



# Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF)

## Minutes

**Title of meeting:** Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF)

**Location:** Skype Meeting

**Date of Meeting:** 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020

**Present:**

Zoe Henderson, NRW (Chair)

Bob Vaughan, NRW

Steve Ormerod, NRW

Geraint Llyr Davies, NRW

Chris Blake, NRW

Dennis Matheson, TFA

Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru

Hedd Pugh, NFU Cymru

Anthony Geddes, Confor

Tim Kirk, Confor

Sian Thomas, Wales YFC

Marc Williams, NRW

John Browne, NRW

**Additional Attendees Present:**

Mydrian Harries, MAWW Fire and Rescue (Item 3 Only)

Dominic Driver, NRW (Item 7 Only)

Tom Jenkins, Forest Research (Item 7 Only)

Kate Beauchamp, Forest Research (Item 7 Only)

**Secretariat(s):**

Marc Williams (WLMF Agri-Pollution Co-ordinator, NRW)

**Apologies:**

Martyn Evans, NRW

Ruth Jenkins, NRW

## **Item 1 Introductions, Apologies and Declaration of Interest**

1. Zoe Henderson welcomed all to the Skype meeting noting apologies.
2. The chair thanked Steve Ormerod (NRW Board member and Chair of Wales Fisheries Forum and Wales Water Management Forum) for joining the meeting.
3. No declarations of interest were raised in respect of Agenda items to be considered.

## **Item 2 Minutes from the last meeting and any matters arising**

4. The Group reviewed the minutes from the September 2020 meeting and approved as a true record.
5. The Chair reviewed the Action Log, and the following comments were made:
  - February AP02: Mark Alexander to seek more information with regards to the emergency information pack, when this will become available and the information it is likely to contain.
    - *Marc Williams explained an email has been sent to Spencer Conlon for an update.*
  - February AP04: The Chair extended an invitation for Dr Ceris Jones to present a future meeting of the Forum.
    - *Rachel Lewis-Davies to invite Dr Ceris Jones to a future meeting when the new dates of meetings in 2021 are shared with the group.*

***AP December 01: Rachel Lewis-Davies to invite Dr Ceris Jones to a future WLMF meeting.***

***AP December 02: NRW to send invites of new dates for meetings to the members (Marc Williams, NRW)***

- May AP04: NRW to circulate further information to the group on Area Statements future engagement planning (Martyn Evans, NRW).

- *An update on Area Statements will be provided under NRW Updates item on the agenda.*
- September AP03: Raise with Ceri Witchard's team regarding the urgency to publish guidance on Ash Dieback for landowners (Ruth Jenkins, NRW).
  - *An update to be provided under NRW Updates item on the agenda.*
- September AP04: Bob Vaughan to discuss the timescales with James Owen and to organise a workshop to coordinate ideas and evidence.
  - *Bob Vaughan has spoken to James Owen but has not provided any dates for a workshop. Bob will follow this up and will inform the group.*
- September AP05: Explore another agricultural and forestry stakeholder event on Area Statements on a virtual basis (Huwel Manley/Martyn Evans, NRW).
  - *An update to be provided under NRW Updates item in the agenda.*

### Item 3 Deliberate Grass Fires Update

6. Mydrian Harries, Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue, is Chair of the multi-agency Wales Joint Arson Group (JAG). Mydrian provided a presentation to the members on deliberate grass fires in Wales. Mydrian gave an overview of the Fire and Rescue Services in Wales and showed a number slides on arson data. Deliberate and accidental fires in Wales have reduced in Wales since 2002, with 28,464 deliberate fires recorded in 2003-2004 compared to 6,047 in 2019-2020. The reduction has been achieved by a number of factors such as school education, regulatory changes and awareness by the police.
7. In 2015 there were significant grass fires in the South Wales area due to the dry Spring. A Task Force was introduced in 2016 to address deliberate fires across Wales. A graph was shown of the number of grass fires by months since 2015 and they are predominately weather dependent. There has been a lot of work to remove the stigma that all the deliberate fires are started by young people. In some areas this is the case but in most cases the Fire and Rescue service deal with fires started by farmers or land owners with very little means of control.
8. The Fire and Rescue service work with partners, stakeholders and agencies to gather intelligence on where they are occurring, are they repeat offenders etc. and to be ahead of the game to reduce the impact.
9. The latest version of the Wales Arson Reduction Strategy (v4) was produced in January 2020 with the first being released in 2007. There are five key priorities for Wales highlighted in the Strategy:
  - Protect our communities
  - Educating our communities both young and old
  - Improving land management across Wales

- Share meaningful and consistent information
- Marketing our work and communicating with our communities

10. Improving land management across Wales was discussed in more detail which would be relevant to the group. Reviewing controlled burning legislation and codes of practice at times when burning is allowed with stakeholders is important, along with raising awareness and changing attitudes within the farming community towards controlled burning. The Strategic Arson Reduction Board (SARB) have investigated mechanisms to penalise serious abusers of the burning code and have developed with WG.
11. Land management pilot trails have been undertaken to look at reducing deliberately set grass and wildfires and manage fuel loads, particularly a bracken trial in Erwood. The group are developing mechanisms to enable the Police to identify land ownership quickly and effectively to deploy resources at the right time and location. SARB will work in conjunction with WG to both identify and provide support in the development of future farm support schemes, and with the Wales Wildlife Crime Enforcement Group to assure the collective work makes a bigger impact in avoiding damage to the countryside. By having conversations with these groups is helpful to identify any similarities with fly-tipping or pollution incidents that are occurring in the same location, whether it is behaviours with a person at that place.
12. In 2016 Operation DAWNS GLAW, new task force, was created to combat deliberate grass fires, mainly in South Wales but will be relevant for all of Wales. As part of the school education programme over 60,000 children and young people receive a fire safety message from the Fire and Rescue Service every year. However, that has been different this year due to Covid.
13. Looking forward the group would like to work more with the farming community to have control measures in place and mitigate wildfires from occurring. Sharing any information with WG and Cross Compliance on farmland fires. They would like a partner approach to their arson prevention campaigns. Mydrian encouraged any of the WLMF members to join the JAG to partake or even as observers they will welcome that in attempt to reduce deliberate fires for them to get in contact.
14. Bob Vaughan asked if the messages from the group have been fed into WG policy relating to the Sustainable Farming Scheme and the Agricultural White Paper. Mydrian confirmed they are involved, and the Fire and Rescue Service are now consulted with pre-planning applications on major construction projects.
15. Geraint Davies highlighted that as a farmer this should be within the future land management scheme where farmers are managing the ground and supported by WG. Geraint has experience responding to grassfires being part of the Fire and Rescue service in Bala. Schemes being designed at the time failed to deliver the right heights in vegetation along with a lack of grazing has contributed to fires in uplands.
16. Rachel Lewis-Davies wanted to emphasise the importance of livestock grazing in open areas, but to also highlight that fires occur on military training grounds in the uplands. Through the work with the SARB and engagement with WG there is an understanding of the need to support upland grazing regimes through the future policy.

17. Anthony Geddes agreed that there has been an increase in burning particularly on bracken land. From a forestry perspective, harvested sites present a fire risk along with younger tree plantations. There needs to be clear guidance on fire controls as part of the woodland creation scheme to manage the potential risks. Mydrian Harries would like to have those wider discussions to identify the vulnerable sites and potential risks to provide messages to the public.
18. Steve Ormerod highlighted there are three major risks to fires occurring including reduce grazing, air pollution changing fuel loads (particularly with nitrogen deposition increases the cover of bracken) and the risk of climate change. Steve questioned whether the three major risks have been factored into the risk assessment on how to deploy assets and in communication programmes. Mydrian Harries confirmed the group are having these wider conversations and how to communicate these messages to land managers and the public to reduce fires.

***AP December 03: Contact Mydrian Harries if you would like further information or to be part of the engagement to address deliberate grass fires in Wales (All)***

## **Item 4 NRW Update**

19. Marc Williams mentioned that NRW have recruited for the WLMF Specialist Advisor role and Bronwen Martin will be starting on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2020.
20. Bob Vaughan provided the updates from NRW to the group. There was a brief update on Avian Influenza with NRW guidance being produced to their staff to follow. All Wales is in a Prevention Zone and next week new measures are being introduced for all poultry and captive birds to be housed indoors.
21. NRW fieldwork were put on hold during the all Wales 'Fire-break' Lockdown, but staff are now visiting sites and catching up fieldwork that were postponed. NRW staff have been very careful in the way they have been operating and following the guidance by Welsh Government.
22. Brexit is becoming a big concern again and NRW are continuing to work with WG to prepare what may happen. A major project has been undertaken to assess the impacts and risks to both NRW and businesses that we operate with.
23. NRW are preparing to provide any advice and guidance to WG on taking forward the Sustainable Farming Scheme. Expert groups have been formed internally bringing together technical specialists to suggest ideas and feed that back to WG as a one voice approach from NRW. NRW are happy to share those views with the members and are willing to have discussions.

***AP December 04: Share information on NRW positions regarding future scheme developments to the members (Bob Vaughan, NRW)***

24. SoNaRR2020 summary report will be published on 18<sup>th</sup> December with the main chapters being published in March 2021. This will be published as web-based content along with a pdf version.

25. There was a brief update on Area Statements (AS). It was highlighted there are sector specific information for farmers, foresters and land managers available on the AS website and explains how the Natural Resources Policy and AS are relevant to the sector. The Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS) proposes that there is an opportunity to draw on the AS and inform on potential spatial priorities and identify the scale of the opportunities. NRW are exploring the role AS could have with the SFS and an internal workshop was held. One of the key outcomes from the workshop was using the WLMF as a critical sounding board to help develop collaborative opportunities and understand the perspectives of farmers and land managers.
26. There is a proposal to organise a further workshop with the WLMF and some other national organisations connected to the land sector to be held early in the New Year. There have been a number of concerns raised by WLMF members and other organisations that they are unable to attend every area workshop.
27. NRW are considering creating a Wales Information Portal to capture the wealth and variety of spatial data used to provide context to AS. NRW are keen to explore this with the WLMF at the earliest opportunity ways of synthesising, interpreting and presenting information that both NRW and WG hold to inform farmers' and land managers' future management options.

***AP December 05: Circulate Area Statement briefing to all members (Marc Williams, NRW)***

28. NRW have been undertaking a major review of information and data on SAC rivers across Wales along with the advice being provided to developers and local authorities. NRW have uncovered some issues with the Wye data, but further analysis of the data is currently being undertaken. All this information will be collated into a report on all the SAC rivers which will be produced over the next month.

## **Item 5 Update from other WLMF Members**

29. NFU Cymru: Recently held a successful Net Zero seminar for members and stakeholders. Over the autumn NFU Cymru undertook a survey and published a report on the Vision for Welsh Upland Farming. This was to better understand upland farmers contribution to communities, environment, economy, social and cultural well-being, along with highlighting their concerns. There are concerns amongst members regarding notices to cut larch trees on their land due to phytophthora with only a 5 months' timescale. Tim Kirk highlighted that this also applies to foresters and there is a shortage of machinery to complete works by end of March. John Browne explained there is information attached to the notice to contact NRW for further advice.

***AP December 06: NRW to provide NFU Cymru with a short briefing on larch tree notices to be circulated to their membership (NRW)***

30. Wales YFC: Due to Covid-19 Wales YFC members have been unable to meet and the organisation have struggled with membership. They have been able to create virtual competitions for their members. NRW are working with Wales YFC to create club night activities that can be done virtually.
31. Confor: Highlighted there has been a lack of output from WG to date regarding Ash Dieback. There is a significant need for WG to speed up work and dealing with the

issues on Ash Dieback. There has been an increase in felling actions taking place, licenced or not, due to dangerous trees. Glastir Woodland Creation Window 10 are now open for applications with a positive uptake when discussing with farmers and landowners. There is a greater interest in tree planting from the number of applications. The timber market remains to be relatively buoyant with fencing and construction markets are supporting that. They are waiting to see what the market will be like after Brexit. There were concerns raised regarding Sustainable Drainage (SuDs) being considered with forestry applications.

***AP December 07: Add Sustainable Drainage to the agenda for the next meeting (Marc Williams, NRW)***

32. TFA: Dennis Matheson joined two North East Area Statement workshops and was disappointed at the lack of local farmers attending. There was a lack of understanding of tenancy issues, particularly with accessing the new Sustainable Farming Scheme or woodland planting. TFA are currently undertaking work after the announcement by the treasury to cut the funding to Scotland and Wales. If the funding is cut and Wales cannot match the EU funding into Environment Schemes, these will be lost.

## **Item 6 Fora Updates**

33. The WLMF Sub Group on agricultural pollution met in early November after a short pause and the main focus is on the priority recommendations that were chosen by the members. The meeting looked at solutions and how to move these recommendations forward to improve water quality. The minutes for the group are now available on the NRW website after web accessibility issues over the summer.

34. Steve Ormerod provided an update on the Fisheries Forum. The forum has expanded recently with more members joining the group. Bob Vaughan provided a presentation of sustainable land management going forward and agricultural regulations. There was a report from Gary White on incident management and the targets for responding to incidents. There was a report and discussion on accessing rivers and how NRW are resolving some issues with access and recreation.

35. Steve Ormerod also provided an update on the Wales Water Management Forum. Three core issues discussed in the meeting were persistent bioaccumulative pollutants in the water environment, the River Basin Management Plans, and water resources and water transfers in Western Britain.

## **Item 7 WLMF T&F Group on Woodland Creation Update**

36. Dominic Driver briefly explained that the WLMF commissioned a Task and Finish Group to identify recommendations and produce a report on Woodland Creation. Dominic Driver highlighted that the recommendations are reasonable but could have been more radical. Chris Blake, NRW, wanted to thank Tom Jenkins and Kate Beauchamp from Forest Research for preparing the report.

37. Bob Vaughan highlighted there is still a lot of misunderstanding on what needs to be done and this report will help move forward the work and clarity around woodland creation.

38. Dennis Matheson mentioned that he commented on the draft report and as an organisation they would sign up to the report as it is very thorough. However, that does not mean they sign up to the concept of woodland creation and they will only support this if it does not impact food security, existing habitats and the landlord tenant's system. At the moment TFA feel all these will be adversely impacted and how to resolve these issues need to be addressed.
39. Rachel Lewis-Davies was very pleased to comment on the draft report and their views reflected in the report. Rachel agrees with Dennis on the concerns with the tenancy sector and the need to explore more of the risks to tenant businesses. A key recommendation from the Vision of the Welsh Upland Farming report was the need for WG and NRW to identify a more balanced framework for long-term decisions.
40. Tom Jenkins commented they have tried to take account of the recent comments from TFA and to emphasise the potential impacts on the sizeable, important and unique population of tenant farmers.
41. Chris Blake wanted to thank everyone for their contribution to the T&F Group meetings. The group has pulled together existing information and data along with a balance of opinions. The report is a comprehensive summary but now there is a need for a T&F Group to deliver the work and move forward the recommendations into policy.
42. Zoe Henderson considered whether a forward-looking plan should be included in the covering note to achieve the aims. The WLMF would want to see feedback and next steps moving forward from WG on how to deliver the actions in the report. Chris Blake highlighted that to deliver the actions there needs to be resource to move them forward. It was agreed to include the need for endorsement, resources and a framework in the covering note to WG. Chris Blake suggested whether this work could be delivered as part of the Green Recovery, which is resourced.

***AP December 08: Zoe Henderson and Chris Blake to brief Sir David Henshaw of the report and could this be a priority under Green Recovery***

43. There is a need to explore non-governmental funding to support woodland creation and NRW have been pushing WG over their future SFS scheme as it is clear the money will not be there to cover all the aspirations. Geraint Davies highlighted that important values including sustainable food production, culture and language needs to fit in with this work of woodland creation. Zoe Henderson had a concern that there was very little mention to what the woodlands are used for. Rachel Lewis-Davies mentioned one of the recommendations recognises a balanced policy framework to reflect wider objectives. NFU Cymru are looking at how to achieve the tree planting targets and how farmers can contribute without impacting food production and farm businesses.
44. NFU Cymru highlighted that the group and NRW will need to think very carefully how the report and messages are communicated publicly. The farming community are going to be key players for woodland creation to meet these targets and the language needs to be right.
45. All the members have considered and endorsed the report. This will formally be submitted to NRW for consideration, including what to submit to WG and how to use the report to promote changes that will have a real impact.

## Item 8 Details of upcoming meetings

46. Dates will be confirmed shortly, and invites will be sent to members.

## Item 9 AOB

47. The consultation for Ammonia Screening has now ended and NRW are working on the comments and responses from various organisations. An update on number of responses and Betterment will be sent to the members when they are available.

48. The Green Recovery report was launched last week and covered a number of topics including Nature Based Solutions, transforming socio-economic systems, circular economy and tourisms. The group will lead further proposals in February 2021 where there is an opportunity to suggest additional measures. Rachel Lewis-Davies raised that NRW will need to consider very carefully that this work is not a call for a collection of projects.

***AP December 09: Circulate the Green Recovery Reports to all the members (Marc Williams, NRW)***

***AP December 10: Add Green Recovery to the agenda for the next meeting (Marc Williams, NRW)***

## Close meeting