



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations**

DATE **27 January 2021**

BY **Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs**

Today, I announce my decision to introduce regulations, which apply to the whole of Wales, to address the significant and ongoing effect of agricultural pollution on the health and quality of our rivers, lakes and streams.

Clean water is essential for life in Wales, for drinking, the health of our population, for food production and our natural environment. Too many rivers are currently polluted by agricultural activities from acute incidents of point source discharges to water and the cumulative effect of diffuse pollution. As a result, we fail to meet public expectation and our environmental standards. The number of agricultural pollution incidents remains far too high, averaging over 3 per week in the last 3 years demonstrating no long-term downward trend. We need to do better and raise the quality of our water courses across Wales by preventing incidents like these and managing wider diffuse pollution risks.

The Regulations I am introducing set a clear and consistent baseline, ensuring all farmers understand what actions they need to take to join those who are already protecting our rich environment and managing manures as a valuable source of nutrients rather than a waste product. The measures are proportionate to the risks of pollution from agricultural practices; some farmers will see a minimal impact whilst others will need time and support to improve.

The baseline standards established by these Regulations are not excessive. They establish standards of production in Wales comparable to those which apply in the rest of the UK and Europe. Formalising good practice standards in this way is not only important to protect our environment and well-being, it is critical to Welsh businesses maintaining European markets and accessing those further afield. These Regulations ensure our regulatory baseline is set at the appropriate level, in accordance with principles of the EU Trade and Cooperation agreement, to avoid future tariffs on exports to the EU, the equivalent of a no-deal scenario for Welsh agriculture.

Whilst these regulations have been developed primarily to prevent the unacceptable pollution of watercourses, other environmental considerations have been taken into

account. The implementation of the regulations will see nutrients used more efficiently on farms, resulting in lower losses of ammonia to the atmosphere. The regulations are a key part of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture to improve air quality and the whole Wales approach reflects the advice from the UK Climate Change Committee in their report “Land Use: Policies for a net zero UK”.

This decision has been taken following a lengthy period of consideration and engagement. I have given the industry every opportunity to demonstrate a change in behaviours through voluntary action. Some progress has been made over the last 4 years but not enough to demonstrate the scale, rate and commitment to change needed.

Before making a decision, I wanted to ensure the industry is in a position to be able to implement any new regulations. There remains uncertainty from the impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic on our agri food supply chain, but market price for agriculture produce remains buoyant and the introduction of the EU UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement removes the threat of export tariffs. I have included transitional periods within the regulations to reduce the immediate requirements on the industry. This will enable farmers to meet the initial good practice requirements which will be introduced from 1 April 2021 and provide sufficient time for planning and preparing for the additional requirements.

It will be necessary for some farms to invest in improvements in their infrastructure. Many farmers have already taken the opportunity to improve their nutrient management, to continue to maintain their high performance and market position, often with financial assistance from the Welsh Government. Up to September 2020 we provided £22m through the Sustainable Production Grant scheme to support infrastructure investments with over 500 applicants invited to submit full applications. For 2021, an additional £1.5 million has been made available to help farmers improve water quality and £11.5m of capital funding will be used to directly support farm businesses to improve on farm nutrient management infrastructure.

The introduction of the regulations will be supported by appropriate guidance and an effective knowledge transfer programme. Farming Connect have already held over 400 related events including soils and farm infrastructure clinics, priority catchment area meetings, Sustainable Farming and Farming for the Future events with close to 13,000 farmers in attendance.

This action on agricultural pollution is part of a suite of measures to improve water quality across Wales. I made £4.5m available in 2020/21 to tackle pollution from mine water sources, which is another major source of water pollution in Wales.

I recognise the farming industry has long advocated its own approach to nutrient management, including greater flexibility of farm practice in response to the environmental conditions. The regulation includes an opportunity for the industry to demonstrate how they might achieve this working within the framework of the regulations to deliver better outcomes in respect of water quality and atmospheric emissions. Any proposals considered by Welsh Ministers would need to meet the national minimum standard set out and maintained by this legislation.

Agricultural pollution has affected waterbodies across Wales for far too long and I am determined to act to protect the Welsh countryside for our future. This legislation, together with appropriate guidance, support and enforcement will make a step change in the quality of our Welsh environment and the sustainability of our agricultural industry.