



Environment and Sustainability Committee

Sustainable Land Management

Conclusions Paper

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1. Introduction

Purpose of the workshop

The purpose of the workshop is to gather stakeholders' views on the initial conclusions the Committee has reached in its inquiry into Sustainable Land Management (SLM) in Wales. In particular the Committee would like views on:

- Whether the key issues identified in this discussion paper reflect stakeholders' views on this subject;
- If there are any key issues not identified in this paper that stakeholders feel are important; and
- The proposed actions the Committee is considering as recommendations to the Welsh Government.

Background

The Committee began its SLM work in the summer of 2013 with a visit to the Pumlumon and Dyfi Osprey projects in Montgomeryshire. Shortly afterwards a stakeholder workshop was held in Cardiff to help frame the terms of reference for the inquiry.

The terms of reference for the inquiry are:

- What do we want sustainable land management in Wales to look like and what outcomes do we want to deliver in the short, medium and longer term?
- What are the barriers preventing us from delivering these outcomes now?
- How do we overcome these challenges?
- What are the main policy drivers and how can these be shaped to overcome these challenges?

During the course of the inquiry the Committee has collected a great deal of evidence through a programme of visits and meetings. Members have visited IBERS at Aberystwyth University and the RSPB run Lake Vyrnwy Estate, as well as two family farms in Brecknockshire and two of the National Trust's farms in Snowdonia. The Committee has also taken evidence from stakeholders with interests in agriculture, conservation, forestry, rural business and knowledge transfer. There was also a session with NRW and a session on CAP with the Minister for Natural Resources and Food, Alun Davies AM (the Minister).



Proposed Next Steps

The Committee will hold a further scrutiny session with the Minister in May to explore with him the evidence gathered by the Committee during its inquiry.

The Committee's intention is to publish its final report in May.

2. Key Issues and Conclusions

This section of the paper provides a brief summary of the key issues that have been raised with the Committee during its evidence gathering stage. At the end of each section there is a list of proposed actions that the Committee is considering recommending to the Welsh Government. Through the workshop the Committee would like to hear your views about these proposed actions.

Definition of Sustainable Land Management

- There were differing views about what should be included within a specific definition for sustainable land management in Wales but there was broad agreement that an agreed shared definition is needed. Some suggested that the lack of a commonly understood and shared definition had acted as a barrier to the delivery of sustainable land management in Wales.
- Some of the evidence suggested that an agreed shared definition adopted and delivered through Welsh Government policy would provide stakeholders with certainty and enable a number of other barriers about communication, data gathering, funding and knowledge transfer to be addressed.
- Although there was little agreement on the specific wording for a definition there was agreement on some broad principles which should be included within/form the basis of an agreed definition. These were:
 - that any definition should be based on the principles of sustainable development and secure the economic and social future of rural communities in addition to protecting and enhancing the environment.
 - that the definition should make reference to the delivery of ecosystems services.



- Some reference was made to work on agreeing priorities for sustainable land management in Wales that was completed by NRW's legacy bodies and the farming unions.
- The Environment Bill White Paper includes a definition of sustainable management but not all stakeholders were happy with the definition as currently drafted.

Proposed Actions:

The Committee is minded to recommend that the Welsh Government should seek to develop a shared definition of sustainable land management which can inform the development of all its policies related to land management. In doing so it should build on the work already done by NRW's legacy bodies and the farming unions.

The Committee is minded to suggest that Welsh Government should use the opportunity provided by its legislative programme to ensure this definition is coherent and consistent with its work to define natural resources and sustainable development.

That the Committee is considering identifying some of the key principles it would like to see as the basis of a definition of sustainable land management including:

- **that it should secure the economic and social future of rural communities whilst protecting and enhancing the environment; and**
- **that it recognises the role of sustainable land management in protecting ecosystems and delivering ecosystem services..**

Geographical Scale

- **There is broad agreement in the evidence that whilst there is a need at a national level or regional level for a coherent definition and high-level outcomes land managers should also be empowered to make more decisions as to how these outcomes are delivered locally.**
- **There seemed to be a consensus that a river-catchment scale approach for developing specific outcomes for sustainable land management could be appropriate. Some reference was made to the natural resource management plans included within the Environment Bill White Paper.**



- The Committee received some evidence that advocated that land managers should be given more freedom to decide on how outcomes are delivered on their land. The example of First Milk was given where producers had been given a range of options within which to decide how they would improve water quality in their area. Some witnesses expressed concern that the opposite had happened to date in Glastir Advanced where it was felt that power had been taken away from land managers in some instances.
- It was felt in some of the evidence that devolving some power to land managers, especially in the context of a clearly articulated shared definition, could improve buy-in to and communication about the principles behind delivering ecosystems services.

Proposed Actions:

The Committee is minded to recommend that the Welsh Government should articulate the high-level outcomes it wishes to see for sustainable land management in Wales with more specific outcomes developed at a regional level which potentially could be a river-catchment scale. The proposals for natural resources management plans in the Environment Bill White Paper could be one avenue for such outcomes to be delivered.

The Committee is considering recommending where possible land managers should be empowered or involved in decisions about how national and regional outcomes are delivered locally. The Committee is minded to recommend that the Welsh Government should explore ways in which existing schemes such as Glastir can be designed to empower land managers to make decisions about how sustainable land management is delivered on the ground.

Measuring Progress: Data and Monitoring

- Some stakeholders told the Committee that an agreed definition and outcomes for sustainable land management could enable better collation and integration of existing data, and could help organisations such as NRW identify gaps and prioritise resources.
- Numerous examples were provided of existing sources of data but there was a general agreement that this data isn't coordinated or collated effectively. The example was given of the data held by Local Record Centres.



- Some witnesses talked of the importance of involving and empowering land managers themselves to gather data as opposed to the collection of data being undertaken by external organisations. An example was given of Fish Map Môn from the marine environment where fishermen have been trained and provided with equipment to gather data on fisheries themselves.
- The importance of giving (through novel GIS and related apps) land managers access to data that was of use to their farm/rural businesses to ensure buy-in and improve knowledge was also emphasised by some respondents.

Proposed Actions:

The Committee is considering recommending that the Welsh Government should adopt a monitoring strategy to assess progress towards delivering sustainable land management in Wales. The strategy should identify existing data sources and gaps in knowledge. The Committee is considering suggesting that it should set out a prioritised action plan for improving the gathering of data and set out the role of different stakeholders in the data gathering process. This work should build on the work already being done by the Welsh Government in relation to biodiversity data.

The Committee is minded to recommend that the Welsh Government as part of its work on natural resource management plans and Glastir should consider the development of pilot schemes that offer land managers a role in the data gathering process and to feed back data gathered in a meaningful way to land managers.

Communication and Knowledge Transfer

- There appeared to be broad agreement in the evidence the Committee received that communication about sustainable land management and in particular ecosystems services to land managers needs to be improved. As mentioned above devolution of some powers to land managers and involving land managers in data gathering were two suggested ways in which improving communication might be improved but better knowledge transfer was also seen as key.
- Recommendations were made to the Committee about two different types of knowledge transfer. Transfer of knowledge about sustainable land management practices, delivery



of ecosystem services and conservation skills and transfer of knowledge about improvements in technology and production efficiencies.

- In relation to the transfer of knowledge about sustainable land management practices some witnesses suggested that this could provide new employment opportunities in rural areas and address skill shortages in conservation.
- The Committee has heard that significant expertise has been developed in Wales about transferring knowledge to land managers, particularly through Farming Connect. The network of demonstration farms throughout Wales was seen as a particular strength on which to build. Stakeholders were of the view that such an approach could be extended to cover other land based sectors, specifically forestry. The Committee has noted that the Kevin Roberts review found Wales's extension services to be 'excellent' and recommended that support be developed further to provide a tiered and tailored approach to individual businesses.
- Evidence from IBERS was that often scientific innovations were made in Wales but not necessarily communicated to land based industries in Wales first. The Committee heard that having a world-leading institution, such as IBERS, in Wales is an opportunity to position Welsh producers as early-adopters of new ideas, thereby placing Wales at a competitive advantage.
- The Committee were told that knowledge transfer should also be a two-way process and that a meaningful mechanism should be developed to allow land managers to feed back the knowledge and information they have to relevant organisations.
- The Committee also heard about the importance of learning from good practice across Europe and were provided with some examples of sustainable land management practices that Wales could learn from.

Proposed Actions:

The Committee is minded to suggest that support should be provided through the RDP for improved knowledge transfer to land managers BOTH for sustainable land management skills and to transfer new technologies and scientific developments.



The Committee is considering suggesting that the Farming Connect-style approach to support services should be expanded and deepened to provide bespoke services to land managers, including the forestry sector.

The Committee is also considering suggesting that support services should include meaningful mechanisms to allow two-way knowledge transfer, which would enable feedback from land managers to help improve development and delivery of support services.

The Committee is minded to recommend that the Welsh Government should investigate ways to better convert new developments from Welsh research institutions into practical examples which are accessible to land managers.

Farm Profitability and Food Production

- Both the formal and informal evidence gathered by the Committee set out clearly that farmers primary function should be food production and that farmers want this to remain their primary role in future.
- Improving farm profitability through more efficient practices was seen as one way of ensuring sustainable land management and as set out above improved knowledge transfer was seen as key to ensuring this. The Committee has noted that this is also reflected in the conclusions of the Kevin Roberts review on the resilience of the sector.
- The issues of access to into the industry were raised by some stakeholders and particularly the issues surrounding succession planning and access to land for young farmers. Some stakeholders suggested that further advice and incentives should be provided to existing farmers considering retirement from the industry to increase opportunities for young farmers. The Committee heard from some that this issue could be addressed through the design of Common Agricultural Policy over the 2014–2020 period.

Proposed Actions

The Committee is minded to recommend that high quality food production should remain at the core of farm businesses alongside other land management activities.



The Committee is minded to conclude that recommendations made by Kevin Roberts about improving the financial sustainability and efficiency of farms are important and should be taken forward by the Welsh Government.

The Committee is minded to conclude that it supports the Welsh Government's proposals to include the young entrants support scheme within the next RDP but that consideration should also be given to providing existing farmers with advice on succession planning and where possible with financial incentives to support farmers wishing to retire from the industry.

Delivery of Ecosystem Services

- Alongside food production there seemed to be a broad consensus within the evidence that the delivery of ecosystems services by land managers is going to become increasingly important in future and could provide an important source of alternative income.
- Improved delivery of ecosystems services was seen by many stakeholders as important not only for its ability to provide alternative income streams but also because of the important public goods provided such as flood risk reduction.
- The Committee visited and was provided with information about a number of projects across Wales where land managers were already working on delivery of an ecosystems approach. Although there were a number of very good individual projects these projects were not coordinated and good practice was not often disseminated.
- Many stakeholders called on NRW to act as an exemplar body for the delivery of this approach and to use its land holdings and the Welsh Government's Forest Estate to pilot and develop such approaches.
- Forestry in the uplands and renewable energy were two clear examples given to the Committee of where wider public benefit could be delivered alongside new income streams for land management businesses.
- The new RDP was identified as the main source of funding for piloting and supporting payments for the delivery of ecosystems services by those who gave evidence to the Committee. The limitations of the RDP both in terms of the amount of funding available and the fact that payments can only be made on a costs-incurred income-foregone



basis were also acknowledged. Some stakeholders suggested that some RDP funds could be used to 'pump-prime' ecosystems based approach to land management, to develop markets for ecosystems services and to support the transfer of knowledge on sustainable land management practices. Several stakeholders suggested that more creative and flexible approach to income foregone calculations could enable the Welsh Government to offer higher payment rates to farmers in agri-environment schemes to reflect the true benefit to society of the services being provided.

- Given the limitations of RDP funding a number of witnesses made reference to the need to attract private sector investment to fund the delivery of ecosystems services and some examples were given of where utility companies has already began working on such projects. Some stakeholders suggested that the Welsh Government could play a greater role in supporting the establishment of markets for ecosystems services. The Committee notes that the Environment Bill White Paper includes a proposal for furthering NRW's role in stimulating market mechanisms to pay for ecosystem services.

Proposed conclusions:

The Committee is considering recommending that the Welsh Government should take on a coordinating role to pull together and disseminate the work already happening through individual projects on the delivery of ecosystem services.

That Committee is minded to recommend the Welsh Government should encourage NRW to act as an exemplar for the delivery of sustainable land management and delivery of ecosystems services.

The Committee is minded to suggest that the next RDP provides support for the piloting and development of the delivery of ecosystems services both through Glastir and through other sections of the plan including knowledge transfer and innovative forms of funding such as loans.

The Committee is considering recommending that Welsh Government should ensure in designing the next RDP that it gives careful consideration to how it designs payment rates for different schemes in line with its sustainable land management priorities.

The Committee is minded to recommend that work to simulate the use of market mechanisms to pay for ecosystems services should be taken forward as a matter of priority and in doing so lessons should be learnt from projects where private sector investment is already being used to pay for the delivery of ecosystem services.