

# Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF) Sub Group on Agricultural Pollution

## Minutes

### **Title of meeting:**

Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF) Sub Group on Agricultural Pollution

**Location:** Microsoft Teams Meeting

**Date of Meeting:** 20<sup>th</sup> September 2021

### **Present:**

Zoe Henderson, NRW (Chair)

Dennis Matheson, TFA

Bob Vaughan, NRW

Sarah Jones, Dwr Cymru

Marc Williams, NRW

James Ruggeri, HCC

Edward Davies, NRW

Chris Mills, WEL

Spencer Conlon, Welsh Government

Matthew Walters, Welsh Government

Nichola Salter, NRW

Einir Williams, FC

Charlotte Priddy, AHDB

Shane Thomas, CFF

Fraser McAuley, CLA

Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru

Geraint Hamer, Welsh Government

Bernard Griffiths, FUW

Ruth Johnston, NRW

Eryl Roberts, Farming Connect

**Additional Attendees Present:**

Gail Davies-Walsh, Afonydd Cymru (Item 3 only)

**Secretariat:**

Bronwen Martin, NRW

**Apologies:**

Creighton Harvey, CFF

Kate Snow, United Utilities

Sarah Hetherington, NRW

Katy Simmons, NRW

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

1. Zoe Henderson welcomed all to the Microsoft Teams meeting and noted apologies. Please note that the meeting is being recorded for the purpose of capturing the minutes and the digital file will be deleted once the meeting minutes have been approved.
2. Zoe welcomed Gail Davies-Walsh (Afonydd Cymru) and Eryl Roberts (Farming Connect) to the meeting.
3. No declarations of interest were raised in respect of Agenda items.
  - NB: All members of the group have completed declaration of interest forms already but should also declare if they have an interest in anything on the agenda.

## **Item 2 Review of Minutes and Actions**

4. The Chair confirmed that once the meeting minutes have been reviewed and formally agreed by the group, they will be published on the NRW for the public to access. Therefore, it is important that the minutes are an accurate record of the meetings.
5. Bronwen mentioned that comments have been received from Creighton Harvey, CFF which are in the process of being resolved.
6. The group reviewed the previous meeting minutes from 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2021. No further comments were received regarding the minutes from the August meeting.
7. Bronwen Martin, NRW shared her screen for the group to review the outstanding actions.

### Item 3 Matters Arising

8. An opportunity for the group to discuss any matters arising from the previous meeting minutes, Update Paper or relevant documents. Members can report significant information, comments, or clarifications to the group.
9. Update on Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Source Apportionment work: Bob mentioned that this work is progressing with the modelling for the other rivers. Perhaps a more detailed update will be available at the next meeting.
10. WLMF Sub Group Newsletter: the draft WLMF Sub Group Newsletter '*Our Land, Water and Air*' was sent to members to review ahead of the meeting. Bronwen said she would pass on any feedback to Katy and her team. Zoe suggested members should provide comments by the end of the week (24<sup>th</sup> September 2021) so that it can be finalised and circulated. No other comments were received in respect of the draft newsletter.
11. Matters resulting from the previous meeting: Zoe suggested that the minutes were comprehensive. Bronwen welcomed feedback regarding the minutes and asked whether more brief minutes are preferred. The meeting minutes are published on the external NRW website, so the level of detail is perhaps more important for those that do not attend the meetings. Zoe said a balance between detailed minutes and condensed minutes would be better.

### Item 4 Afonydd Cymru Presentation

12. Zoe welcomed Gail Davies-Walsh, Afonydd Cymru to the meeting who will be giving the group an insight into the work of the organisation.
13. Gail shared a presentation and introduced Afonydd Cymru which is an umbrella organisation representing the six Rivers Trusts in Wales. Afonydd Cymru has many roles including:
  - Advocacy role with Welsh Government and NRW
  - Support the six Trusts and assist with their development
  - Lead partnerships across Wales
  - Continue restoration and maintenance of our rivers, water quality and freshwater ecosystems improvement
  - Deliver improvement of water quality across Wales
14. Gail mentioned that Welsh rivers are failing with only 43% at Good Ecological Status, and there has only been 4% improvement in the last WFD cycle. There is a historical legacy of issues which come from industrial pollution, mine water pollution and weirs and obstructions. Current problems include agricultural pollution, CSO discharges, pesticides/herbicides, and culverts. Gail suggested future things to consider pharmaceuticals, microplastics, new chemicals, new standards and people power driving improvements and change.

15. Gail discussed the ongoing fish passage and habitat improvement work across Wales including surveys and restoration projects.
16. Gail mentioned that the Trusts are also involved with agriculture. Rivers Trust farm advisors are working with farmers and landowners across Wales with projects covering:
  - Soil management (soil structure, organic matter levels, nutrient levels)
  - Pesticide handling and storage
  - Farm infrastructure (grant supporting on-farm improvements such as clean and dirty water separation, fencing etc)
  - Livestock access to the watercourse (fencing, alternative drinking water stations etc)
17. The Trusts prioritise their activities to the sectors they work with. Agriculture is very variable across the Welsh landscape therefore the issues and challenges are also variable. The Trusts also work hard to make sure there is learning and knowledge transfer between them.
18. Gail outlined some current ongoing agriculture projects across Wales and suggested there are opportunities for others to engage with these projects.
19. Gail highlighted some of the work they do with the agricultural sector:
  - Rivers trusts have a high success rate in terms of farm engagement
  - Never find a farm where there isn't anything to improve
  - In many cases, small modifications make significant difference
  - Farm advice and management needs to be bespoke to the geographical area and to the farm
  - Huge demand for support – farmers are welcoming the rivers trusts support in applications for funding and in the grant support they give directly
  - Rivers trusts will not grant funding to farms where there is clear non-compliance
20. The Trusts are also working on things to support Natural Capital through data collection and mapping. This will ultimately help their overall land management delivery and identify opportunities. Some project examples include Natural Flood Management (storage ponds, tree planting and leaky dams) and Biodiversity (Net Gain Planning Tool, River Condition Assessments and biodiversity metric).
21. In conclusion, Gail summarised the Trusts everyday activities (e.g. farm advice and management, woodland creation, nutrient offsetting, and flood management) and things they are seeking to achieve (natural capital enhancement, biodiversity improvement, water quality improvement and water resource management).

22. Eimir Williams, Farming Connect mentioned that they will be holding water quality events in 48 catchments and asked Gail if she would be happy for Bronwen to share her contact details so that they could discuss the possibility of collaborative working; Gail agreed for her details to be shared.

***AP September 01: Bronwen Martin, NRW to share Gail Davies-Walsh's contact details with the group.***

23. Bob said he is interested in engaging with Afonydd Cymru regarding 'Beyond the farm gate'. Gail agreed that there is some joining up to do and more communication is needed. Directly linking the work of the Trusts will also be hugely beneficial.

24. Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru said celebrating good practice is important and motivating. Rachel asked which public good and natural capital are they specifically mapping and commented on the supply chain work and acknowledged that a lot of that is happening across the border in England and it probably works well where the supply chain is integrated however it is perhaps not the case in Wales. NFU Cymru have focussed on 'Brand Wales' and the development of the sustainable brand values programme, which may be of interest to Afonydd Cymru. Gail said they recognise the supply chain differences between England and Wales and there has been some good work on this to understand the situation, but they are now exploring different potential contacts and contracts for Wales.

25. Fraser McAuley, CLA asked what the name of the project was which was mentioned about working with supply chains in England. Gail said this was called the 'Core Tools Initiative' which is being driven by the catchment-based approach of the Rivers Trusts in England.

26. Bernard Griffiths, FUW asked why there was a big gap in mid Wales and north east Wales within the map of the current projects. Bernard also mentioned that this group has been working on a joined-up approach and identified catchments which are 'problem areas' and asked how we can make sure farmers are not bombarded with different advice from many sources. Gail said this area is covered by the Severn and data could not be obtained because of internal structural changes in the last few weeks. The Severn have 18 farm advisors and there are projects within these areas.

27. Dennis Matheson, TFA discussed two newspaper articles he read recently; one regarding river pollution across the border in England and the second regarding the new rules protecting fish stocks.

28. Chris Mills, WEL said without some form of masterplan, working together will not work. There needs to be an overall plan in order to coordinate things, help understand what other organisations are doing and collaborate to deliver things.

## **Item 5 Nutrient Loading Project Update**

29. Marc Williams, NRW provided a brief update on the Nutrient Loading Project progress thus far.

30. Marc gave a background to the project aims and outlined what the two work packages involve. Funding for the project is available from Welsh Government's soil branch and ADAS is the contractor delivering the work.
31. ADAS has started Work Package 1 which is looking at the constraints to nutrient recycling and will quantify the physical, land, soil, management, seasonal and climatic barriers to the application of inorganic and organic materials to land. Work Package 2 will include an assessment of current nutrient use, including organic manures (livestock slurry and farmyard manure) and other non-farm organic materials.
32. Regarding the project deliverables, ADAS has started Work Package 1 and they are aiming to complete this by 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021. ADAS aim to complete Work Package 2 by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022. All of the information and findings will be collated into a final report which will be complete by 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022.
33. Marc said progress meetings have been organised to stay updated on the advancement of the project and allow us to provide further guidance, data, support etc. Further updates will be provided to the group as the project progresses and the final report will be shared with the group. Options for Work Package 3 can then be considered.
34. Marc mentioned that NRW have discussed the data gaps and limitations with ADAS and these will be highlighted in the report.
35. Zoe asked whether there has been any input from members of the group. Marc said that the project specification was shared with the group earlier in the year and members were asked at the time whether they had any information which could feed into this work. No comments were received at the time, but Marc reiterated this request.
36. Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru acknowledged that this work will only be as good as the data that it is based on. It is really important to clearly identify the existing gaps because there could be some false conclusions drawn. Looking at cattle numbers for example, there may be one 'keeper', but they may be distributed across a number of holdings; therefore, capturing this type of real-time data is going to be difficult. Rachel said all of the caveats will also need to be clearly reported. Marc agreed with Rachel's comments, identifying caveats and limitations has been included in the project brief.

Rachel mentioned that as industry stakeholders, NFU Cymru have had the opportunity to sense check some of the Welsh Government evidence and scenario work on the development of future policy. Rachel suggested that perhaps a future stakeholder meeting could be arranged to review the Nutrient Loading Project work. Marc thanked Rachel for the suggestion and said this possibility could be explored with ADAS at the next progress meeting.

37. Now that the project has commenced, Zoe suggested that the original project proposal could be recirculated to members as well as a list of some of the gaps already identified. Marc said he would send the information to members.

***AP September 02: Marc to circulate the Nutrient Loading Project proposal document.***

## Item 6 Round Table Discussion

38. This is an opportunity for members to update the group regarding the recent or ongoing work of their organisation, discuss current concerns of their members and highlight future plans or events (e.g. [Winter Fair](#)).

39. Fraser McAuley, CLA said the CLA have responded to the various recent consultations and reviews. CLA are looking at their agenda for the Welsh Winter Fair and can share that once it has been confirmed.

Fraser mentioned that there is going to be some sort of announcement from Lesley Griffiths MS tomorrow (21<sup>st</sup> September 2021) and wondered whether others had an insight into what it was about. No comments were received from the group.

40. Bernard Griffiths, FUW mentioned that he attended the Gelli Aur slurry event last week and he thought it was very interesting. Bernard said he had asked whether Gelli Aur had had the chance to feed into the Senedd review of The Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) (Wales) Regulations 2021, John Owen said yes they had. John requested that people should try to use our platforms to try and persuade the minister to visit Gelli Aur to see the work in place. Bernard suggested that everyone should also try to persuade Paul Davies' group to visit Gelli Aur.

41. Charlotte Priddy, AHDB said that she is managing three projects looking at a net zero dairy farm and a few others on a similar vein. Charlotte suggested there may be an opportunity to share progress at a future meeting, perhaps December or January time.

42. Chris Mills, WEL said WEL have also submitted a response to the committee review on the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations. However, Chris mentioned that there is an issue that this review is taking place at the same time as the Judicial Review. WEL have questioned whether it is appropriate that a review is carried out at the same time, as it does have legal implications for evidence that is given to the review.

43. Spencer Conlon, Welsh Government said that the committee review and the Judicial Review (JR) process are ongoing. Spencer said he is happy to answer any questions that he can but cannot comment on the review or the JR process.

44. Einir Williams, Farming Connect said Farming Connect have water quality events coming up covering the 48 failing catchments. They have narrowed down 7 priority catchments which have been selected where past events have not been undertaken.

The Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations communications plan is ongoing with workshops and webinars planned over winter and are coworking with AHDB and HCC on some of these. Workshops are planned on a 1-to-1 basis for dairy farmers to work through the NVZ workbook, but this has not yet been finalised.

In terms of Winter Fair presence, Farming Connect will be there and will hopefully have a presence on the upper circle of the Cattle Ring. Farming Connect will also be coworking with Welsh Government and RPW in the Pavilion.

Einir said that the Farming Connect Development Officers have been given the go-ahead to restart visiting livestock markets which will be a massive help to start conversations with farmers on the ground.

45. James Ruggeri, HCC mentioned that HCC are continuing to work on their 'Welsh Way' brand which sustainability and pollution all feed into. HCC will be coworking with Farming Connect wherever possible to support them.
46. Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru said they are working to develop their presence at the Winter Fair, and it will be really good to see members face-to-face after such a long period.

Last week, NFU Cymru launched their '[Growing Together Strategy](#)' campaign for sustainably increasing tree cover in Wales. NFU Cymru are also busy preparing for their presence for COP26 and are working alongside the UK farming unions. NFU Cymru are also hoping to have some events or focus for a Countryside COP leading up to the COP26 event.

Rachel mentioned that over the weekend, it was reported that the only UK fertiliser manufacturer has stopped production due to the rising cost of fuel which is impacting the production of CO2 which is needed in the supply chain. This emphasises the benefits of organic fertiliser and the circular economy approach to farm management. Rachel said that this is something the group will want to keep an eye on.

47. Sarah Jones, DCWW said that her team is currently working on different proposals for the rest of their AMP period. Some of the farmer groups in the Brecon Beacons Catchment have been doing some risk mapping and opportunity mapping which might link to the Nutrient Loading Project. Sarah said she could introduce Marc to her colleague Jamie to see if there is any support they can give.

***AP September 03: Sarah Jones, DCWW to introduce Marc Williams to her colleague Jamie to see if there is any support, they can give regarding the Nutrient Loading Project.***

Sarah mentioned that they are working with Farming Connect and have a few Agrisgôp groups linked to priority catchments. DCWW also responded to the Committee Review which highlighted the risks to the business such as biosolids operations.

48. Dennis Matheson, TFA said they have also responded to the Senedd Committee Review. TFA Cymru welcome NFU Cymru's 'Growing together' report on tree planting and recalled that the effect of tree planting on tenants is highlighted within the document.

Dennis discussed a situation where someone applied for planning permission for an extension on their slurry lagoon which was rejected by the Local Authority due to environmental concerns. There is a worry that if this sort of situation comes up, getting planning through to comply with the rules by the deadline could be seriously compromised.

Regarding the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations, Dennis said he spoken to the landlord as recommended by the FAQ for Tenanted Land document. Dennis said the landlord's position has not changed from the last 20 years and they cannot afford to

and will not replace or upgrade any tenant's slurry stores where they are liable; this means arbitration.

TFA Cymru are still engaging with Welsh Government regarding tenancy concerns but have not managed to make any progress.

49. Ruth Johnston, NRW said she received an email from Gwyn Jones, NRW who is involved with commons. The email is regarding the LADER/NRW funded project to develop a results-based approach to supporting the sustainable management of commons in Wales ends on the 31st of October 2021 and a series of webinars have been organised. Ruth said she would forward the information to Bronwen for her to share with the group.

***AP September 04: Ruth Johnston, NRW to share Gwyn Jones' email with Bronwen for her to share with the group.***

***AP September 05: Bronwen Martin, NRW to share Gwyn Jones' email with the group regarding details of the upcoming commons LADER/NRW funded project webinars.***

Ruth mentioned that she has changed roles slightly and is now going to be leading on Ofwat's price review 2024 and the setting of investment for the next asset management programme period but this relates to land use in terms of things like nature based solutions and linking up with the Sustainable Farming Scheme.

50. Bob said in addition to the Winter Fair, there is also BlasCymru / TasteWales on 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> October 2021 at ICC Wales, Newport. Regarding the Senedd Committee review on the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations, Bob said NRW did not submit any comments because our position is clear in the public domain. However, NRW has been asked to attend on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021 to give evidence, Bob understood that WEL and the farming unions have been invited in November.
51. Zoe suggested that it would be nice to organise something for us to meet up and say 'hello' at the Winter Fair. Bob suggested organising some tea and coffee for those who are attending. Marc mentioned that NRW will have a small stand at the fair.

## **Item 7 Discussion regarding in-person site/farm visit**

52. Following the results of the recent poll, Zoe welcomed the group to suggest options for a site/farm visit in October.

53. Some potential locations for the October meeting in October include:

- Coleg Cambria – Llysfasi (north east Wales)
- Coleg Sir Gâr's Gelli Aur agricultural campus (south west Wales)
- Water Treatment Plant north of Merthyr (south Wales)
- Possibly a Farming Connect demonstration site/farm

54. Sarah Jones, DCWW mentioned that a visit to a Water Treatment Plant would need to be put on pause due to the current restrictions that are in place for operational sites.

55. Zoe said the team will work towards organising an in-person meeting for October.

### **Item 8 Any Other Business**

56. Zoe mentioned that the next Sub Group meeting is scheduled for 18th October 2021.

57. No other comments were received.

### **Close meeting**