework was a learning resource. The data provides information on the state of the system and provides knowledge to support decision making. Impact assessments help understand the causes for the current state of the system in order to identify changes. Richard said it was important to undertake a 'state of the system assessment' which helped inform the development of the GFM visual wheel.

14. Richard summarised some of the conclusions:

- Assessments should be seen as part of a process of change which begins with engagement through learning
- Using a holistic sustainability framework like the Global Farm Metric as a learning resource:
  - likely to be an important first step in processes of change for many farmers in Wales
  - support policy development to avoid unintended consequences from ignoring trade-offs between sustainability goals
- State of the system assessments could drive learning, build trust, and support change if kept simple and separate from rewards and punishments
- Impact assessments are required to link practices to outcomes, and should include off farm impacts on the system
- Implementation must identify and tackle barriers to change, and ensure all take responsibility for their effects on our food production system
- Using common state of the system indicators, and reducing duplication in data collection are important for assessment efficacy and uptake

15. Richard said the next steps are to:

- Development and use of the Global Farm Metric framework as a free, unbranded learning resource for use in farm advice, education and professional training
- Iterative indicator development for state of the system assessments in collaboration with others

***AP December 03: Bronwen Martin, NRW to share a copy of Dr Richard Kipling's Global Farm Metric Presentation along with his contact details.***

16. Zoe asked is there support and backing from other organisations and why is it called 'Global' Farm Metric, is this a Welsh initiative or a UK initiative. Richard said the 'Global Farm Metric' idea was something that the Sustainable Food Trust came up with around 6 or 7 years ago. Richard said he has come into it in the last year and his brief was to look at it from a UK perspective and a Wales. The aim of the Sustainable Food Trust is to broaden it and see how these ideas can also apply in different countries. There are partners in Malawi and in the US that are looking at how these ideas can apply in those countries.

17. Teleri Fielden, FUW recalled that the project has captured a lot of the barriers and challenges from farmer's experience. The view of it being a more holistic assessment is welcomed as this is something that FUW have been struggling to see in some of Welsh Government's proposals. Regarding Welsh Government's SFS approach, they are proposing to do a sustainability review for every single farmer going into the new SFS. This could be a really valuable learning tool but how could you see something like this working within the sustainability review. Richard said firstly, the farmer feedback was very positive about the farm advisors and needing that support, but they also did not want that to come out of the budget. Secondly, we did find that the assessment took too long because we were trying to collect practice data as well as some data on the state of the system. Richard said it is clear that the focus has to be on how we can get something meaningful that is also achievable for the farmers and does not actually add to their stress.
18. Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru said the big challenge is how you go about mainstreaming. The industry has built on the work that has been done with the Climate Smart Agriculture and put in a proposal to Welsh Government called the Low Carbon Farming Framework. The industry is wanting to take forward the mainstreaming some of these challenges which all starts with the assessment.
19. Zoe suggested that Richard could stay in contact with the WLMF and send any updates on progress so that members can stay informed of this work.

## **Item 4 Living Land Management Wales**

20. Marianne Fisher, Monmouthshire County Council joined the meeting to provide a presentation about the Living Land Management Wales Project.
21. The Living Land Management Wales project was conceived as a partner project to the Space for Local Production Project that Richard had been talking about.
22. Living Land Management Wales is a Monmouthshire based project using satellite mapping, socioeconomic and environmental data and computer modelling to address the fundamental question: 'how should we use our land now and into the future?'. It is a partnership project between Monmouthshire County Council, Aberystwyth University, Natural Resources Wales and Dwr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW). It is funded by Welsh Government through the final stage of the Rural Development Programme and has a very short timeline running from June 2022 through to the end of June 2023.
23. The project is in two strands: one strand working with landholders and land managers at the level of the individual farm or holding and another strand working with partners and practitioners at county scale and the policy decision maker's level.
24. Central to the project is Living Wales, which is being developed by Aberystwyth University and uses Earth observation and remote sensing combined with multiple data sets and sophisticated algorithms to analyse and monitor landscapes and landscape change using daily satellite imagery. This is a platform that is still developing rapidly and is not a finished product yet. Currently, it can map and monitor land covers, habitats and ecosystems. It can give an indication of their extent and quality, and this facilitates mapping connectivity as well. The future capacity (work in progress) is to integrate socioeconomic and ecosystem service data and predictive modelling. There is

an ambition to integrate natural capital accounting and then give some predictive outputs of what the effects of different scenarios might be. The resource will ultimately support, enhance and facilitate collaborative planning, decision making and monitoring of land management issues at national, regional and local levels.

25. Though the project is Monmouthshire based, the data in Living Wales covers the whole of Wales, so there is capacity to scale. Living Wales supports a participatory planning process to get you through from where the project is currently, to where we might like to be.

26. Marianne said the purpose of the project is about:

- Early engagement with stakeholders
- Test and trial the Living Wales platform, data validation to test and pilot the participatory planning approach
- Demonstrate feasibility and the potential to scale up
- Provide training to enable practitioners
- Gather insights for the development team at Aberystwyth

27. Marianne mentioned the open data cube training. The open data cube is a capacity that allows satellite analysis to get meaningful results out of the data without needing to have vast amounts of power on your computer or taking up vast amounts of storage space. It will provide training in:

- What Living Wales can currently do, teach attendees how to benefit from those free and open resources that are already available, and integrate them into your daily practice.
- The training is free and open and there is currently no intention to charge for anything that Living Wales offers.
- It will foster a deeper understanding of the Living Wales platform which would enable the attendees at the workshop to give informed judgments and guidance to the project team on what they think of this capacity.

***AP December 04: Bronwen Martin, NRW to share the booking link to the Living Land Management Wales event on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022.***

28. Marianne said they will run through the participatory process to explore what Living Wales can reveal about Monmouth's past and present land cover habitats and ecosystems. Then have a discussion to identify future requirements, what would it be useful for this workshop or this platform to be able to provide, what information do people want from it? They will then go into land values and ecosystem services.

29. The other strand of the project is the one where we are looking for support with. We need to link with four land owners to explore what Living Wales can offer private land managers when making decisions about their individual holdings. There are a few selection criteria around how long the person has been on the land, what sort of data they hold. There is a tender brief out for supporting this engagement work which is currently live on the Sell2Wales website. We recognise that there is an awful lot going on in this agricultural technology space. It would be really valuable to have some insights and support around what other tools are currently available and where we can avoid duplication, add value and identify where the opportunities are with this project.

Marianne said they are aware that there are lots of experts out there and asked members if they know anybody who may be interested, either in putting their land forward to apply this system on it, or in bidding for the tender to support that work, then please get in touch. Marianne shared her contact details and offered to provide more information as appropriate.

***AP December 05: Bronwen Martin, NRW to share Marianne Fisher's Living Land Management presentation and reshare her contact details.***

30. Marianne provided a brief guide to the sort of information that might be useful for a landholder to get out of this system. Depending on what sort of information the landowner has or is willing to share with the project team, there is the possibility to integrate this with, for instance, yield data to provide yield maps or with land values as well.
31. Zoe asked about the budget and the original objective. Marianne said the Living Land Management Wales benefit from Welsh Government's existing investment in the Living Wales platform. The project is funded through the Rural Development Programme (RPW) and is linked to tests, trials, and practical application. The original objective of the project is the desire to encourage and implement uptake of technology in agriculture in Monmouthshire and to assist with moving towards sustainable farming practices and food security.
32. Teleri Fielden, FUW recalled that Marianne mentioned RPW online, but obviously for all farmers signing up for the basic payment scheme, that process is something they do every year anyway. RPW Online is 0.01 hectares of detail in terms of the land parcels, the crop codes, year on year changes in the past 30 years etc. That is all there, and farmers are accustomed to doing that and going through that process, and obviously it is worth it for them because there is a payment at the end of it. Teleri suggested that making more use of it or give more information back to the farmers. FUW often get asked how have things changed on a farm in the past. Perhaps the IT has the capability to provide that information back to farmers. Marianne said satellite mapping of remote observation systems is never going to replace 'boots on the ground' but the hope is that it can allow land managers to make more efficient use of their time. Reporting will be easy, and it will support monitoring and produce data in a palatable format for a landowner to digest. Teleri said it would be really good if that can be integrated with RPW Online because then it is a process that the farmer has already been through. Abigail Sanders, Aberystwyth University said that is one of the main outputs that we are looking at from this project. While working with farmers, we want to work on what is useful for them, how can they best access maps and about looking back at their farm over time to see trends.
33. Anthony Geddes, Confor said he had looked at some of the priorities of the project, which are the incorporation of technology, SMNR and food security. However, potentially there is a gap around timber security. Anthony said whilst it is looking at modelling data and providing mapping information, how is that actually producing the outcome of incorporating the technology or providing the appropriate advice for those decisions on strategic land management going forward. What has the Monmouthshire project done to actually ensure that it is holistic and includes forestry. Marianne said in terms of ensuring the holistic approach, this project is about testing what happens when you get a group of people in a room to consider land management changes or



approaches. We are doing our best to reach as many people as we can through events such as this. We are reaching out to a broad a range of partners, stakeholders, private companies, the public and the 3rd sector. The thing to be aware of is that the software system is never going to tell you what to do. The data will always need to be interpreted by humans and the quality and nature of those results will depend on the person doing the interpreting. Abi said one of the capacities that we are looking to produce is creating future maps. This is related to forestry because the satellite data that we are getting is radar data and the people at Living Wales have been working on biomass generation algorithms. Particularly in forestry, we are already testing the efficiency and reliability.

34. Huwel said it is good to see work on technology moving on and mentioned some previous projects including the Pontbren Project which used satellite technology around 15 years ago. They teamed up with the Polyscape Geographical Mapping Tool, which enabled people to target best actions for flood elevation and timber and conservation management. Huwel asked whether they looked at this type of work. Marianne said she was aware of the Pontbren Project but not of the satellite use within in. These projects could feed in to what we are doing and some of the participatory discussions.
35. Rachel said farmers can get nervous with mapping and modelling approaches because when they are used to inform policy decisions, inevitably they are the wrong side of a line on a map. Rachel recalled that habitat classification was referred to in the presentation and asked how that is defined. Rachel asked how this fits in with the Environment and Rural Affairs Monitoring & Modelling Programme (ERAMMP), which is also funded by Welsh Government and includes some sort of modelling capacity to inform future decision making. Abi said regarding the habitat classification, they have recently done a phase one classification which is a layered system looking at habitats. Due to limited time, Abi suggested people look at the Living Wales website for an in-depth explanation, but it is a global system which can be translated and transferred into other systems. One of the things that we are looking at within this project is transferring that habitat classification, into agricultural classifications.
36. Richard said Living Wales seems like a great resource and we were hoping for it to be part of the project we did this year, but the funding was not lined up. It links together because if you want to look at the state of the system then using these approaches is a really good way to reduce effort for farmers, if we can improve that issue of trust. Having a common language and a holistic view of sustainability is key because you can do exciting things with flood management or forestry. Marianne agreed that there is potential for these two to link up and you can imagine a scenario where someone's gone through the GFM process, developed their management plans accordingly and then they are monitoring the progress of those plans using the remote software and the remote sensing. Sustainability is obviously the angle, but it can also be supporting increased outputs, yields, economic sustainability, and that is a key part of holistic sustainability. There is potential for Living Wales to be used for monitoring and enforcement, but it can be useful for other things as well. There is the possibility that we can do confidentiality agreements if that is what we need to do to make everybody feel comfortable and safe to participate.

## Item 5 Land Management Agreements

37. Nick Thomas, Joel Rees-Jones and Jennifer Day, NRW joined the meeting to discuss working with land owners to bring Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) into better condition.
38. Nick said his work is focussed on overseeing NRW's five European funded Life Projects in Wales, which are large scale projects to bring protected sites into better condition. Nick also oversees NRW's Nature Networks funding which is given to NRW by the Welsh Government to bring protected sites into better conditions. Nick showed a map of SSSIs, Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) in Wales and the surrounding Waters. A large area is protected, about 12% of Wales is covered by SSSIs (there are over 1000 SSSIs). We do not know what the condition is of 50% of those is because those sites have not been visited in detail for some years. But we do know that of the sites we have visited, about 30% of the features are in an unfavourable condition. Features are things like marshy grassland, Marsh Fritillary butterflies, Pearl muscles etc. Whilst we know that 20% of the sites, we have monitored are in favourable conditions, so it is not a very good picture really. So, of the 50% we do not know, probably over half at least are in unfavourable condition. As a result, we have been given a lot of money by the Welsh Government in recent years to try to increase our efforts to bring these sites into better condition via the Nature Networks fund.
39. We have focused our work on some of the top priority habitats (e.g., sand dunes, sea cliffs and salt marsh, wood pasture, grasslands, etc.) along with a host of marine projects. In addition to that, we have got a number of large-scale projects, most of which are funded by the EU Life Nature Projects which are scattered across Wales and focused on peatlands, sand dunes, woodlands, and rivers.
40. Jennifer is a Conservation Officer based in Carmarthenshire and wanted to talk to the group about Marshy Grasslands. There are 99 SSSIs, 6 SACs and 3 SPAs in Carmarthenshire. These include fresh water, terrestrial, fens, raised bogs, geology sites etc. Jennifer showed a map highlighting the location of these sites. Jennifer gave a brief overview of some of the organizations NRW work with who actually manage or have ownership of some of these protected sites. NRW also work with private land owners as well as farmers.
41. Jennifer summarised the methodology of restoring protected sites which includes site assessments, management agreements, site restoration and management and monitoring.
42. There has been a lot of work regarding the Marsh Fritillary Butterfly. There is a hotspot in the western extent of the UK. It is extinct from a lot of its previous range in the east England area. They often assess the benefits of Devil's Bit Scabious, we do a lot of larval web counts and monitoring adult flight.
43. Jennifer discussed two case studies where both sites involved working with marshy grassland. Cae Cwrt Brynbeirdd SSSI is arguably one of the best sites for Marsh Fritillary Butterfly in Carmarthenshire. There is a lot of improved agriculture, the land owner is actually a farmer who has never had much interest in this site because it has been too wet. It was previously grazed a little bit with cows and calves, but the farmer

said the udders get too muddy and then the calves do not suckle which is also a hygiene issue.

44. The Caeau Rhyd-y-Gwiall SSSI is not owned by a farmer, but there is a lot of arable around the site and has marshy grassland protection.
45. The initial site assessment includes seeing what the issues are on site, such as scrub encroachment and cattle grazing issues (Cae Cwrt Brynbeirdd) and scrub encroachment and development, thick bramble from under grazing and European Protected Species (EPS) Dormice present (Caeau Rhyd-y-Gwiall). We rely heavily on the Butterfly Conservation to undertake larval web counts and monitoring the Marsh Fritillary Butterfly. The restoration plan aimed to implement this capital work. Specialist contractors were employed to carry out scrub clearance for the site. Approximately 15% of the site has been restored to marshy grassland on the sites. As the dormice are EPSs, Jennifer had to apply for an agreement with the Species Team and were then able to do a double staggered Hazel hedgerow as mitigation for removing some of that bramble and scrub clearance. We also did not touch a wide habitat corridor and put in 10 dormouse boxes to meet an agreement and working with the Species Team. This work benefitted the Marsh Fritillary Butterfly, grassland as well as the EPS Hazel dormouse.
46. Jennifer gave a brief overview of some of the other capital works undertaken on site and showed some before and after photos. Following the restoration, the next component is management and monitoring. We need to maintain and make sure it is going towards favourable conservation status. The team did some livestock unit calculations so that the sites could be sensitively grazed, and not overstocked. The sites were stocked and grazed over the seven-month period between April to October. It is too wet in the winter, causes poaching and it is not fair for the livestock. Even though cattle are preferred for grazing these marshy grasslands, we had to work with the landowner at Cae Cwrt Brynbeirdd to have 3 Welsh ponies on site because it was the safer option due to potential TB issues and mixing cattle herds. At Caeau Rhyd-y-Gwiall Highland cattle were used to sensitively grazing the site.
47. Jennifer reviewed some of the issues with managing designated sites including delays, not able to pay more than Glatir rates, fencing on common land, availability of native cattle breeds and use of no fence collars on ponies.
48. Joel is the Team Leader for the LIFE Dee River Project. The LIFE Dee River Project is a 5-year project until the end of 2024 with a budget of about £6.8 million. NRW are the coordinating beneficiaries (managing and running the project) and we have associated beneficiaries and co-financiers to the project including the Environment Agency, Snowdonia National Park authority and Dwr Cymru.
49. Joel discussed the main project objectives including:
  - Removing the constraints to fish migration
  - Restoring and improving natural riverine processes and habitats
  - Improvement of the agricultural and forestry Land Management practices with the main aim of reducing the input of nutrients and sediments entering the SAC River.
  - Initiating conservation management for freshwater Pearl mussels

- Establish and build long-term positive relationships with key stakeholders during and beyond the life of the project.

50. Joel concluded by giving an overview of some of the successes achieved so far within the project and showed some before and after photos.

51. Dennis mentioned that the PONT organisation is trialling no-fence collars on cattle in the Gower and in the Cambrian Mountains on behalf of Welsh Government. PONT wanted to use them on ponies, but Welsh Government will not let them.

Dennis recalled a recent report that said the National Trust are recommending grazing with cattle and ponies on archaeological sites to consolidate the ground and help to preserve the structure. In a presentation on the Natural Recovery Fund, it was said that the money provided by the National Lottery and the Welsh Government was being used to sign up about 89 management agreements. One main block of agreements was for getting mixed grazing back onto the hills (cattle and sheep) to try and restore the vegetation to what it was 50 or 60 years ago. Dennis asked if this project is tied up with that or is this completely separate. Nick said he suspects it is the same project. Regarding the Welsh Government Nature Networks Fund, some of that money is going into large scale projects from partners but they have also given NRW some money and as a result of that, we signed up a large number of management agreements last year (in part using that money). This probably does relate to that press release Dennis referred to. We are trying to get more cattle out on to a number of different locations because they are beneficial the way they graze in many instances, comparison to sheep. But it is quite a struggle because the number of suckler cow herds is declining and a lot of these situations, the kind of rough pastures, rough uplands, we do need native breeds because they fare better. TB is also a big issue in many parts of Wales, so some farmers are very reluctant to put cattle out in some of these places as a consequence of that.

52. Rachel said the management of these protected sites and the system for their effective management has broken down over the last eight to 10 years. Rachel described her first-hand experience of a SSSI on a tenant farm. There are lessons from the previous blueprint that NRW needs to pick up again, because the approach that you can do this through a broad and shallow agricultural environment scheme like Glastir or the SFS is flawed. They do need specific management agreements that are developed in conjunction with the farmer which provide fair reward over a long-term period for the effective management. Rachel said the system that Jennifer outlined seems like you are trying to bring that back, but it is a shame that we lost those relationships in the meantime because they are key to the optimum management of protected sites. Nick agreed, the relationship between the NRW member of staff and the farmer/land manager/owner is absolutely crucial. That is going to be really important in conjunction with the SFS as well. Rachel suggested that every site needs an NRW officer assigned to build that relationship. This requires specific management practices, but they come at a cost to the farm business. If Welsh Government is serious about its 30 by 30 target and is funding NRW towards the delivery of that, then the resources need to be put in place and expecting the SFS to pick up the bill for this is completely unrealistic. Zoe echoed comments regarding the need to reconnect with the local teams and mentioned that a map was shared prior to the meeting with contact details for local NRW Environment Teams across Wales. Zoe encouraged everybody to share this

information with farmers and said NRW must monitor this and follow up on any communications.

53. Nick said at present, we are hearing that a lot of land owners are saying they do not want to sign up to a management agreement because they are waiting to see what the SFS is going to offer. They are concerned that entering into a management agreement now might affect their payments from the SFS. Nick explained that in the management agreements there is a clause that says that NRW will release you from the management agreement if there is an equal or better environment scheme to go into. Nick said this is a message that needs to be shared because it is a bit of a barrier with our work.
54. Rachel said there is a huge communication job to do here with the SFS. It looks like an agricultural environment scheme, but it is not because it is also replacing in pillar one payments for the BPS so it has to provide that level of income to farm businesses. The Glastir scheme was based on a point system and farmers are really wary that they might not be able to get into the SFS if it is based on a point system and they have done all the environmental work, which could include a protected site previously. There is a message to send back very clearly to Welsh government and to NRW around fair reward. Since Brexit and Our Land was mooted back in 2017/2018, the farming community were told they will have fair reward for the environmental goods that they deliver. Actually, during this transitional period towards the SFS, they are not allowed to go beyond cost incurred income forgone. So, if Welsh Government is serious about bringing these sites into proper management and providing fair reward, that needs to be rectified now and if the rewards/incentives were there, that would go a long way to encourage farmers to have the confidence to go into a management agreement and not wait to see about the SFS.
55. Sarah Hetherington mentioned this is one of the risks NRW have raised with Welsh Government SFS team as well as through other channels. We are waiting for communication and clarity around the fact that if farmers go into schemes and start moving towards targets it will not count against them going forward into the SFS and that it will actually be positive.
56. Anthony asked if they are released into other schemes that are 'better', is that better for the farmer and their sustainable business or better for the land in terms of the environmental outcomes are set out within that management agreement and is there some level of baselining before people do enter into those schemes? Confor have looked at long term forest management agreements and have had some interesting discussions relating to long term land management agreements surrounding forestry, especially those with Section 7 Habitats. There is not a huge amount of trust in the implementation and the assessment of some of those Land Management agreements. Have you got enough partners on board to be able to create the case studies or communications that start rebuilding that trust that these are actually valuable and beneficial outcomes for both land owner and habitat? Nick said equal or better, is assessed on an environmental basis and then the option would be up to the farmer. So, if we felt the new scheme offers equal or better than the Land Management agreement, we would be happy to release the farmer from that agreement. Regarding case studies, that is what we are building up through the likes of Jennifer and Joel where we are hoping to get more stories out about this and build a portfolio of positive stories, positive for the environment but also positive for land owners as well. Nick said

we would assess each site before entering into a management agreement looking at the condition of the site. At the end we will be able to make some judgment as to whether it has been a success or not and indeed has the farmer delivered what was planned or perhaps the prescription wrong in the first place so there are a number of factors we need to look at before and after.

## Item 6 NRW Corporate Plan

57. Dom recalled that the NRW Corporate Planning Team discussed the development process with the WLMF earlier in the year.
58. Dom shared some high-level information regarding the new NRW Corporate Plan including the shape of the plan, the challenge, the vision and mission and objectives.
59. Dom mentioned that there is an opportunity to feedback on the emerging priorities, which we will draw on as we revise the document in the coming weeks.

## Item 7 NRW Updates

60. Prior to the meeting, a WLMF Update Paper was shared with members with some relevant information for members to review.
61. Zoe mentioned the WLMF Update Paper was really comprehensive and there is lots going on within NRW.
62. Bronwen said many of the subjects covered in the December WLMF Update Paper were suggested by Ruth Jenkins, NRW. Sharing written information helps use the meeting time more efficiently.
63. Members are encouraged to review the document beforehand and come to the meeting with questions.

## Item 8 Update from FUW / NFU Cymru / Wales YFC / Confor / CLA / TFA / Welsh Government

64. **FUW:** Teleri Fielden, FUW said the SFS, and Agriculture (Wales) Bill are currently the biggest pieces of work. FUW have been undertaking engagement and gathering feedback from their members regarding the SFS. FUW are also working on the fee-payers consultation along with BVD and TB issues.

Sarah asked if the FUW SFS is work with their members only or with the codesign process. Teleri said they are doing both. FUW went around all the counties and branch meetings to explain SFS proposals and gather feedback from their members. FUW are sitting on various codesign groups for tenants, commons and young entrants.

65. **NFU Cymru:** Rachel Lewis-Davies said the focus has been on and continues to be on the agriculture (Wales) Bill and the development of the Sustainable Farming Scheme. At the Winter fair last week, NFU Cymru launched a paper on policy priorities for common land as the SFS is developed. NRW will have a key interest in that because common land covers 10% of Wales, it is a carbon store and there are key habitats and

species supported by common land and of course the management of that land by graziers is important to its success.

NFU Cymru are working with their members to formulate our response to the fee-payers consultation, but it is fair to say that they are outraged at some of the proposals NRW has put forward, and a 10-fold increases can be considered realistic at this particular time. Rachel said NRW needs to bear in mind the key people that it is regulating through the charge payers are also key people that it wants to work with on the delivery of environmental outcomes.

The other key piece of work is the recent Welsh Government consultation on the NVZ licensing system.

66. **Wales YFC:** A representative from Wales YFC was not in attendance.

67. **Confor:** Anthony Geddes said Confor have been working on the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) consultation which is ongoing. Anthony recommended that Teleri and Rachel should look at that consultation because it has impacts under the SFS going forward, especially if the 10% of on farm trees is going to be managed to UKFS. Confor have some quite strong feelings about how that works and how that does not work. Anthony said he would be happy to follow that up with other WLMF members.

The fee-payers charging consultation obviously did affect us in a relatively number of small areas, however it has the potential to really hinder woodland management. Managed woodland remains one of the land uses in Wales that is either in good or improving condition and we would hate to see that go backwards through a reduction in management as a result of new fees. That coupled with the Agricultural Bill and the changes that are proposed in Felling Licenses, to condition licenses and also to be able to suspend, amend or revoke those. There are some actually very positive changes in that bill which we are supporting. However, this is quite brutal feedback, but the largest area of concern is the quality of the paper that has been provided by NRW for how it is going to use these new powers. There are huge gaps in understanding the implementation, conditioning and how and when that will be deemed appropriate or inappropriate by NRW. There are too many voids in the information that we have been provided at this point in time to be able to comment on this with confidence that NRW will operate in a pragmatic manner as a partner to the sector. Such is our concern over the scale of impact that this relates to.

Confor are working with the industrial strategy group to produce a wood fibre and timber industrial strategy for the timber and forestry sector within Wales. That is quite a long-term piece of work which should wrap up around October 2023. There will be various stakeholder groups and opportunities to engage with that through the next 12 months.

The update to the timber marketing plan and the production forecast for 2023 should be launched shortly and there should be consultation with the section on that in February at the Timber Liaison Day.

68. **CLA:** Fraser McAuley, CLA had to leave the meeting before this item.

69. **TFA:** Dennis Matheson mentioned that the TFA's main focus has been trying to get access for tenants to the SFS and if they can access it then they can actually take part in it. Dennis said there has not been much progress on that. However, the Tenancy Working Group has now been set up and they recently had the first meeting. Hopefully this group will come up with some answers. Dennis mentioned that it was a pity that it was set up after the Agricultural Bill was published and not before. The Agricultural Bill itself has virtually no reference to tenancies whatsoever after having originally said that it would deal with it. This is very disappointing.

## **Item 9 Any Other Business**

70. Meeting dates for 2023 will be circulated shortly. Members are encouraged to suggest topics for the agenda and update paper just let Bronwen know.

***AP December 06: Bronwen Martin, NRW to circulate the meeting dates for 2023.***

71. No other business was raised.

## **Close meeting**