

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Materion Cyfansoddiadol a Deddfwriaethol | Constitutional and
Legislative Affairs Committee
Ymchwiliad: Llais cryfach i Gymru: ymgysylltu â San Steffan a'r sefydliadau
datganoledig |
Inquiry: A stronger voice for Wales: engaging with Westminster and the
devolved institutions
IGP004
Ymateb gan: Cymdeithas Tir a Busnesau Cefn Gwlad
Response from: The Country, Land and Business Association

The CLA (Country Land & Business Association) is a well-established representative organisation with UK headquarters in London and a national office in Wales. We work closely with both the UK Government and the Welsh Government as a consultee-of-choice on issues concerning agriculture, land-use and the rural economy.

We devote ourselves to addressing our members' interests in rural affairs: the gamut of agricultural interests and also those affecting the rural economy in general. A key part of our role is consistently to engage with government and political representatives in Westminster and Cardiff. We represent 32,000 members in England and Wales, around 10 per cent of whom are in Wales. The needs of the rural community are often under-represented in UK politics. Our membership footprint accounts for the ownership/management of around half of the rural land in both countries. About 80 per cent of land-use in Wales is consigned to farming and rural business. A significant number of our members are rural business-people who have diversified into other sectors of the rural economy. Some members' land, farming or business interests straddle the England-Wales border.

Key Principles

Brexit will have a major impact on our members' interests. We have identified key areas where it is likely to bring about fundamental change in support for agriculture, regulation, trade-deals and the international movement of labour. Consequentially it is our assertion that:-

1. A new and improved UK Food, Farming and Environmental policy–framework must be created which supports the rural economy. The central UK policy should make sure that internal trade–barriers are not created directly or indirectly.
2. It is essential that the needs and contributions of each part of the UK are recognised within the framework. Each country has its own distinct challenges and opportunities and must be allowed to respond to these within the over–arching policy framework. A formal platform to do this is essential.
3. The policy is supported by a new, UK, ring–fenced budget which is distributed to devolved government on a needs–based basis, which is able to develop and execute a range of policies within the devolved settlement for the benefit of Welsh farming and the Welsh rural community.
4. Wales should have proportionate influence over the trade deals developed by UK Government that affect the country’s principal product streams. Securing long–term sustainable markets is key for the viability of the industry.
5. Recent Welsh legislation has created a strong foundation for Natural Resource Management in Wales. This should continue to be the cornerstone for land–use policy which looks to deliver public benefit in a sustainable way, balancing the economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges we face.
6. Workers from the EU play a vital role in a number of sectors in agriculture and the food and drink supply chain. UK Government must ensure that the Welsh economy is not penalised by any restriction in employing skilled or specialist migrant labour where this is well–established.

Political, economic and legal implications

Brexit presents challenges in inter–governmental relationships between Wales and the UK. Wales has no formal role in EU negotiations and in

brokering trade-deals with individual EU countries or other countries/economic blocs. The Welsh Government's document, *Securing Wales' Future* does refer to "current inter-governmental machinery which will no longer be fit-for-purpose," and, it says, "new ways of working" will need to be forged. We would support the view that the current devolutionary settlement will require appropriate attention in order that the devolved government does have meaningful practical role.

The UK framework for agriculture must be consistent with devolution as set out in the recent Wales Act. The UK Government in Wales plays an important role in representing the country at UK Cabinet level and dovetailing UK and devolved government so it works efficiently and effectively. A focus for development may be in the Joint Ministerial Committee. This provides a helpful forum for creating and carrying out strategy. As structures of UK and devolved government develop, we must ensure that means of holding our ministers accountable – both individually and collectively – is not compromised.

EU competences & the devolved administrations

A strong practical foundation has already been established in Welsh law via the Environment (Wales) Act and the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act both of which received Royal Assent last year. The Wales Act was considered as the final piece of constitutional change for a generation. Brexit is important, but it should not affect the fundamental structure and principles of government within the UK. The Great Reform Bill should *flow from* and should not *dictate to* this legislation. We await clarification as to how the Great Repeal Bill will tackle issues of devolved responsibility. It should also acknowledge that Brexit does create some practical issues between the institutions and respect those elements of the existing constitution without bringing about wholesale change.

Clearly opportunities exist to improve inter-parliamentary dialogue. As things stand the representative bodies do not take part in each-other's Consultation exercises and members of the UK Parliament and devolved Assembly do not give evidence in each-others' Committee Inquiries. It does seem inevitable that this gap may be bridged in some way at some point.

Conclusion

Sustaining continuity of existing mutually beneficial relationships with the EU or its members is a key practical issue for the rural community in Wales. We must take advantage of a well-established devolved settlement and a firm basis in existing Welsh legislation in confronting these matters. Wales is a rural nation – about one-third of the population lives in the countryside, rural landowners invest over £1.3 billion per year into the rural economy. The needs of the rural community must be considered within the Brexit-Devolution process; we will be pleased to expand on this written submission in oral evidence.