

Sustainable Land Management Branch
Agriculture and Rural Affairs Division
Welsh Government
Rhodfa Padarn
Llanbadarn Fawr
Aberystwyth
Ceredigion
SY23 3UR

30 October 2014

Dear Sir/Madam

Consultation Response: Agricultural Advisory Panel for Wales (WG22807)

Thank you for consulting Natural Resources Wales (NRW) on the constitution and functions of the Agricultural Advisory Panel for Wales. We understand that the Panel will support the functioning of the agricultural industry by addressing a wide range of key challenges, including skills and labour shortages, the effects of climate change and possible disruptions to the food supply chain.

Our detailed responses to the consultation questions are set out below.

Natural Resources Wales works as a regulator, partner and advisor to businesses, non-governmental organisations, Local Authorities and communities to help deliver Welsh Government and European Union policies and priorities. We take an ecosystem approach to promoting sustainable development that delivers social, economic and environmental benefits to the people of Wales.

Sustainable land management is one of the biggest challenges facing Wales. Ensuring that land management practices deliver environmental, social and economic benefits to the rural economy and the people of Wales is crucial. It will require support for land management practices focused not only on the production of food and fibre, but on delivering the full suite of ecosystem services that are essential to securing a safe, prosperous and healthy future for all Welsh citizens.

Adopting an ecosystem approach to sustainable land management will benefit Welsh citizens and deliver a range of complementary national and EU priorities. These include economic growth, social cohesion, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and flood risk, climate change resilience, and meeting the requirements of the Habitats, Water Framework, Bathing Water, Drinking Water and Nitrates Directives.

A well-trained and well-motivated agricultural workforce will be critical to achieving the integrated approach to the management of natural resources which is needed to underpin a sustainable food production system in the longer term. The Agricultural Advisory Panel can assist in meeting this objective through promoting appropriately structured career development across the industry. More emphasis should be placed on how best to apply the principles of sustainable land management at the level of the individual farm. Such an approach could make a significant contribution to creating a more successful rural economy and a healthier Welsh environment.

KEY QUESTIONS:

I. How do we ensure that the Panel achieves a balanced representation from across the industry? Please list the organisations, or types of organisations, you feel would contribute positively to the work of the Panel.

To assist the Panel with advising on the full range of key challenges now facing the agricultural industry, it will be important to ensure that at a wide range of interests are represented. This could be achieved through the inclusion of representatives from a wide range of agricultural organisations (sector bodies such as Hybu Cig Cymru and the NSA as well as the Farming Unions) alongside LANTRA (as the Sector Skills body for the land based and environmental industries) and relevant educational establishments such as IBERS Pwllpeirian.

II. How might the Panel improve the uptake of new entrants into the industry?

The Panel could improve the uptake of new entrants through advising on the design of relevant schemes under the Wales Rural Development Plan (RDP) and by highlighting examples of best practice.

It may be appropriate for Panel members to develop informal links with the Agricultural Wages Boards within the other Devolved Administrations in the UK.

III. Please outline how the Panel's work might contribute towards continuous skills development and the professionalization of the agricultural industry in Wales?

The Panel should have a clearly stated strategic goal of driving forward training and continuing skills development for those working in the agricultural industry as well as advising on the mechanisms required to ensure sufficient uptake. As part of its wider functions related to the operation of the agricultural sector the Panel will need to address the broader challenges posed by the concept of integrated natural resource management.

Developing a clear understanding of how the wise use of natural resources underpins the sustainability of long term food production should form a key part of continuing skills development. More emphasis should be placed on sustainable land management (in particular, how best to apply the principles at the level of the individual farm).

The Panel will need to forge strong links with the education and training sectors in Wales. Representatives from schools, the further & higher education sectors and relevant training providers will need to be engaged in the work of the Panel as the future of agriculture and related land based sectors such as forestry and tourism will depend on the career

signposting provided by these organisations as well as the skills and training they provide. The educational sector will also play a major role in attracting new entrants into agriculture in addition to building on existing skills and experience.

Sustainable land management involves balancing agricultural production with other provisioning and supporting services such as biodiversity, a continuing supply of ecosystem services and the well-being of rural communities. It needs to be supported by diverse knowledge exchange systems which draw on both scientific and local knowledge, in keeping with the principles of integrated land management. Natural Resources Wales would like to see established links between other land based sectors such as forestry.

IV. How could the Panel address the challenges that face the agricultural sector and utilise available opportunities in order to support the operation of businesses and the wider industry in Wales?

The Panel will have a crucial role to play in addressing a number of challenges, in particular the age profile of the agricultural workforce; the uptake of new technology; leadership and management; farm succession; financial/ business skills; the role of regulation; the impact of climate change and the need for more sustainable land management. It may also be able to play a key role in building on existing strengths and opportunities such as: strong husbandry and land based skills; links with rural communities; consumer demand for local produce and the advantages of developing an integrated approach that assists farmers develop their businesses whilst simultaneously improving their environmental performance. Natural Resources Wales would like to see stronger collaboration between farming communities and with other land management sectors and would be interested to work with the Panel, WG and others to enable this.

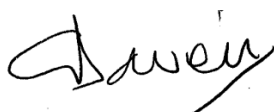
Natural Resources Wales would welcome the opportunity to engage with the Panel members in discussing how best to embed the concept of sustainable land management at all levels of the industry; strengthening the links between managing a successful agricultural business and the integrated management of natural resources.

Question V.

Natural Resources Wales does not wish to raise any additional issues in relation to this particular consultation.

Please do not hesitate to contact Dylan.L.Williams@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk should you wish to discuss any aspect of our response in more detail.

Yours sincerely,



CERI DAVIES

Executive Director for Knowledge, Strategy & Planning

Cyfarwyddwr Gweithredol Gwybodaeth, Strategaeth a Chynllunio

Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru / Natural Resources Wales

Ffôn /Tel: (029) 20466045

Ffôn symudol / Mobile: 07818008865

E-bost / E-mail: ceri.davies@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk ceri.davies@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk