



Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF)

Minutes

Title of meeting: Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF)

Location: Microsoft Teams Meeting

Date of Meeting: 5th September 2022

Present:

Zoe Henderson, NRW (Chair)

Martyn Evans, NRW

David Letellier, 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

Lee Pritchard, Wales YFC

Additional Attendees Present:

Sian Williams, NRW

Tracey Dunford, NRW (Item 3)

Brendan Hardiman, NRW (Item 4)

Sue Ginley, NRW (Item 5)

Nick Thomas (Item 6)

Secretariat(s):

Bronwen Martin, NRW

Apologies:

Ruth Jenkins, NRW

Fraser McAuley, CLA

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 and acknowledged that two new representatives were joining the group; Lee Pritchard, Rural Affairs Officer for Wales YFC and David Letellier, Sustainable Land Manager for NRW.
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 5th June 2022. The minutes were approved as a true record.
5. The group reviewed the outstanding actions and updates were provided. The following were of note:
 - AP March 06: Marc Williams, NRW to ask colleagues who is leading on the NRW website update for Woodland Creation and liaise with Anthony Geddes, Confor.
 - Anthony confirmed that no one has contacted him, Marc said he would follow this up again.
 - AP June 01: Bronwen Martin, NRW to follow up the request for a meeting to discuss the reintroduction of beavers.
 - Bronwen confirmed that the request has been passed on to NRW colleagues in the Species Team for them to arrange a meeting directly with NFU Cymru to discuss this topic.

- AP June 08: Marc Williams, NRW to look into coordinating a conversation between NFU Cymru, NRW and DCWW to discuss the SAC Rivers report and modelling work.
- Marc mentioned that a meeting has taken place but discussions regarding the modelling work will continue going forward.
- Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru said following the publication of the reports just before the Phosphate Summit at the Royal Welsh Show, NFU Cymru have looked very closely at it and have submitted a number of written questions back to Dwr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW) to clarify and improve their understanding of the modelling. A copy of the questions have been shared with NRW, but they have not received a response yet. Rachel said she would share the response when she receives it. It is also understood that NRW has commissioned a QA process of the modelling work and NFU Cymru would be really interested to have an update on that or just see the specification for the work, if available.
- Bronwen said this topic was not covered on the WLMF NRW Updates for this meeting, but there is a crossover in interest with the WLMF Sub Group. Bronwen suggested perhaps this will be talked more in depth at future Sub Group meetings.
- Anthony Geddes, Confor asked if any of the Sub Group engagement will be reported back here. There was an evidence pack put out which was available following the Phosphate Summit at the Royal Welsh Show. There were some quite interesting commentaries along different land uses and phosphate impacts.
- Here is the First Minister's written statement regarding the River Pollution Summit at the Royal Welsh Show - [Welsh Government - Written Statement: River Pollution Summit](#)
- Here is the First Minister's written statement regarding the River Pollution Summit at the Royal Welsh Show - [Welsh Government - SAC Rivers Summit \(Information & Evidence Pack\)](#)
- Sian Williams, NRW said NRW supported Welsh Government in providing evidence towards the evidence pack and that was circulated to all of the attendees at the summit. It focuses on the evidence around phosphates in SAC rivers which was also the purpose of the summit. The summit was driven largely by the restrictions at the moment on the planning process and whether there were ways that we could work together across the whole spectrum, including NRW, DCWW, landowners, planners, house builders and everybody else who may have an involvement. It was to think about how we could all work together and what we could all do to improve the situation. The First Minister was very clear about being positive. There was a written statement from the First Minister, including eight different commitments around phosphates and what would happen next. One of the main things is Welsh Government is leading on a review of governance around water and water quality. We are also looking at what NRW does in terms of water management, whether we are doing the right things internally to achieve what we want to achieve long term and that will also tie in with the Welsh Government review. There is no date yet for a follow up meeting to the summit, but there was a commitment at the summit that there would be follow up and accountability on our commitments and what we would be doing next.

- Dennis Matheson, TFA said he knew nothing about this summit and therefore TFA Cymru did not take part. Dennis asked if this is this a separate initiative because it is a topic that has been discussed with the WLMF Sub Group for several years. Dennis suggested that the Sub Group should be dealing with it, not another body. Sian said it was driven by the restriction on planning rather than driven by environmental needs but obviously the two things are very closely related. Dennis said it is very important that all these things are all joined up.

Item 3 Update: Dry Weather

6. Tracey Dunford, NRW joined the meeting to provide an update on the latest dry weather position. Tracey is a Lead Specialist Water Resource Planner for NRW and also the NRW Drought Coordinator.
7. Tracey gave an overview of the rainfall pattern from the last 6-months. There was a lot of rain in February but since then every month has been well below the long-term average (using the 1981 to 2010 as the long-term average). In July, there was some rain across the month, but August was very dry (less than 50% of the long-term average). South Wales has perhaps been drier than North West Wales. Generally, the rainfall over the last couple of months has been short lived which has caused rivers to recede without any significant recovery after rainfall.
8. In comparison to previous drought years, the last six months have been the third driest on record since 1865, and the only years for those six months that have been drier was in 1976 and 1984. Provisionally, in 2022 we have experienced the 8th warmest summer on record.
9. Tracey described some rainfall maps comparing the equivalent 6-months (March to August) in 1976 versus 2022. Tracey also summarised some monthly mean river flow data. Generally, the rivers across Wales have seen monthly mean flows well below the average. As a result, the daily mean flow has been exceptionally low for the time of year.
10. Groundwater is also notably low and, in some cases, exceptionally low for this time of year. There needs to be a lot of rain to help replenish groundwater which is worth noting for those that may be reliant on a groundwater source.
11. Tracey summarised the review process regarding the stages of status (e.g., prolonged dry weather, drought etc) along with the triggers and possible impacts. Different stages have been announced in different areas across Wales in the recent weeks. Tracey mentioned the importance of communicating with catchments and organisations.
12. NRW does not have a 'severe drought' stage, but some of the water companies do. NRW recognise that 'drought' covers a whole spectrum of risks going up in increasing severity. Currently, the main concern is water supply for the Pembrokeshire area, therefore NRW are talking to the water company (Dwr Cymru Welsh Water, DCWW) about the measures that they are taking. NRW and DCWW are also keeping a close eye on other sources across Wales, along with Hafren Dyfrdwy.
13. There has also been impacts on the environment such as fish kills, fish in distress (particularly with the heatwaves and hot weather) and rivers drying up across Wales.

There have also been some blue-green algae outbreaks and some pollution and water quality concerns.

14. NRW are communicating with wider sectors through the Wales Drought Liaison Group (Chaired by Welsh Government) to get a picture of the emerging concerns. Currently, there are concerns for private water supplies (particularly in Pembrokeshire) and emerging concerns for the agricultural industry with crop growth, using up winter feed and water supply concerns.
15. Tracey gave an overview of some of the actions taken by NRW including monitoring, regulation schemes operating to support abstractions, engagement with abstractors, increased proactive communications, increased engagement with Welsh Government, regulators, water companies and other sectors, ensuring water companies follow drought plans and promoting water efficiency.
16. Rachel said NFU Cymru have welcomed the opportunity to be a part of the Wales Drought Liaison Group and have fed into some of the issues regarding farming in terms of private water supplies, water and livestock, reduced grass growth rates and how that all impacts on the forthcoming winter because farmers are having to feed their fodder now. Rachel said the group has worked well and a key ask moving forward is for the group to be put on a more proactive footing rather than reactive. There is scope to have a meeting next spring so that we can collectively understand where we are in terms of winter rainfall and whether levels have been replenished. Tracey said Welsh Government are starting to focus on the medium to long-term and what the bigger issues will be because it is not necessarily about what is happening now, it is also the consequence of how this will be felt in 2023 because groundwater and other sources will take longer to replenish.
17. Marc encouraged members to get in touch with any queries or questions and he can feed them in to the Drought Team in NRW.
18. Tracey recommended members look at the Welsh Government advice and support for farmers during prolonged dry weather which can be found using this link - [Welsh Government - Impact of dry weather on farmers](#).
19. Martyn Evans, NRW commended everyone for their good work during this really complex and challenging set of circumstances. This is a really good example showing a strong degree of teamwork operating both internally and externally. Martyn also mentioned a few of the operating arrangements between NRW and the water companies.
20. Tracey said NRW forestry colleagues are also on the Wales Drought Liaison Group so there is consideration about how the dry weather will affect young trees that have been planted this year. On the Welsh Government Woodland Estate, trees are left to cope because they cannot be watered. This could be a potential impact when the surveys are carried out, which is a consideration for the tree planting programme (e.g., effect on nurseries). During July and the beginning of August, there were quite a few wildfires so there has been a big drive to ban barbecues being lit on NRW managed land and NRW are working together with the Police Force and Fire Service to promote this.

21. Bernard Griffiths, FUW said the data shows that increasing areas of Wales are going into drought status within increasing number of years. This affects not only rivers and groundwater but also agricultural businesses. But yet we hear of water being moved from Llyn Clywedog (Wales) down to the southeast. Bernard asked does NRW do anything in terms of modelling or predicting the impact of that on the environment and businesses in the future. Tracey agreed that there was prolonged dry weather in 2018 and 2020 but it did not quite reach drought status because it rained within a couple of months. Tracey said the current water that is going to England is linked to historical existing bulk supply agreements with the water companies, so they have been in existence for years. The Clywedog supply does not supply customers in Wales currently, it goes to England as part of the bulk supply agreement. Tracey said to reassure you going forward, you may have heard about regional planning, which is a requirement in England and looks at the strategic resource options through Ofwat's RAPID process and one of those is the Severn-Thames transfer ([Ofwat - Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development \(RAPID\)](#)). NRW and Welsh Government are actively involved in those groups and that part of Wales is included in the Water Resources West Regional Plan. Welsh Government's guiding principles for those plans have made it very clear that for any new or modification of existing bulk supplies it has to be done in full discussion with NRW (because it is devolved responsibility to Welsh Government). A full assessment would have to be carried out of the impacts to people, the environment and to carbon costing, among other things.

Item 4 Presentation: Water Efficiency

22. Brendan Hardiman, NRW joined the meeting to provide a presentation on water efficiency. Brendan is an Advisor for Water Efficiency within NRW.
23. Brendan began by providing an overview of the national ambition to combat climate change.
24. The holistic approach to the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR) is already supported by current Welsh legislation and policy drivers including:
- Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015
 - WG Water Strategy for Wales 2015
 - Environment Act 2016
 - Natural Resources Policy 2016
 - The State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) for Wales 2016 & 2020
 - Area Statements/Opportunity Catchments
25. Wales has a maritime climate and extreme changes in topography within relatively small area. The average rainfall in Wales can be more than 3000 millimetres on high ground, but less than 1000 millimetres elsewhere. Wales has very few aquifers and natural surface water storage facilities. The larger reservoirs provide vital supplies to conurbations across the border. The availability of water to new abstraction at lower flows is a problem, particularly in the eastern half of Wales. Future pressures recognised the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment of 2017, shows that Wales will be subjected to longer, drier spells and more intense rainfall events. The population is also predicted to rise from 3.1 million by a further 400,000 by 2050. Both these changes

would put greater stress on the environmental, social and economic resilience in Wales, especially during prolonged periods of low or no rainfall. The Welsh Water Efficiency Group is endeavouring to change the perception that water efficiency is not a priority in Wales.

26. There is an opportunity through the Wales Water Efficiency Group for a multi organisational approach to help change the perception of the need for water efficiency in Wales. They look to deliver the Wales Water Frequency targets to create a more prosperous Wales by improving environmental and social resilience and by making water efficiency part of the Wales circular economy. Working together, they will look to reduce the per capita consumption (PCC) by as much as 6.3% by 2025 and raise the awareness for the need for water efficiency across all sectors of society. They will also work to close the evidence gaps.
27. NRW will work as part of the Wales Water Efficiency Subgroup to deliver research and innovative approaches towards resources management and encourage customers to use these measures through campaigns.
28. NRW look to lead by example and have undertaken water efficiency accreditation with Water Wise by gaining their water efficiency status for all visitor centres and the three main offices within Wales. It is also NRW's priority to deliver the evidence base for the State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR) 2020, with water efficiency as a cross cutting theme for all of the broad habitats as a climate change resilience measure.
29. Brendan provided a summary of the benefits of water efficiency, including:
 - Increased drought resilience
 - Reduced consumption
 - Lower irrigation losses
 - Reduced dirty water disposal costs
30. Advice for farmers –
 - Waterwise - [Waterwise on the farm](#)
 - Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) - [AHDB: Full Water Audit Pack](#)
31. Zoe asked how well the Water Efficiency work dovetails into some of the activities of the WLMF organisations. Brendan said NRW colleagues have been doing a lot of work with some of the WLMF members regarding non domestic use along with NRW farming teams and operational teams working closely with the farming industry. Brendan said the team are always looking for further opportunities to raise awareness of water efficiency messaging and the opportunities. Brendan encouraged WLMF members to get in touch to further discuss Water Efficiency.
32. Dennis said generally, livestock do much better in a dry hot year than they do in a wet, cold year. A lot of people are carrying water to their cattle and sheep as they have run out. Some people rely on shallow wells and shallow streams but these have gone dry. Dennis said he grows red clover for silage, and he has got some fields that were cut 2-3 weeks ago, and it is 6 inches high and dark green. A field next door is permanent

pasture, and it has got nothing whatsoever since it was cut two months ago. Dennis suggested perhaps farmers have to choose crops differently as the climate gets drier.

Regarding concerns about water transfer from Wales to England, Dennis said it also worries him greatly. Dennis mentioned that the UK as a whole probably has enough water, but it is in the wrong place. Dennis discussed the difficulties with logistics and infrastructure when transferring water across the UK.

33. Anthony said that Spring and Summer has been quite stressful for new planting, some schemes have done well but others have suffered. This is a question of planting at the right time. Hopefully there will be a change in planning now that the Woodland Planning Grant and the other planting grants are no longer in small windows (they are rolling schemes throughout the year so that you can apply for them at any point). Anthony encouraged anyone who is planting to look at the types of trees they are planting (e.g., bare root stock, the physical type, the species of tree, but also the type of tree, how it is grown etc.).

Anthony asked what engagement is going on with the water efficiency and monitoring programmes crossing over into the Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) and to sustainable forestry schemes. Anthony explained that currently, if we create new woodland, any open ground, ponds or anything that is of additional benefit is not registered or acknowledged. Therefore, there is no incentive to create additional features. Tracey said she is talking to forestry colleagues within NRW and asked the group to highlight anything they want her to flag at the Wales Drought Liaison Group. Any additional information members can provide would be helpful for Tracey to take to the meeting so that issues can be escalated. Anthony asked for the engagement details for the forum because the private sector is responsible for restocking and advancing far more woodland than NRW.

AP September 01: Bronwen Martin, NRW to share the contact details for Tracey Dunford, NRW.

AP September 02: Anthony Geddes, Confor to contact Tracey Dunford, NRW and provide more information and evidence regarding forestry related issues which can be flagged with the Wales Drought Liaison Group.

34. John Browne, NRW echoed Anthony's comments. The type of tree and when you plant are absolutely critical. However, one of the big factors is the tight windows for grants and that sometimes pushes the tree planting into the wrong time of year. John discussed some of the other planting issues encountered on the Welsh Government Woodland Estate.

Item 5 NRW Corporate Plan

35. Sue Ginley, NRW joined the meeting to provide an update on NRW's Corporate Plan.
36. NRW are currently working on the corporate plan and are due to publish it in March 2023. In February 2022, NRW ran an online survey about what should be included in the corporate plan. The feedback from the survey has been used to help shape the Corporate Plan which is currently being developed.

37. The main nub of NRW's corporate plan is based around the requirements of both the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Sue said NRW need to develop well-being objectives which are the objectives for the organisation itself and to develop the steps that need to be taken to meet them. Currently, those two things are central to the corporate plan (e.g., what we want to achieve and what we are going to do about achieving it).
38. The survey earlier in the year asked about NRW's current well-being objectives; were they the right ones, do we need to change things and how long should our well-being objectives run for. The current well-being objectives are very long term, so should we be looking at focusing on something shorter in time and what should we frame them around.
39. Sue said from the first survey, NRW have feedback around:
- How long our well-being addresses should be.
 - What we should shape them around.
 - The well-being objectives that we had previously were relevant, but there were of their time and now we need to be thinking more about shaping things around the climate emergency and the nature emergency.
40. NRW Leadership Team are currently working with their teams on the steps that we would need to take within NRW to actually meet those wellbeing objectives by 2027, whilst also thinking longer term to 2030 and beyond. They are due to get back to the Corporate Planning Team with their initial ideas for those steps in the middle of September. Then NRW's Executive Team will look through all those and then a first draft of the Corporate Plan will be written.
41. Sue said there are quite tight timings for this work. NRW Executive Team are looking at the Corporate Plan at the beginning of October and then we want to ask everybody what they think of that draft. NRW would like to ask the WLMF members to get involved with this second round of engagement and consultation which would likely be between mid-October and mid-November. The Executive Team will then look at the Corporate Plan again to finalise it, which will allow time to run it past Welsh Government ready to launch by the end of March 2023.
42. Sue said they are working on how this engagement would take place between mid-October and mid-November. It will likely be a simple copy of what NRW have done so far in a rough draft with the objectives and the steps along with about five or six questions to answer. These questions will be around the look and feel of them, do they make sense, are they ambitious enough and are our approaches integrated between our different functions and our different ways of working. Once we have got those views from you it will feed into the finalisation process at the end of November.
43. Sue said she will be sharing information with members of the WLMF and will be asking them to consider the document and then share feedback. NRW are looking for targeted feedback and comments so that a good balance of views is received from across partner organisations.

AP September 03: Bronwen Martin, NRW to share the contact details for Sue Ginley, NRW.

44. Rachel said NFU Cymru appreciates the opportunity to feed into the NRW Corporate Plan and mentioned that they have also been invited to submit comments on the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme which is due the 31st of October. Rachel asked that these other significant commitments and deadlines be considered when inviting organisations to submit comments and feedback.
45. Dennis suggested that food security is very important and appears to be missing from the Corporate Plan. Dennis suggested food should be at the top of the agenda.
46. Anthony said September and October are already jam packed with commitments. Confor are often asked to engage with consultations which have very short windows and two weeks is not sufficient time for active participation. The Corporate Plan for NRW is a major factor which will influence many important things, and sufficient time is required to provide responses.

Item 6 NRW Updates

47. Prior to the meeting, a WLMF Update Paper was shared with members with some brief information.
48. Martyn Evans, NRW introduced Nick Thomas, NRW to provide a brief presentation on Nature Networks, which is part of NRW's work to bring Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) into better condition. This work also has a key focus on Land Management Agreements.
49. Nick Thomas, NRW is overseeing NRW's five EU funded Life Projects. We are continuing to get money from the EU to bring sites into better condition. Nick also oversees the Nature Networks Programme, which is Welsh Government funded.
50. Nick showed a map indicating the locations of SSSIs, Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) across Wales. Overall, there are 1070 SSSIs covering over 12% of Wales. Around 30% of features are in 'unfavourable' condition and about 20% of features are in 'favourable' condition. However, around 50% we do not know and are unaware of what their condition is. A 'feature' can be the habitat itself but also some of the species associated with the SSSI, for example marsh fritillary butterflies are also a feature.
51. Welsh Government launched a Nature Networks Grant Programme in August, which is administered by the National Heritage Lottery Fund. It is a grant programme of approximately £10 million worth of funding up to 2026 for partners to bid for funding in order to primarily bring SSSIs into better condition. As part of that, additional funding went to NRW last year (£2.75m in 2021/2022) and this year (£4.5m for 2022/2023), to try to bring these SSSIs into better condition.
52. A lot of this is being delivered through Management Agreements. These are five-year voluntary agreements with landowners to bring SSSIs into better condition and they usually consist of an annual payment (e.g., for grazing a grassland with cattle rather than with sheep, as well as capital works payments for things like fencing, cutting of bracken or heather etc.).

53. The consequence of that increase in funding has been quite significant because the number of management agreements has been declining over the last decade, which is a consequence of cuts in staff, but also the fact that a lot of agreements came to an end and the land went into Glastir. As a result of that increased funding, there was a significant increase in the amount of management agreements last year (115 last year).
54. Nick described some of the work undertaken to improve SSSI status including the restoration of pools, clearing out of ditches for aquatic plants and scrub clearance to restore grasslands. Teams work very closely with land owners, land managers, occupiers and tenants. Much of it is making sure sites get the right level of grazing, particularly with cattle. This is key to improving many of these important areas of grasslands. Nick mentioned the work undertaken to try to restore Curlew habitats.
55. Along with a continued focus on Management Agreements, Nick mentioned some of the other NRW Nature Networks projects for 2022/2023. Martyn encouraged members to get in contact with him or Nick for further information. Martyn thanked the landholders, land owners and farmers who have entered into Land Management Agreements because projects are dependent on those partnerships.
56. Martyn welcomed questions about the written updates from the group.
57. Rachel mentioned that NFU Cymru have been involved in the round table meetings with the Climate Change Minister. There is the '30 by 30' target, and the focus needs to be on the existing sites and getting them into good condition first. This will not be achieved through regulation; you will achieve it in the very approach that Nick has outlined through Land Management Agreements with farmers. Rachel said at a member level, those who have got these sites can find it quite difficult to know who their local contact is and asked is anything NRW can do to help identify who the appropriate officers are to contact.

Rachel discussed the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme and the proposal for a universal action that all farmers who have a designated site on their farm will have a Management Plan (not necessarily an agreement that provides money) in place. Rachel noted that there are over 1000 SSSIs and around 400 agreements in place currently. How feasible is it from an NRW perspective to have people out on sites working with farmers to get these management plans in place because if they have not got them in place, it will hold back their opportunity to go into the future scheme. Martyn said NRW have got some additional capacity because we are allowed to take some of the overheads from the programme from Welsh Government to get some short-term capacity for the next 2-3 years for staff, that does allow either those new staff or the existing staff in our local teams. Martyn said that a list can be circulated after the meeting of NRW's contacts for the environment teams.

AP September 04: Bronwen Martin, NRW to circulate the contact list for NRW Environment Teams.

58. Bernard Griffiths, FUW recalled that Nick mentioned atmospheric nitrogen being a possible problem around intensive farms close to these sites and working with farmers to reduce that. Bernard asked what NRW are hoping to do with the new water quality regulations, will they be mandated to do nutrient management plans. Nick said NRW have two officers who will focus on particular sites where we know there are high levels

of atmospheric nitrogen affecting them. There are other things you can do such as around poultry units, maybe put in screens of trees in order to reduce the amount of nitrogen coming off those sites and into the SSSI. There is a range of different things we can do, getting staff out there talking to landowners about this and having some money that can fund some capital works would be really helpful.

59. Dennis was pleased to hear that it has been recognised that cattle are essential for trying to get habitats back into condition as many have been lost over the last 50 years. Dennis discussed some of the sites he has visited with the PONT organisation. Dennis asked about the funding. Nick said the Nature Networks Programme (work with management agreements) funding is coming from the Welsh Government. The five LIFE projects funding is continuing to come from the EU (some projects run until 2026).
60. Anthony mentioned a recent RSPB paper that somewhat played down the 30% of land under designation being actively managed and in good condition. Anthony recalled that there is no data for about 50% of the designations and asked what is being done to collect data on those and questioned whether it is onerous for the land manager. What is currently in place so that land managers can benefit from the actions they are already undertaking. Nick said the 1000 SSSIs is almost about 230,000 hectares of land and because of the limited number of staff over recent years, NRW simply have not had the opportunity to get out to many of these sites. Consequently, we only have a reasonable idea about the condition of 50% of those. However, as a result of the Nature Networks Programme, NRW are able to get out to more sites and we are gradually collecting more information. Regarding land managers, it is unlikely that it will be onerous to them. These sites are SSSIs and are not really going to have a significant impact on them apart from the fact that it may open up the way towards management plans and hopefully management agreements or entry into the SFS.

In relation to the gaps, Nick said woodlands would be eligible for management agreements, but we have to prioritise the more sensitive habitats like grasslands, peatlands and other places like that which can be damaged either deliberately or just by lack of grazing for example.

Anthony said if NRW's resources have increased and are seeking to go out to SSSIs and other conservation areas, do you have guidance, data, or support information that you can broadcast. Nick said there is lots more NRW could do but a lot of it does come down to resources. Nick suggested that a newsletter could be produced for all SSSI owners which would be a minor step in the right direction.

Item 7 Update from FUW / NFU Cymru / Wales YFC / Confor / CLA / TFA / Welsh Government

61. **FUW:** Bernard Griffiths, FUW said his colleagues in the Policy Department have been very busy and briefly mentioned FUW's initial response to the SFS. The latest Welsh Government SFS proposals are on the right track, and they are broadly in line with the comments that FUW made in consultations, but there are numerous concerns around some of the details of the scheme. FUW think it is essential that there is a baseline payment to ensure the scheme is attractive, which will allow farmers to continue producing food. The FUW believes that there should be payment capping and tapering of payments and this must feature in the scheme. The crucial role of active farmers as

food producers is rightly recognised but is not high enough up in the agenda, it should be level with the environmental issues. However, a proposal that 10% of all farms should comprise tree cover will be a major concern for many farmers for whom this would mean losing a large proportion of their productive land.

The FUW Policy Department has also produced a five-point plan to mitigate the effects of the COVID pandemic and the war in in Ukraine as we know this has led to some business facing crippling increases in energy and fuel costs. Farm inflation is approaching 30% and there are predictions that food will rise by 15%. Bernard summarised the five points:

1. Trade – It is time to reset international trade policy. The UK Government has been pursuing liberal trade deals with distant countries that even its own figures show will undermine UK food security.
2. Relations – Good relations should be restored with our nearest neighbours, the majority of which are EU members and members of the most stable trade partnership in the world. The UK Government must seek to restore its relationship with the EU and neighbouring countries in order to protect UK food exports and security and not enter into a legal and trade war over the Northern Ireland Protocol.
3. Renewable energy – It is high time for a renewable energy revolution. Both UK and Welsh Governments must step up efforts that restore growth in the industry by incentivising on farm production of renewable energy without compromising food production and agricultural land.
4. Policy – We need to rethink domestic, agricultural and rural policies. By the end of 2023, Wales will have received around £250 million less in agricultural funding than would have been the case had we remained in the EU
5. Funding – Financial support for critical industries. The UK Governments must act to place UK farmers on an equal footing with farmers in the EU who were receiving funding to make up for escalations in food production.

62. **NFU Cymru:** Rachel Lewis-Davies said regarding the SFS, the devil remains in the detail, and we have not seen a lot of the detail yet, for example what is going to count as habitat in the 10% habitat requirement, what is going to count as tree cover in that 10% and how feasible is it going to be to achieve that. It is vital that we get the future policy right and that we do not start a transition until we are sure it can provide at least the same level of stability for our farm businesses and rural communities.

NFU Cymru recently submitted written evidence to the interim Environmental Protection Assessor for Wales on the legislative position with respect to hedgerows. NFU Cymru has provided evidence to the Senedd inquiry into the Environmental Protection (Single-use Plastic Products) (Wales) Bill. NFU Cymru have also provided a consultation response to the National Air Pollution Control Programme.

Hedd Pugh, NFU Cymru asked for more information about the Phytophthora disease in Larch and whether it is spreading in Wales. John Browne, NRW said it has always spread and it can never be completely controlled because it is wind borne. Although it has not spread as fast as was feared at one point. But nevertheless, we still see new areas of infection every year, so the control measures are still important. There is a new Phytophthora now, which is very similar but attacks different species of trees. We

do not usually give notice until there is a confirmation of the disease and if it is in the early spring period then unfortunately you know the time when the trees must come down is very tight. If it is later on in the summer, there is a second requirement date and there is a bit more time. John has previously provided an official response which was circulated to members; this information will be recirculated after the meeting.

AP September 05: Bronwen Martin, NRW to recirculate the Statutory Plant Health Notice document regarding Larch.

Hedd also asked for a future update on Beavers in the Dyffi Valley.

63. **Wales YFC:** Lee Pritchard mentioned that he is new in post. Lee said it has been a very informative meeting. Wales YFC are meeting to discuss and formulate a response to the SFS.
64. **Confor:** Anthony Geddes said Confor are still engaging on the detail of the SFS. Confor welcome the 10% woodland cover on farm but the time scale of implementation or achieving that 10% is of concern particularly for resource, for sector supply and actually ensuring that the nursery sector in Wales can provide the required hedging, tree cover and other afforestation projects. People need to think about how integrated land use will affect the supply chain.

There are some quite significant moves forward regarding the Forestry Act including the felling license reform. However, there are also some significant changes that are being pushed through by the felling and licensing teams, which will be affecting all land owners who are seeking to apply for felling licenses.

Anthony mentioned that there is a sustainable drainage system (SuDS) review which is in the early stages of external consultation. Confor have been reviewing existing SuDS framework. Legislation was very poorly delivered in Wales, especially for non-urban development (e.g., farm tracks and forest roads) where they are not connected into existing infrastructure drainage. Confor is pushing for a very significant increase in the area that can be changed. Currently in Wales it is 100 square metres, which do not even cover a loading area for stacking timber in most cases. In Scotland it is about 25,000 square meters, which means that you can construct a forest road in Scotland. Anthony encouraged the farming unions to get involved and offered to pass on the contact details.

The Woodland Planning Grant Scheme has been live for a while, but the Woodland Planting Grant Scheme went live on the 1st September. Anthony mentioned that there was some slight confusion that the funding for forestry was highlighted as £54 million in the previous budget, but it is now only £34 million. The drop in allocated funding is concerning but would encourage people to get in early with the planning system because that will still take probably 12 months to get through before any of the planning grants can be provided.

Regarding the new grant schemes, Tim Kirk, Confor mentioned that earlier today the Welsh Government sent everybody details of the new scheme which opened on the 30th August and closes on the 14th October. That gives just 38 working days (we have already lost five) with at least 40 schemes. Tim questioned whether NRW can actually cope with this work in the time given time.

65. **TFA:** Dennis Matheson mentioned TFA has been working closely with Welsh Government to try and get access to the SFS for tenants. As it stands, most tenants will not be able to access it because of the tree planting requirement along with the agricultural pollution regulations. The Minister announced the setting up of a tenancy working group to try and resolve these problems, but nothing has happened yet.

Last week Dennis attended a meeting run by a consultancy firm from London on Nature Recovery. One of the things Dennis raised was the decline in habitat due to the declining cattle numbers.

Dennis mentioned the campaign for protection for rural Wales has got a sustainable food and farming conference on the 17th September. There will be a presentation from Welsh Government in which TFA are taking part.

Item 8 Any Other Business

66. Marc Williams, NRW mentioned that the Healthy Hillside team within NRW are thinking of hosting a Wildfire Conference/Extreme Weather planning workshop or Climate Change Conference in 2023 prior to the wildfire season in March. This workshop/conference would be for land managers, policy makers etc with a mixture of workshops, presentations and stands so that people can showcase the work they have been doing in preventive action and sustainable management of the landscape within Wales. The team are currently looking into the logistics of where and how (in-person with possible hybrid function) to host the conference. Marc asked members whether they would be interested in this event, would people likely attend in person, where the most suitable location would be for the event, whether farmers, foresters and other land managers would be interested to attend in-person and if there were any other topics which should be included on the conference agenda.

AP September 06: Members to contact Marc Williams, NRW with any feedback or suggestions regarding the proposed Wildfire Conference/Extreme Weather planning workshop.

67. Zoe mentioned that NRW Board meetings will now get a short update on the WLMF and the WLMF Sub Groups. Other forums have previously reported to the NRW Board. Zoe said it is really important to provide agriculture and forestry updates at board level on a regular basis and she is really pleased to have this opportunity. Zoe thanked Marc and Bronwen for putting together the short update paper as it highlights the very important profile of this group. Zoe mentioned that her term as WLMF Chair was due to come to an end in November 2022, but it has been extended until May 2023.

68. Zoe said there is a SAC Rivers meeting on 27th September. The Welsh Game Fair is also coming up on Saturday 9th September in Bangor.

69. Martyn reflected on the meeting and some of the discussions, particularly what should be at the top of an agenda. NRW has got its own particular role but what the earlier discussion flagged is related to co-dependency. We cannot produce food unless the climate and the supporting biodiversity, water and soils facilitate the growing of food. If you put food on top of the agenda at the expense of resourcing other things like the climate and nature emergency, we will not be able to produce food and neither if we

just focus on nature, for example, we would not be able to produce sustainable food. Martyn said we need to think and operate in this space of co-dependency.

70. Regarding the water review, Sian said it seems really simple to look at river water quality (e.g., are we doing the right monitoring, are we doing the right regulation, are we doing the right incident management and are we responding in the right way). However, when we expand that to think about everything that impacts and is impacted by water, then it becomes much bigger. We cannot think about water without thinking about land management and vice versa. We also cannot think about water quality without thinking about water quantity. All of these things need to consider people, climate and nature as well. That is part of what we are going to be looking at over the next few months when reviewing everything that we do with water in terms of quality and quantity.

71. The next meeting is 5th December 2022. WLMF members were encouraged to suggest potential agenda items and discussion topics, please forward them to Bronwen Martin, NRW.

AP September 07: WLMF members to suggest potential agenda items and discussion topics for the December meeting.

Close meeting