

Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS  
Y Dirprwy Brif Weinidog ac Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros  
Newid Hinsawdd a Materion Gwledig  
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate  
Change and Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1461  
Ein cyf/Our ref HIDCC/10175/24

Petitions Committee  
[petitions@senedd.wales](mailto:petitions@senedd.wales)

20 September 2024

Dear Chair,

Thank you for your letter of 6 September related to petition P-06-1461 and the Sustainable Farming Scheme.

The proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) is underpinned by the Sustainable Land Management (SLM) objectives established in the Agriculture (Wales) Act. These objectives are to;

- Support the Sustainable Production of Food and other Goods
- Mitigate and adapt to climate change
- Maintain and enhance the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide
- 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

To reflect these objectives, supporting the ongoing sustainable production of food is the cornerstone of the SFS proposals. However the climate emergency is the main risk to food production over the long term, and our natural ecosystems are one of the best defences we have in responding to climate change. The proposed SFS contains a suite of Universal Actions to invest in, for example, our soils, ecosystems, animal health and our farmers' skills, which we consider as investments in protecting our future food production capacity.

It is not our view that the proposed 10% habitat and 10% tree cover Scheme Rules will lead to a 20% drop in food production in Wales. Existing semi-natural habitats, and existing trees will count towards these 10% requirements, so many farmers will already be some way towards meeting these, if they do not already.

Where new habitats are to be created to meet the Scheme Rule, we propose farmers will be able to create valuable temporary habitat features such as establishing herbal leys. These provide agricultural benefits by improving the resilience of the grassland, such as through including deeper rooted species which can access moisture at greater depths to combat dry summers, as well as providing ecological benefits to pollinating insects. Importantly the habitat creation options proposed for the Universal Layer are temporary in nature and do not in themselves lead to permanent restrictions on productive farmland.

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

[Gohebiaeth.Huw.Irranca-Davies@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Huw.Irranca-Davies@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Huw.Irranca-Davies@gov.wales](mailto:Correspondence.Huw.Irranca-Davies@gov.wales)

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

We have adjusted the 10% tree cover requirements to accommodate various constraints such as those tenant farmers who will be unable to plant trees due to the conditions of their tenancy agreement. Where additional trees are to be planted, we continue to explore where they can be integrated in a way they become an asset to the farm such as through shelterbelts and agro-forestry. In this way the trees can provide valuable shade and shelter to livestock during our increasingly erratic weather, but does not result in the loss of large areas of pasture.

The ADAS evidence referred to in the petition reflects the impacts of an earlier version of the scheme, not the version included in the consultation which closed in March this year. This economic assessment was an important piece of work which helped inform our consultation. It helped identify the potential risks of the scheme, such as a potential drop in agricultural output which we are addressing. For example, the assessment assumed grazing restrictions on woodland and habitat, which we now propose to remove.

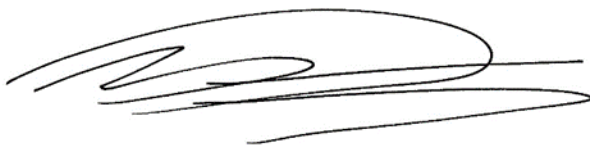
No final decisions have been made on scheme design. I [announced on 3 May](#) I was listening to the concerns of the industry and have since established a Ministerial Roundtable to work directly with key stakeholders to review the critical steps leading to the development of a revised Scheme. I further [announced on 14 May](#) I had moved the start of the SFS from 2025 to 2026 in order to work with the industry to ensure we develop a Scheme that supports a sustainable and resilient agricultural industry in Wales.

We published the [Welsh Government response](#) to the latest consultation in July, in which we reaffirmed the work with stakeholders on the Ministerial Roundtable to refine the scheme design. A good example of this productive partnership with the Ministerial Roundtable is the [announcement on 23 July](#) to update the industry on the proposal to include management of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) in the Universal Baseline Payment. This will recognise farmers' efforts in managing these areas, for all our benefits and ensure these sites are integrated within wider farm management, balancing food production and actions that improve the prospects of nature and freshwater habitats.

To reiterate, Welsh Ministers will not be making any decisions on the SFS scheme design until this period of engagement with the Ministerial Roundtable is complete. I am expecting to provide an update on the progress made to Plenary this term.

I would be pleased to provide any further information required by the Petitions Committee.

Yours sincerely,



**Huw Irranca-Davies AS/MS**

Y Dirprwy Brif Weinidog ac Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Newid Hinsawdd  
a Materion Gwledig

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs