

# 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:** 13<sup>th</sup> December 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

Einir Williams, FC

Shane Thomas, CFF

Geraint Hamer, Welsh Government

Bernard Griffiths, FUW

Ruth Johnston, NRW

Katy Simmons, NRW

Creighton Harvey, Carmarthen Fishermen's Federation

Chris Thomas, NRW

Fraser McAuley, CLA

Andrew Chambers, Welsh Government

Sarah Hetherington, NRW

Elizabeth Franks, Hafren Dyfrdwr

**Additional Attendees Present:**

None

**Secretariat:**

Bronwen Martin, NRW

**Apologies:**

Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru

Charlotte Priddy, AHDB

Kate Snow, United Utilities

Spencer Conlon, Welsh Government

## **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. 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.
3. Zoe welcomed Chris Thomas, NRW to the group. Chris is the Lead Advisor for the Dairy Project and has joined the group as a direct contact for the Dairy Project.

## **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. The group reviewed the previous meeting minutes from 15<sup>th</sup> November 2021. No comments were received regarding the minutes from the November meeting.
6. Bronwen Martin, NRW shared her screen for the group to review the outstanding actions. The following updates are of note:
  - AP Aug 07: Bob and Zoe to draft a letter on behalf of the group to the Minister regarding the FAQ document and issues around tenancies

- Bob thanked Dennis for providing information. Bob is in the process of drafting a letter for Zoe to review. Bob will also discuss the letter with Welsh Government colleagues prior to sending the letter to the Minister so that they are aware of the topics covered within it.
  - AP Nov 01: NRW to circulate the list of priority recommendations to the group.
- This action is linked to the suggestion from Chris Mills during the November meeting to look at the group's objectives/outcomes and map what the Sub Group member organisations are doing to help achieve these goals. Ed has reviewed the recommendations from the [WLMF Sub Group Interim Report \(2018\)](#). Ed suggested that there is some work to be done to update these recommendations, so they are more relevant and reflect the changes and developments which have happened since the report was first published. Ed is working on collating a list of objectives based on the priority recommendations and then in the longer term perhaps look at putting together another report to include the progress made to date.

### Item 3 Matters Arising

7. Zoe welcomed the group to discuss any matters arising from the previous meeting minutes, Update Paper or relevant documents.
8. Fraser McAuley, CLA asked NRW for a quick update regarding the phosphate work. Bob said that the work on the River Wye is continuing and NRW have requested some amendments to the way that some of the apportionment is being done. An update on the Wye sub-catchment position should be available soon. Work on some of the other SAC rivers is ongoing and we should start to see some results coming out in the New Year. NRW have also had discussions with some Local Authorities and programmers to look at nutrient modelling.

Fraser mentioned that some CLA members have experienced real issues regarding the planning process and obtaining permission but that is an aside from the actual state of the rivers. Fraser said CLA have provided their members with a guidance note on Nutrient Neutrality which helps people identify the problems earlier on in the planning process. Fraser confirmed that the WLMF Sub Group and other groups help keep up to date with these matters. Bob asked whether this CLA Guidance Note is available to share wider. Fraser said it was intended just for CLA members but would check whether a copy could be shared with this group.

#### ***AP December 01: Fraser McAuley, CLA to check whether a copy of the Nutrient Neutrality Guidance Note could be shared with this group.***

Dennis Matheson, TFA mentioned an article in the Farmer's Guardian regarding the nutrients in the River Wye. Dennis summarised some of the claims made in the article and asked whether NRW has responded. Bob said NRW is considering whether to respond directly to the committee. NRW was expecting to be asked to provide further evidence to the committee but this has not happened yet.

Creighton Harvey, CFF mentioned that WEL have received a letter from the committee asking for responses to two questions, the letter also suggests that they might be calling people before the committee again in the future.

Ed confirmed that an invitation has been extended to DCWW representatives along with NRW water quality colleagues involved with the SAC River work, to come to the next WLMF Sub group meeting.

9. Zoe gave a brief overview of the SAC River Oversight Group which she has been invited to sit on. The group is run by Andy Fraser, Welsh Government which focusses on phosphates and modelling. Zoe has extended an invite for Andy to join a future WLMF Sub Group meeting to discuss this group and the Nutrient Management Boards across Wales. Zoe mentioned that they have set up a small group who have been looking at planning and the affects sewage and phosphate. They will also be looking at agriculture and Zoe has suggested that the WLMF Sub Group could be helpful.
10. No other matters were raised by the group.

## **Item 4 Winter Fair Discussion**

11. Marc Williams, NRW gave a brief overview of NRW's activities and experience of the Winter Fair. Clare Pillman (Chief Executive, NRW) attended both days; on the Monday Clare engaged with several people at the HCC breakfast event and then met with quite a few representatives on the Tuesday including those from FUW, NFU Cymru and CLA. Zoe asked whether Marc felt that agricultural pollution was high on people's agendas at the Fair. Marc said there were more discussions around trees and woodlands more so than agricultural pollution.
12. Einir Williams, Farming Connect said that colleagues who attended said it was lovely to see people in person again. Farming Connect colleagues who were present on the Welsh Government stand reported that there were a high number of enquiries about the Sustainable Farming Scheme. In terms of Farming Connect, enquiries about agricultural pollution were not very prevalent.
13. Dennis Matheson, TFA said it was great to talk face to face. Dennis said the TFA met with the Minister and colleagues including Vicky Jones from Welsh Government. TFA had interesting discussions around forestry. Dennis also met with Powys County Council and this meeting confirmed that there is a real worry that council farms will be sold due to consequences of the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations.
14. Fraser McAuley, CLA agreed that it was a good opportunity to meet people in person. Fraser said he and his colleagues really appreciated the time spent with those they had meetings with. Overall, it was a positive few days and has got people excited for the Royal Welsh Show next year.
15. Sarah Jones, DCWW said her colleagues went to the Fair and they had an exhibition van and a stand. The team said there was probably less direct engagement with farmers at the Fair this year, but they had some meaningful conversations with stakeholders and representatives.
16. Zoe suggested that perhaps people need to start thinking of plans for next years' Royal Welsh Show and even the spring event, as sometimes things are left rather late. Zoe explained that the feature county for the Royal Welsh Show 2022 is Clwyd and that they have been waiting a long time for their feature year due to the pandemic. Zoe

recommended the group should discuss plans for the 2022 agricultural shows in the New Year.

## **Item 5 WLMF Sub Group Newsletter**

17. This is an opportunity for the group to feedback their members' reaction to the first edition of the WLMF Sub Group Newsletter 'Our Land, Water and Air' and discuss topics and articles for the next edition.
18. Katy Simmons, NRW said she is looking to get the next addition of the newsletter out early in the New Year. Ed sent some information out to members prior to the meeting and asked for ideas for the next edition.
19. Katy mentioned she has already spoken to DCWW and they will be sending an article through. There are also a few contributions from NRW, but the newsletter needs to reflect the varied membership the WLMF Sub Group. Katy asked whether anyone would like to make any suggestions today or alternatively people can email their ideas or contributions directly to her or Ed.
20. Katy confirmed that there are currently 276 subscribers of the newsletter. Katy said she will look into getting some more details regarding these numbers and provide an update at the next meeting, for example what the difference was before and after the publication of the recent addition.

### ***AP December 02: Katy Simmons, NRW to provide more details regarding the newsletter subscriber numbers.***

21. Zoe asked Katy to explain how people can subscribe to the newsletter. Katy said people can go onto the NRW Website and subscribe to the 'agriculture and land management topic' or when the Sub Group members circulate a copy of the newsletter then people can sign up directly through that. Hopefully the numbers will grow as time goes on.
22. Zoe said this is a valuable opportunity to get messages out there and asked the group to consider what their articles should say in the next edition.
23. Ed suggested that it would be more convenient if he contacted the communications teams of the larger organisations directly for these types of enquiries to streamline the process. Ed said when the newsletter is published it should then be shared by the Sub Group organisations to their membership to make sure the messages are getting out there.
24. Zoe asked whether the newsletter could include something on the SAC rivers. Bob said it is a good route to get the information out to people. Bob mentioned he would talk to colleagues about providing some information to share. Zoe suggested that Creighton and Chris could also include some information from their organisations on this topic.
25. Zoe said it is very important that the newsletter includes agricultural representation and encouraged the farming unions to provide articles. This will also help the readers understand that this Forum is a balanced and well represented group with important messages.

26. Creighton confirmed that he will provide a document for the newsletter.
27. Chris Mills suggested that some of the guest presenters who have attended meetings might be willing to provide short articles, for example John Morgan from the Maize Growers Association. Chris said John's presentation was excellent and perhaps he would be willing to produce a short article summarising some of the points from his presentation about how to minimise environmental impact from maize growing. Zoe, Bob, and Katy agreed that this was a good suggestion. Zoe proposed that Katy could draft a short article for the person to sign off. Katy confirmed that each article should be around 300 words and can include links to any wider information.
28. Marc asked whether HCC or ADHB have any information to share in the next newsletter. James Ruggeri, HCC confirmed that there will be a presentation about 'The Welsh Way' at the next Sub Group meeting. James said he would be happy to get the HCC Communications Team to have a chat with Ed or Katy to provide some information.
29. Bob asked whether the Newsletter could also include some details about how members of this group have contributed information and evidence to various committees. Creighton suggested that identifying who contributed would be acceptable but said it is not appropriate to include who said what. Bob agreed but was thinking more about the pre-set questions the committee was asking.
30. Katy thanked the group for contributing to this helpful discussion and said she would contact those who have volunteered with suggestions and ideas.

## **Item 6 End of year review and forward look**

31. This is an opportunity for the group to review this years' WLMF Sub Group meetings and highlight any pressing topics/issues to discuss in the New Year.
32. Ed suggested that the group could decide what the group want to focus on in the next 12-months and asked what the pressing issues are for the members of the organisations here today. Perhaps the group could also evaluate some of the discussions and presentations the group had in 2021.
33. Zoe asked members to think about the number one thing they would like the group to focus on going into 2022. Zoe said she would like the group to think about coordinating what is going on at a farm level and understanding what is going on out there to help maximise effort.
34. Creighton said regarding guests invited to meetings, some are fully prepared and are aware of the difficulties within their organisation's activities, however, some come along to try and sell their organisation. Creighton gave an example by evaluating the question/answer process with several of the guest presenters from meetings this year and emphasised the importance of asking the presenters questions. Zoe summarised the suggestion that guest presenters could be briefed before attending the meeting but clarified that guests are invited to share information.
35. Chris Mills said he would like to see a more systematic approach. Chris suggested the group should be clearer about the types of agricultural pollution we are trying to

prevent, evaluate the current situation and then explore, assess, and publicize what can be done to prevent each type of pollution. Chris said this is possibly already being done but should perhaps be done in a more formal way. Pulling all of this together would help identify what we are doing and what we have achieved. Chris suggested this could start with an assessment of what the group has done to date. This approach will also help identify gaps which can then be addressed going forward. Bob said that this is a good suggestion, but everyone needs to work together. A systematic approach requires the group to work together so that there is not a one-sided effort. Bob acknowledged that this would vary depending on the resources available to each organisation, but the group still needs to work together to achieve this shared goal.

36. Bernard Griffiths, FUW said that the focus of this group might largely depend on the outcomes of the Judicial Review (JR) and the Senedd Enquiry.
37. Andrew Chambers, Welsh Government said there is no update on the JR. Andrew agreed that Chris' suggestions were sensible. Reviewing the Priority Recommendations would be helpful to see what progress has been made and what needs to be taken forward this year.
38. Einir Williams, Farming Connect said the group has a big role in collating the available information and support for farmers.
39. Liz Franks, Hafren Dyfrdwr said it would be interesting to see how this group can feed into some of the wider water quality work which is going on. Liz said the group which Andy Fraser is leading has already been mentioned but there is also a road map in progress regarding the storm overflow situation and recognising the other sources within industries which affect water quality across Wales.
40. Fraser McAuley, CLA agreed with Bernard's comments and mentioned the outcome of the Task & Finish Group on Alternative Measures will also be interesting and important.
41. Geraint Hamer, Welsh Government echoed Andrew's remarks. Geraint also agreed with Liz's comments about linking up wider work, particularly regarding phosphates and SAC Rivers.
42. James agreed with comments made, particularly around the outcomes of the JR. James said it is also important that the group help and support farmers to improve.
43. Sarah Jones, DCWW agreed with Chris' suggestion about more structure around which pollutants the group is targeting. Sarah said there is a lot of discussion about nutrients but DCWW encounter challenges regarding other water quality issues (including pesticides, Cryptosporidium, turbidity etc.), so having more information about this would be helpful. Sarah agreed that the collation of information is important to help farmers and asked whether this group could try to bring it all together for a 'one stop shop' which could be hosted by Welsh Government.
44. Creighton mentioned that the Environment Agency has released a good video on the River Axe which deals with some of the issues this group is interested in like intensive dairy and growing maize. [YouTube Video: Environment Agency - Future Farming in the Axe Catchment](#)

**AP December 03: Creighton Harvey, CFF to share the link to the Environment Agency video.**

45. Sarah Hetherington, NRW said that the recommendations from the [WLMF Sub Group Interim Report \(2018\)](#) will require reviewing due to developments and workstreams as some of these recommendations were based on the current initiatives at the time of writing the report. Sarah also suggested looking at what the opportunities are with the Rural Economics Strategy to see what the group can do. Sarah explained that the Rural Development Programme (RDP) comes to an end in 2021 and there will likely be a domestic replacement that will come under Rural Economics Strategies. Zoe suggested that Sarah could lead a session on this in the future to help the group identify where there are opportunities.
46. Bronwen thanked the members for their input this year in suggesting agenda items, helping coordinate their colleagues to present to the group and providing links and information to be circulated to the rest of the group.
47. Chris Thomas, NRW said a lot of the solutions this group are looking at are 'end of pipe' solutions and looking at how to solve problems. The ultimate problem is intensification of various agricultural industries. Chris said Welsh Government are looking at the initial style of farming, but the group should look at the whole process and explore this deeper to discover the reasons for agricultural intensification. Chris Mills agreed with these comments, it is currently treating the symptoms and not the cause and it needs to be the opposite. Ruth Johnston, NRW said that in taking forward a strategic approach, the inputs to the system also need to be considered in order to bring the whole picture together and make sure the messages work for our audience.
48. Dennis Matheson, TFA said the Dairy Project should be ramped up and Welsh Government should be persuaded to provide increased funding for the project. Dennis also discussed some of the tenancy law challenges and issues.
49. Chris Thomas, NRW said we need to be careful with unintended consequences and discussed that the National Trust are slowly banning the use of slurry on their farms and are pushing farmers to use farm yard manure.
50. Ed said this discussion has been very helpful.

## **Item 7 Any Other Business**

51. Chris Mills mentioned that a report has been written and published by Dr Guy Mawle - [A dying river? The State of the River Usk Report](#). Chris summarised some of the findings of the report.

**AP December 04: Chris Mills, WEL to share a link to the River Usk report.**

Zoe said NRW have been sent a copy of the report and asked Bob whether he had anything to say on the report. Bob said the state of the River Usk is concerning, and colleagues will likely provide a response to the report and its findings.

52. Ruth Johnston, NRW said the WFD 2021 information is expected this month or next.

53. Bob said recently there has been a series of themed workshops which some members of this group have attended. These sessions have been tied in with Area Statement work and have been useful in bringing people together to discuss topics and try to come up with solutions.

54. Chris Mills, WEL suggested that an update on the Task & Finish Group on Alternative Measures could be given at the next meeting.

***AP December 05: Chris Mills, WEL to provide an update on the Task & Finish Group on Alternative Measures at the next meeting.***

55. The next meeting is Monday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2022 on Microsoft Teams.

56. Zoe wished the group a Happy Christmas and thanked everyone for their efforts this year.

**Close meeting**