

Sustainable Farming and Our Land: Focus and Priorities of Wales' Sustainable Land Management Scheme

March 2020

Introduction

Wales is one of the most nature depleted nations in the world. The 2019 State of Nature report highlighted that nature remains under increasing pressure across Wales. One in six species is at risk of disappearing from Wales, and none of our ecosystems have all the attributes required to be resilient. Farming and forestry make up approximately 90% of Wales and have a significant impact on the state of nature, climate change, our natural and cultural resources, and the opportunities for outdoor recreation.

Climate change is already becoming one of the greatest challenges to the continuity of farming and forestry systems, to the functioning and resilience of remaining habitats and to our health and wellbeing. The Committee on Climate Change¹ has highlighted the urgency of the challenge: we have less than 12 years to start taking meaningful measures to keep warming to 1.5C, such as making significant changes in land management, including a 6% increase in forest cover.

Urgent and transformative change is needed to achieve the sustainable management of natural resources, to secure resilient ecosystems and the benefits they provide society. Without people, this cannot be achieved: farm incomes must be viable, so that present and future generations can sustainably manage the land.

How the scheme should work

We support the creation of a single Sustainable Farming Scheme based on the principle of public money for public goods. We agree with the Welsh Government's definition of public goods and the need to target measures to ensure nature's recovery. Future support should be designed around the principle of sustainability in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (WFGA) and the Environment Wales Act 2016 (EWA). A future scheme should:

- sit within Wales' current legislative framework and secure the objectives of the Natural Resources Policy and Nature Recovery Action Plan, via land management;
- support the delivery of domestic and international environmental commitments, including commitments to tackle both the biodiversity and climate crises;
- reward farming, land management practices and activities that go above and beyond regulatory standards and requirements;
- be supported by effective inspection and enforcement regimes;

¹ CCC 2020. Land use: Policies for a Net Zero UK.

- include interventions that can be shown strategically to enhance the landscape in ways that are sensitive to local character; and
- be funded to address the scale of our environmental land management needs (not via the Barnett Formula), which for Wales is estimated to be at least [£273 million per annum](#).

To be successful, a future scheme must avoid repeating past mistakes, and should incorporate the following criteria associated with success:

- Evidence based interventions at the appropriate scale to deliver objectives, which for many environmental objectives requires integrated action at a landscape scale;
- Effective integration, covering agri-environment measures, agroecological practices such as Integrated Pest Management and agroforestry, and woodland and forest habitat management;
- Sufficient budget and coordination to deliver at the required scale;
- Defined and measurable outcomes with effective monitoring for all scheme objectives;
- Effective targeting – to ensure the right management interventions in the right places;
- Expert, trusted, independent advice, from accredited advisers; and
- Engaged and motivated farmers who then go on to deliver better environmental outcomes.

Delivery Model

If Welsh Government is to deliver on its ambitions the new scheme must include

- a broadly accessible element (which can be action-based) to address widespread environmental issues and be inclusive of the “green infrastructure” of habitats on all farms;
- a targeted element to support more complex interventions, such as the restoration and recovery of threatened habitats and species and to maximise the land’s carbon storage potential, by driving sympathetic grassland management and encourage semi-natural grassland, scrubland and woodland, in harmony with nature and wildlife. These will likely be landscape-scale projects, for which there is already proof of concept in Wales; and
- actions and results-based approaches in combination, to direct funding at interventions for which there is evidence of beneficial outcomes.

A programme of pilots and trials will be required to iron out some of the issues associated with results-based payments, such as identifying measurable indicators for a broad range of environmental objectives.

Transition and funding

We are facing significant, urgent environmental challenges, so the transition to the new scheme must begin immediately. We recognise that a transition period will be needed to address systemic non-compliance, during which appropriate funding and financing should be made available to meet baseline good practice. Regulators should establish a ‘polluter responsibility’ to take this up. Advice and training can play a crucial role in improving knowledge and understanding or and compliance with regulatory standards and legal obligations.

Wales Environment Link (WEL) is a network of environmental, countryside and heritage Non-Governmental Organisations in Wales, most of whom have an all-Wales remit. WEL is a respected intermediary body connecting the government and the environmental NGO sector in Wales. Our vision is a healthy, sustainably managed environment and countryside with safeguarded heritage in which the people of Wales and future generations can prosper.

This paper represents the consensus view of a group of WEL members working in this specialist area. Members may also produce information individually in order to raise more detailed issues that are important to their particular organisation.

You may find a more detailed, fully referenced version of this briefing at www.waleslink.org/publications/position-statements



Baltic House, Mount Stuart Square, Cardiff, CF10 5FH
Tŷ Baltic, Sgwâr Mount Stuart, Caerdydd, CF10 5FH

Tel: 02920 497 509

www.waleslink.org

Registered Charity Number / Rhif Elusen Gofrestredig: 1022675
Chair / Cadeirydd: Roger Thomas
Joint Directors / Cyf-Gyfarwyddwyr: Susan Evans & Karen Whitfield