

# 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:** Wales YFC Centre, Royal Welsh Agricultural Showground, Builth Wells  
(& Microsoft Teams)

**Date of Meeting:** 16<sup>th</sup> May 2022

### **Present:**

Zoe Henderson, NRW (Chair)

Dennis Matheson, TFA

Marc Williams, NRW

James Ruggeri, HCC

Chris Mills, WEL

Lee Price, Farming Connect

Shane Thomas, Carmarthen Fishermen's Federation (online)

Creighton Harvey, Carmarthen Fishermen's Federation (online)

Chris Thomas, NRW

Fraser McAuley, CLA

Andrew Chambers, Welsh Government

Mathew Walters, Welsh Government

Polina Cowley, Welsh Government (online)

Bernard Griffiths, FUW

Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru

Sarah Hetherington, NRW

**Additional Attendees Present:**

Liz Davies, The Wye & Usk Foundation

Bridie Whittle, The Wye & Usk Foundation

Susie Kinghan, NRW (4 Rivers for LIFE Project)

**Secretariat:**

Bronwen Martin, NRW

**Apologies:**

Sarah Jones, Dwr Cymru

Kate Snow, United Utilities

Geraint Hamer, Welsh Government

Adriana Kiss, Welsh Government

Katy Simmons, NRW

David Ball, AHDB

Einir Williams, Farming Connect

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

1. Zoe Henderson, NRW welcomed all to the first in-person meeting of 2022. Zoe noted apologies and asked those present to briefly introduce themselves.
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 the guests to the meeting; Liz Davies and Bridie Whittle (The Wye & Usk Foundation) and Susie Kinghan (NRW) to the meeting.

**Item 2 The Wye & Usk Foundation Presentation**

4. Liz Davies and Bridie Whittle joined the meeting to provide a presentation on the work that The Wye & Usk Foundation are doing with farmers including a discussion about some of the challenges, risks encountered and solutions.
5. Liz began by giving an overview of The Wye and Usk Foundation. The Wye & Usk Foundation is a cross-border charity organisation focussing on restoring habitats, water quality and fisheries of the River Wye and River Usk. The Habitat Team are involved with fencing and habitat work, invasive species management, weir removal and fish passage, school engagement and fishing passport. The Farm Advisory team have

engaged with more than 1000+ farmers across the Wye and Usk catchments and work with farmers supporting sustainable measures which benefit both the farm business and wider environment. The team provide advice and grant support towards capital work to improve water quality, natural flood management measures, biodiversity enhancement and soil health. On farm support includes soil nutrient and organic matter level testing, soil structure assessment and infiltration tests, risk mapping, farm reports, yard infrastructure advice along with land management advice.

6. Liz gave a brief overview of The Wye Ithon Severn Ecosystems (WISE) Project. The WISE Project is funded by Welsh Government's Sustainable Management Scheme (SMS) 2019-2021 and works with farmers to protect and enhance natural resources which benefits agricultural businesses, rivers, and the wider community. Along with project partners The Severn River's Trust, around 300 farm businesses were visited across priority catchments to improve soil quality, reduce diffuse and point source pollution, increase woodland cover, and maximise multiple benefits. Liz gave an overview of some of the opportunities and possible interventions along with a summary of outputs from [The Wye Ithon Severn Ecosystems \(WISE\) Project](#).

James Ruggeri, HCC asked if the funding covers carrying out interventions. Liz said there is a small in-house pot of funding which has allowed some natural flood management interventions to be carried out. Farmers are directed to Welsh Government to apply for funding. James asked if the potential interventions Liz identified could be funded through the new Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS). Liz said yes, most of the interventions could be funded through the SFS.

Fraser McAuley, CLA asked roughly how long it takes to produce a farm plan. Liz said The Wye & Usk Foundation allocate roughly about a week per farm plan.

7. Liz mentioned that The Wye & Usk Foundation work with the supply chain through the Courtauld 2030 Commitment which is a voluntary agreement to reduce food waste, GHG emissions and water stress across the entire UK food chain. The Wye & Usk Foundation are one of six water pilot catchments working with retailers and suppliers through this innovative and have convened the Wye Agri-food Partnership where sector specific priorities were identified during the initial meeting following a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) Analysis.
8. Working with the WWF-UK/Tesco Partnership and Muller, dairy farm visits have been undertaken, focussing on Monmouthshire. These visits look at infrastructure improvements (such as clean/dirty water separation), manure and nutrient management, under sowing maize and grant support towards capital works. Initial findings suggest over £580k would be needed for all improvements required (20 farms). Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru asked when this figure was from, does it account for inflation and the rise in costs. Liz said this analysis was done prior to inflation rise when the work was concluded in 2020. Rachel suggested that the supply chain does not share these costs, it is a challenge for farmers. Liz said the figures were presented to Muller and to Tesco and will be feedback as part of the final project report.

Chris Thomas, NRW asked whether the Wye & Usk Foundation build on the Dairy Project visits or do they conduct new audits. Liz said that NRW are aware of the project. Rachel asked what the GDPR arrangement between NRW and The Wye & Usk Foundation is and who has oversight on these projects. Zoe said it is good that there is

not duplication. Zoe mentioned that it is useful to have an idea of the figures in order to know the scale of the situation. James and Rachel discussed the Sustainable Production Grant but acknowledged that due to the scale of the investments needed, often there is not enough time for the grant to be given due to quotes for the work being valid for only 3 weeks and then expiring. Sarah Hetherington, NRW explained that England has a guaranteed funding structure.

James asked whether the farmers are keen to make the improvements and if so, perhaps the funding mechanism is the barrier. Liz said that generally, farmers want to make the improvements. Sarah asked whether they have noticed a structural change in Monmouth (e.g., farm businesses moving away from Dairy). Liz said yes, there has been some change.

Rachel recalled some of the presentation regarding under sowing maize and mentioned that Welsh Government has included under sowing with maize as an element of 'growing for the environment' but not ryegrass. Liz said Welsh Government are welcome to talk to them about the work they have done with ryegrass.

***AP May 01: Andrew Chambers or Matthew Walters, Welsh Government to feedback information regarding why there is support for under sowing maize but not ryegrass.***

Lee Price suggested that the structure is interesting, Farming Connect offer advice but point people towards Welsh Government for funding, whereas The Wye & Usk Foundation can offer advice and grants.

Chris Mills, WEL said that the statistics shown are shocking and questioned what the appropriate approach would be to realistically address the scale of the problem. The messages really need to be clear so that people understand the true scale of the level of investment needed to make the improvements. Bernard said this group has been in this position before but outside factors are the issue.

9. Bridie Whittle, The Wye & Usk Foundation gave an overview of the work they are doing with farmers within the Free-Range Egg Industry. They have been working with Anglia FR, Noble and Stonegate farmers to highlight potential risks, promote best practice and offer grant aided support towards solutions. They are also working directly with Noble Foods and Anglia FR management team providing support on water quality issues in the Wye catchment.
10. The Wye & Usk Foundation have also organised an upcoming webinar to promote the benefits of tree planting on ranges.
11. Through the Courtauld work, The Wye & Usk Foundation are working with free range egg farms (47 free range egg producers, 29 of which are in Wales). This work includes:
  - Assessing the risks to water quality from each site
  - Providing advice and information
  - Producing site reports
  - Signposting farmers to support and grants

- Grant aiding interventions and improvements with funding through Courtauld Initiative
12. Bridie described some of the improvements which have been delivered which have reduced runoff, provided habitat protection, improved infrastructure to reduce the risks from slurry and separated clean/dirty water.
  13. The main challenges on free range sites are associated with manure management and application, range management and site drainage, and include the following:
    - Muck management – inadequate storage resulting in inappropriate timing of application to land
    - Accumulation of muck and slurry in veranda areas
    - Drainage water from French Drains and land drains
    - Management of dirty water/slurry at wash out
    - Nutrient build up in soils – on the range and across the farm
    - Erosion and overland run off from bare soils on range – a risk on some sites
  14. Bridie showed a typical site drainage plan, gave an overview of the risks from site drainage and verandas, and suggested some possible mitigation measures. Bridie said that retrofitting drainage at these sites is often very difficult.
  15. The group discussed the potential use of constructed wetlands as a possible innovative technical solution at poultry farms. The group also discussed the difference between 'lightly fouled water' and 'slurry'; the nutrient content determines how the 'water' is managed.
  16. Matthew Walters, Welsh Government reminded the group that there is an opportunity to suggest 'Alternative measures' within The Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) (Wales) Regulations 2021. Matthew said something specific for poultry could be explored through that process.
  17. Rachel said that every site is different. People need to understand the risks and look at bespoke solutions. Sarah agreed and mentioned that groundwater must also be considered, not just surface water.
  18. The group discussed the nutrients within chicken feed and the input/output process. Bridie mentioned that Avara Foods are supporting actions that remove phosphate from poultry manure.
  19. Zoe asked how we can move forward regarding the challenges around the poultry sector and who should be leading on it. Lee suggested that consumers and supermarkets have a role to play and reminded the group that some poultry farm businesses are not restocking due to the increasing costs they are facing. Chris Mills said this challenge should involve the industry and supermarkets so that solutions can be found. Liz mentioned that some suppliers are aware of the challenges facing

farmers and that there is funding available to tackle the problems, but it will not be able to solve everything.

20. Zoe said that there is work ongoing with the dairy sector but perhaps not as much within the poultry sector. Matthew asked how well these environmental problems are understood. Liz said the phosphate issues on the Wye have only recently become widely acknowledged and Bridie suggested that more monitoring is needed to understand the scale of the problem. Bernard suggested that Welsh Government should be looking at this problem and provide funding and guidance to the industry.
21. Regarding the nutrient problem, Chris Mills said it is important to assess where they are in order to find solutions, including trade-offs or balances. Everyone understands that generally there are too many nutrients in the system but there needs to be economic and practical solutions. The group discussed nutrient separation and the Gelli Aur Project Slurry. Lee suggested that it is important to help farmers not encounter problems in the first place, for example through best practice guidance.
22. Andrew Chambers, Welsh Government said it is important to identify the key people who should be involved in finding solutions. Andrew asked for more information about the 29 farms in Wales which were visited. Bridie said of the 29 farms visited in Wales, 17 had French drains and 11 of those went directly to a watercourse. Chris Mills asked how many free-range farms there are in Wales. Liz and Bridie were not sure, but Lee reminded the group that the permitted ones would be known but the others might not be. Andrew recalled that ADAS undertook a study a few years ago and that he could obtain those numbers.

***AP May 02: Andrew Chambers, Welsh Government to find out how many free-range poultry farms there are in Wales.***

***AP May 03: Bronwen Martin, NRW to circulate The Wye & Usk Foundation presentations and contact details.***

23. Zoe thanked Liz and Bridie for their presentations and said that there is a lot of work to be done to help find solutions to the challenges and issues highlighted today.

### **Item 3 Review of Minutes**

24. 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.
25. The group reviewed the previous meeting minutes from 25<sup>th</sup> April 2022.
26. Dennis suggested that the record of his comments regarding the Tenanted Land FAQ Document were perhaps more refined than in reality due to his frustration and disappointment over this matter. Dennis said he would be more forthright at the upcoming meeting with the Minister. Dennis agreed that the comments within the minutes should remain unchanged.
27. No other comments or suggested amendments were received in respect of the April meeting minutes.

## Item 4 Matters Arising

28. Zoe confirmed that Bob Vaughan, NRW has announced his retirement. Zoe thanked Bob for his dedication and support over the years and invited others to wish him well for his retirement.
29. Bernard said it was nice to be back in a room with everyone and asked what the meetings will look like going forward (e.g., hybrid meetings). Zoe said some meetings will still be held virtually but hybrid meetings would be a good idea as it gives people flexibility. James mentioned that HCC have hybrid facilities set up at their office and the WLMF Sub Group would be welcome to use it in the future.
30. No other matters arising were raised.

## Item 5 WLMF Sub Group Discussion

31. This is an opportunity for members to review the WLMF Sub Group aims, discuss the direction of the group, and agree some common goals.
32. Marc Williams, NRW reminded the group of the [WLMF Sub Group Interim Report \(2018\)](#) which outlined 45 recommendations. Marc asked the group whether they had any comments about the recommendations and whether the recommendations should be reviewed along with the aims of objectives of the group (outlined in the group's Terms of Reference).
33. Zoe suggested that the group should put more of a focus on innovation and asked if there is a way of knowing what is currently being done which is relevant to the matters of this group. Marc recalled recently seeing the new innovative trial at Coleg Cambria Llysfasi with a small anaerobic digestion (AD) system and currently, cost appears to be the biggest barrier.
34. Zoe said that one of the key things to come out of the meeting today is that there needs to be clear best practice guidance for the poultry sector.
35. Dennis Matheson, TFA said that there should also be more emphasis on the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations. Lee mentioned that Farming Connect offers support to farmers regarding these Regulations. Farming Connect will also be sharing more information for farmers and organising bespoke surgeries on key aspects of the Regulations.
36. Chris Mills emphasised that this Sub Group is focused on tackling *agricultural pollution* and we are all working to collectively reduce the harms and risks to the environment. Chris mentioned that the Interim Report is a starting point and suggested that the recommendations from this report should be looked at to see how many of them have been achieved and what remain the key issues. Information sharing is good, but it needs to be centred around what the issues are and what this group will do to help address them. Chris recalled that the meeting today has highlighted some of the challenges and issues linked to the poultry sector and this should be considered going forward.

37. Regarding Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR), Rachel said that it is very important to walk the talk. This WLMF Sub Group has been an important group and generally one of the best performing groups. Rachel said The Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) (Wales) Regulations 2021 are in place and information has been shared with farmers and land managers, but it is the role of Welsh Government to implement them. Rachel reminded the group that resources are limited across organisations and there are also other upcoming priorities to focus on (e.g., SFS codesign phase, Agriculture (Wales) Bill, consultations etc.). The prospect of reviewing the WLMF Sub Group Interim Report is not something NFU Cymru would relish. Zoe agreed that the report should not be reviewed by the group but suggested that some important points could be picked out and moved forward. Zoe said communication and support for farmers is very important.
38. Dennis recalled that there has been a lack of engagement from Welsh Government over the recent weeks and months.
39. Andrew Chambers, Welsh Government suggested that the WLMF Sub Group Interim Report is a good framework. Andrew reminded the group of that the Alternative Measures opportunity along with the 4-year review process for the Regulations. There is also the upcoming work on Ammonia emissions (Defra consultation). Sarah asked how the 4-year review fits in with National Minimum Standards and the Agriculture (Wales) Bill. Andrew said the Welsh Government teams focused on these things all work together.
40. Bernard asked what Welsh Government thinks this WLMF Sub Group should be focussed on going forward. Andrew said he would be happy to look at the Welsh Government agriculture portfolio and bring some suggestions and information to the group. Zoe suggested Andrew could also provide a Welsh Government perspective on some of the issues/challenges raised during the discussions around the poultry sector.

***AP May 04: Andrew Chambers, Welsh Government to look at the Welsh Government agriculture portfolio and bring some suggestions and information to the group regarding possible focus areas for the WLMF Sub Group.***

41. Marc recapped the 5 themes of the WLMF Sub Group, which include:

- Ensuring that the formal regulatory regime is sufficiently robust to achieve the outcomes required.
- Developing a voluntary, farmer-led approach to nutrient management.
- Providing better advice and guidance which can then be taken up by farmers.
- Improving the existing range of investment opportunities.
- Identifying and promoting innovation.

42. Chris Mills suggested that innovation is key to preventing agricultural pollution and that people should think about it logically. Chris suggested the following areas to explore:

- What are the problems?

- What is the scale of the nutrient issue?
- What are the solutions?
- What can be done effectively and efficiently?

43. Sarah reminded the group that we are currently in a process of transition and change (e.g., upcoming Agriculture (Wales) Bill, SFS etc.). This WLMF Sub Group needs to provide a way forward with momentum around agricultural pollution including thinking about things like funding, influencing change, suggesting alternatives etc.

44. Bernard mentioned waste management and the potential spare/excess nutrients and asked whether Regulations are preventing re-use.

45. Dennis mentioned that part of the nutrient problem is because of the amount contained within animal feed; if high nutrients go in, then they must also come out. Zoe agreed that the feed cycle is an interesting and important area which needs more thought and asked members to share any further information or knowledge regarding this topic.

***AP May 05: Members to share information or knowledge regarding the nutrients within the feed cycle (particularly regarding poultry feed).***

## **Item 6 Any other business**

46. The next WLMF Sub Group Meeting is Monday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2022.

47. Chris Thomas and Susie Kinghan, NRW gave a brief overview of the 4 Rivers for LIFE Project. The 4 Rivers for LIFE Project is run by NRW in partnership with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, River Restoration Trust, Coleg Sir Gâr and the Woodland Trust, with additional financial support from Dŵr Cymru/Welsh Water. The project aims to improve river habitats and conditions, re-profile sections of rivers to slow the flow and reduce flood risk downstream and work with farmers to protect river corridors and reduce sediments and nutrients from entering rivers. Chris suggested that he could provide a presentation to the group at a future meeting.

***AP May 06: Chris Thomas, NRW to provide a presentation about the 4 Rivers for LIFE Project at a future meeting.***

Zoe said this work sounds very good and asked how people can find out where projects are and what they involve. Chris said he is happy to stay on the WLMF Sub Group and provide future updates. Sarah mentioned that a barrier going forward could be the missing link between knowing what has been done and where, for example there is no register to know what/where funding has been spent in the past, therefore these types of groups are a key knowledge base and can help make sure funding is not used for the same things over again.

48. Dennis mentioned the Guilsfield Brook Project which is a £500K scheme aimed at delivering a nature-based solution to flooding in Powys. Dennis recalled some details about the Guilsfield Brook Project that he had heard whilst recently attending an FUW event.

49. Bronwen Martin, NRW mentioned that Katy Simons, NRW is working on putting together the next edition of the WLMF Sub Group Newsletter. Katy has already spoken to TFA Cymru and will be contacting Einir about the Farming Connect suggested material (information about their Communication Plan for the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations). Bronwen requested that members forward a short article to her or Katy Simmons and/or let them know if they have any questions.

***AP May 07: Members to forward a short article to Katy Simmons or Bronwen Martin, NRW for the next edition of the WLMF Sub Group Newsletter.***

Chris Thomas, NRW mentioned that Dana Thomas, NRW is the Communication and Engagement Officer for the 4 Rivers for LIFE Project should there be an opportunity to include some information on the project.

Bernard said FUW recently launched a Manifesto ahead of 2022 Welsh Local Government elections.

Shane Thomas, CFF mentioned that Carmarthenshire Fishermen's Federation and the Rivers Trust have joined the 'Smart Rivers Project' investigating the health of rivers in Wales. This project involves river sampling and invertebrate identification to inform water quality issues by highlighting indicators which can help identify the type of pollution.

50. Zoe recently attended the Royal Welsh Grassland Event which took place on May 12th, 2022, at Coleg Cambria Llysfasi. Marc also attended as said it was very good to interact with the College and farmers. Zoe mentioned that the 'Da Byw 2022 - The Sustainable Livestock Farming Conference' is being held on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2022 at Coed Coch, Dolwen.

## **Close meeting**