

National Sheep Association

Response to: Senedd

Subject: Agriculture (Wales) Bill

Date: 11th November 2022

The National Sheep Association is a charitable company that represents the views of sheep farmers through a membership structure across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Part 1: Sustainable Land Management

The first objective is to produce food and other goods in a sustainable manner, and in doing so—

- (a) to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and
- (b) to contribute to achieving the well-being goals in section 4 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The second objective is to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and in doing so—

- (a) to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and
- (b) to contribute to achieving the well-being goals in section 4 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The third objective is to maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide, and in doing so—

- (a) to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and
- (b) to contribute to achieving the well-being goals in section 4 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. 30

The fourth objective is to conserve and enhance the countryside and cultural resources and promote public access to and engagement with them, and to sustain the Welsh language and promote and facilitate its use, and in doing so—

- (a) to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, and Agriculture (Wales) Bill 2 GB/06/22
- (b) to contribute to achieving the well-being goals in section 4 of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

NSA would support the four sustainable land management objectives. Welsh farming is world renowned for its sustainability and high quality, these attributes must be recognised by Welsh Government. NSA would advocate that to become more food secure as a nation, both at a Wales and UK level, we must utilise the produce grown

on our doorstep, providing support and legislation that protects and provides opportunities for our primary producers in Wales, in turn affording them with the ability to reinvest in delivering high environmental and animal welfare outcomes. NSA would advocate for Welsh produce, being world renowned for its high environmental, welfare and health standards with a huge number of these standards being entrenched in law, to be at the heart of any future food, trade, health & environmental policy. Wales is renowned for a climate and topography suited to growing grass, supporting livestock enterprises where following fertility can be utilised for human consumption crops on appropriate soils. Welsh Government must continue to strive to put agriculture and food production first in any future scheme or policy proposal.

It is vital that agriculture is recognised for the positive impact on the climate and the huge progress that has been made as an industry to work towards NetZero. It is imperative that the progress made is attributed to agriculture rather than other sectors.

Protected areas throughout the UK **and Wales** are not only a tapestry of habitats, but these unique ecosystems have been forged from food production activities, 44% of the UK's breeding sheep belong to the upland areas, with up to 75% in Wales, many of these areas are underpinned and rely on farming and food production as the main economic activity. The UK is home to over 60 native breeds of sheep which over hundreds of years have adapted to the harsh conditions of some of these areas to best utilise forage, NSA advocate the importance of maintaining these areas not only as honey pots for biodiversity but also to recognise the integral part they play in the food production system while ensuring Wales is as sustainable as it can be.

The monumental progress agriculture has made not only in Wales but across the UK to becoming more sustainable cannot be overlooked with huge uptake in schemes such as Glastir which actively require farmers and land managers to improve and enhance biodiversity on farm whilst also producing protein for the nation. Farmers and land managers have been and are ready to adopt new technology to become more productive while reducing environmental impact and contributing to the country's collective ambition to become more sustainable and ensure that Wales improves food security and sustainability.

Many of these landscapes have historically and continue to be managed by farmers, graziers, local communities and other businesses, many of which have created the iconic landscapes we value and seek to preserve today. A tunnel-vision focus on nature and nature recovery ignores the essential role of livestock farming and these communities and businesses.

National Parks & AONB's are home to 75% of upland farmers with a huge proportion of protected landscapes coming under private ownership or tenancies. Almost 37% of the UK's national sheep flock graze in protected landscapes.

Farmers expertise of land often managed for generations must not be overlooked, the importance of their businesses to rural communities and the landscape they manage are pivotal to governments ambitions. Many are farming actively in AONB's and National Parks or on the periphery and have managed and improved habitats

and biodiversity whilst also providing high quality produce to consumers. As mentioned earlier farmers and land managers have been actively involved in a variety of government led land & environmental management schemes voluntarily, many proving to be hugely popular, it must be a key outcome for any future development to harness the knowledge these farmers and land managers have for any scheme to be successful, in many cases generations have taken part in or witnessed various approaches by government to develop schemes, it is vital the farmers directly must be involved and consulted with from the beginning of any new development to ensure the most successful outcome. This must be approached using a bottom – up model to ensure the best design possible.

Grassland also has benefits to carbon sequestration having the ability to sequester as much carbon as trees due to the extensive and diverse root system and above ground turnover. Grazing is also an important conservation management tool to maintain sward composition and structure and prevent the build-up of nutrients, creating dense stifled plant growth. Grazing on a grassland can stimulate plant and root growth, taking up carbon from the atmosphere. Many areas of peatland, which are well recognised as one of the largest terrestrial sources of carbon, are managed by farming businesses.

Any future financing of nature recovery must not come at the expense of the agricultural industry. Farming has made huge strides towards NetZero through actions taken within the individual businesses, a position that is almost unique across industries with many favouring to buy their carbon neutral status. The current mechanisms around carbon auditing, offsetting and trading are volatile in their nature with very little consistency or regulation across the market, something which must be addressed before pushing land managers to trade carbon. Food production and food security in Wales must not come at the cost of large high polluting industries buying their carbon neutral status.

Investing in the businesses and communities that are best placed (farmers & growers) to provide the desired outcomes will be vital in successful delivery of any future scheme targeting the environment and is increasingly important that those directly impacted by the impacts of these policy are an integral part of the decision-making process. Investing in these businesses directly will be key.

It is important that any future targets or ambitions are science and evidence based, at the moment the detail for these plans are yet to be realised. Agriculture is the obvious answer to many of these ambitions, however any future plans must be made with land managers and farmers at the heart of any decision-making process. It is also important to appreciate the value farmland also has for biodiversity in well managed grassland, hedgerows, water bodies and woodland plantation, these must not be overlooked in an effort to plant blanket forestry, the right tree and the right ambition must be in the right place.

NSA would welcome future discussions and will be responding in full to the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme in Wales.

