

Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF) Minutes

Title of meeting:	Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF)
Location:	Microsoft Teams Meeting
Date of meeting:	18 th September 2023
Members present:	Professor Rhys Jones, NRW Board Member (Chair) Dominic Driver, NRW Jon Goldsworthy, NRW Anthony Geddes, Confor Gareth Parry, FUW Sarah Hetherington, NRW John Browne, NRW Dennis Matheson, TFA Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru Tim Kirk, Confor Dav Letellier, NRW Fraser McAuley, CLA Ieuan Stephen Davies, NRW Marc Williams, NRW Hedd Pugh, NFU Cymru
Attendees present:	Keith Davies, NRW (Item 3) Geraint Richards, NRW (Item 4)
Apologies:	Ruth Jenkins, NRW Martyn Evans, NRW Huwel Manley, NRW Lee Pritchard, Wales YFC Andrew Chambers, Welsh Government
Secretariat:	Bronwen Martin, NRW

Item 1. Introductions, Apologies and Declaration of Interest

1. Professor Rhys Jones (WLMF Chair) welcomed all to the meeting and noted apologies.
2. No declarations of interest were raised in respect of Agenda items to be considered.
3. The group were reminded that the meeting was being recorded for the purpose of capturing the minutes and the digital file will be deleted once the meeting minutes have been compiled.

Item 2. Minutes from the last meeting, actions & matters arising

4. Once the meeting minutes have been reviewed and formally agreed they will be translated and published on the NRW website. The Group reviewed the minutes from the meeting held on 5th June 2023. Rhys suggested modifying a descriptive phrase used by Anthony Geddes, Confor to describe the timelines of the Agriculture (Wales) Bill, Anthony agreed and suggested 'unachievable' should be used instead. The minutes were approved as a true record.
5. The group reviewed the outstanding actions and verbal updates were provided.
6. Rhys recalled the previous discussions regarding the Welsh Government FAQ Tenanted Land document in relation to the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations. The advice has been updated following extensive discussions with TFA Cymru.
7. Bronwen mentioned that there were two outstanding actions from March which both relate to beavers. Bronwen has spoken to colleagues and received a short-written update on Friday regarding the action to clarify the legal position relating to beavers. However, there was no update regarding action point March AP03 'Sarah Wood to provide an update on the next steps following the evidence review for Beavers'. Bronwen said the response to this was 'apologies, but there is no further update at this time, but NRW are in discussion with Welsh Government about timelines and next steps'. Bronwen said she will remain in contact with Sarah to see what progress is being made and whether information can be shared with this group going forward.

Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru said any strategy involved with the reintroduction of beavers needs to be subject to consultation before it is finalised. We are aware of the piece of work that has been submitted to Welsh Government and it needs to take into consideration broader economic, environmental, social and cultural concerns and that can only be reached by consultation. Before that strategy is finalised with Welsh Government, a public consultation, particularly for the communities affected, needs to be built in to the process. Rhys asked that an action is recorded to clarify whether there will be a consultation in relation to this issue.

AP September 01: Bronwen Martin to clarify with Sarah Wood whether there will be a consultation on a Beaver strategy.

8. Regarding an action recorded in June (June AP 01) about 'Updates regarding the FUW query about a potential conflict regarding Sustainable Drainage and the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations; Bronwen followed this up internally and a response letter was provided to FUW but essentially, this is a query for Welsh Government and Local Authorities.
9. Rachel asked whether there is an update from NRW about EPR intensive farming and the fact that determinations of permits have been suspended and what's the latest position with respect to that. Bronwen recalled that this was a topic that Rachel had emailed but she was unable to source an update at this time but would follow up with colleagues again after the meeting. Rachel said communication on that issue is really important.

AP September 02: Bronwen Martin to source a written update from NRW colleagues regarding the situation on EPR intensive farming.

Item 3. Designated Landscapes Presentation

10. Keith Davies, NRW joined the meeting to provide an update on the work that NRW are undertaking with regards to the Designated Landscapes Programme. Keith recalled that he gave a brief presentation to the WLMF in March 2022 about National Park Designation ([NRW: WLMF - March 2022](#)).
11. Keith said the programme includes two projects, one of the projects looks at designating a National Park, and the second one is a project looking at an analysis of Wales in the context of Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR). This presentation will focus on the National Park Designation work.
12. The work to assess the case for a new National Park in the North East of Wales emerged as a consequence of the current Programme for Government in Wales, including a commitment to designate a new National Park focused on the existing, Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
13. NRW is the Statutory Designating Authority in Wales responsible for the designation process and providing advice to Welsh Ministers to consider and confirm, refuse or amend any Designation Order. We are responsible for undertaking the consultation and engagement events that are critical to informing any decision. Keith said we are working to a timeline to complete the work within the current Senedd term.
14. Keith described each of the following stages:
 - Stage 1: Pre-commencement
 - Stage 2: Evidence gathering and engagement
 - Stage 3: Statutory designation process
15. Keith explained the criteria for establishing whether an area qualifies as being a National Park, as set out in designation. There are two fundamental tests that need to be demonstrated in terms of the evidence, one is extension tracts of natural beauty and the other is whether the area provides sufficient opportunities for outdoor recreation. Unless we can demonstrate the evidence supports those tests, we would not be able to move on to recommend designation as a National Park.
16. We also need to frame the work in the context of Welsh legislation including the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Therefore, we will need to undertake work to frame the discussion on natural beauty and outdoor recreation in the context of the wider social, economic, environmental and cultural trends and opportunities within the area. There will also be a focus on opportunities to address the challenges of the nature and climate emergencies and how a new National Park could help address those issues in a way that supports wider wellbeing within the area.
17. Keith showed some maps and explained the context of the area of search including special landscape qualities, local authorities, significant features and other aspects which are included in the evidence gathering.
18. Keith summarised the next steps of taking the work forward:
 - Undertaking evidence gathering – special landscape qualities for the area of search, forces for change and Management options.

- August/September – wider stakeholder engagement (organisations, representative bodies etc.)
- October/November – Public engagement (local drop in events across the Area of Search and online)
- Sector specific events
- Public Consultation 2024

19. Keith described the other piece of work within the Programme which focusses on how evidence is collated for natural beauty – Wales Integrated Natural Beauty Mapping. There are 4 integrated themes in a landscape context including:

- Natural beauty
- Nature recovery
- Resilience to climate change
- Well-being

20. We are currently exploring the types of information and evidence. This work is in the very early stages, but the next steps include evidence gathering, setting up a technical advisory group and undertaking external stakeholder engagement in October. Keith offered to arrange a more in-depth discussion with members if they want more details, particularly regarding the National Park designation process.

AP September 03: Bronwen Martin, NRW to share contact details for Keith Davies, NRW.

21. Gareth Parry, FUW asked if there are dates pencilled in for wider engagement with residents, farmers, landowners and others who are within the search area. It would be good to have a list so that it can be shared with our networks and members because they may want to attend different sessions. Keith said he could circulate the dates of the both the community engagement events and dates for stakeholder sessions. We will also have bespoke sessions for different sectoral interests (e.g., land, environmental recreation, renewable etc.). We've allowed some flexibility and will have time to build in additional sessions for others to be involved and engage with the process.

22. Rachel asked if the maps in the presentation are publicly available on the NRW website. Keith said they're not published at the moment, but they will be when the engagement events commence in October. Rachel suggested people don't really know whether they need to engage unless they see the maps ahead of the sessions. Keith said he would take the feedback on board.

Regarding the natural beauty mapping work, Rachel asked whether Keith has touched base with CEH about the work that they did through Glastir Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (GMEP) which is funded by Welsh Government and the EU RDP to monitor Glastir. They developed a tool to assess landscape beauty and this work might fit in or might have been done already. Keith said they haven't linked into that work yet, but we are at quite an early stage in scoping the work to understand what existing evidence and tools might be out there. Keith thanked Rachel for the suggestion and said he would follow it up.

23. Dennis asked if they know the actual area in hectares of the proposed National Park.

Dennis mentioned he attended the NRW launch of the Corporate Plan at the Senedd in June. The event included presentations from Minister Julie James, Sir David Henshaw and Minister Lee Waters. However, in all that time, there was no mention whatsoever about producing food or food security in Wales. Dennis suggested that NRW should take note of the situation in England. Dennis explained that the TFA have members in Dartmoor and the proposal there is to reduce the stocking rate on the moor to 0.01 livestock units a hectare, which is 1/10 of what is on Snowdon at the moment. Consequently, it is unviable for farmers to farm on Dartmoor. Dennis discussed the situation in the Berwyn Mountains where the stock was taken off which allowed self-seeding conifers to encroach, and the heather is so overgrown you can't even walk through it. Dennis pleaded for people to take note of what he described as mismanagement by people who don't know anything about it in other areas of the UK.

Keith thanked Dennis for his comments and said this type of information about management is obviously the sort of engagement they want to ensure happens throughout the consultation process. We are keen to understand the key issues and opportunities that are currently impacting and potentially support the area in the future. The consultation process is likely to flag a whole range of specific issues that we will need to consider in order to find the best way forward. We haven't yet decided on a boundary, but the area of search is simply the area which will help us collate the evidence to actually identify a candidate area.

24. Fraser McAuley, CLA said the CLA have discussed the designation internally with some of their committees and members within the area. CLA do have some specific concerns, but perhaps that will come out further down the line in the consultation. Fraser said it is important to make sure that everyone who's likely to be affected will get an opportunity to engage and asked if postal information (similar to the Spring Update from Welsh Government) is going to be sent to those who might not have access to the Internet. Fraser said the CLA will be contacting their members who are likely to be affected to let them know that consultation processes are in the pipeline, but it is important for everyone to get a chance to participate. Keith said they weren't intending on sending out a detailed mail shot in advance of the planned engagement events but can consider that when we get to a more formal stage. We are keen to hear how we can use existing networks (e.g., stakeholders and groups in the area) to spread the message about the process which is about to commence. We are also keen to ensure that the engagement is totally inclusive of all groups who will potentially benefit or be affected.
25. Regarding the area of land, Rachel said this is a really important consideration because, about 25% of Wales is already designated as a National Park or an AONB. If NRW is looking to greatly increase the area, then there comes a point when these areas are not being designated because they're special. Keith said yes, 25% of Wales currently has statutory landscape designation, and we are mindful of that. We need to demonstrate that the proposed area meets the key statutory tests. We are at an early stage, but we are keen to hear views which will help shape our future work on this.
26. Rhys asked to clarify whether the consultation addresses whether the designation should happen at all or whether it's a consultation around the territorial extent of the proposed National Park. Keith said it's both, the area of search will provide the framework for the more detailed evidence gathering against the criteria. It also provides an opportunity for stakeholders and communities to express their views on whether or

not the area would benefit from being a National Park. Then based on the evidence and the responses from communities, NRW would need to go into judgement on whether or not to move on to the next stage, which is the candidate area. That will then form the basis of a more formal and detailed consultation.

27. Keith said he is more than happy to engage with the forum on a regular basis as the process moves on because it is important that the voice of the land management community is heard and reflected in the discussions around the proposal.

Item 4. Waste Exemptions Review

28. Geraint Richards, NRW joined the meeting to provide an overview and update on the Waste Exemptions Review. Geraint works within the NRW Waste Policy team and most of his work is around regulating the waste industry, but he also deals with waste crime, organised crime and illegal waste activities.

29. Geraint said waste exemptions are the permissions you need to manage waste on a farm. Although, they apply across the industry and all the sectors – they're not specific to farming but for anyone who handles waste. If the changes do come in, then they will apply across all sectors, there's nothing targeted to farming specifically.

30. The last 10 to 15 years has seen a huge increase in the amount of waste crime and the impact it is having. Welsh Government and Defra have been looking at that and they've been working on measures to tackle both crime and poor performance in the industry. NRW is the regulator in Wales and the Environment Agency is the regulator in England and we have worked side by side on this and are looking to make some changes and advising government on what is needed.

31. A consultation was done in 2018 which was wide-ranging on waste crime and enacted quite a few things. Those have been implemented slowly overtime and the last of those to be done is the waste exemptions review. The government's response to the consultation was published earlier this year.

32. To clarify, exemptions are free to register currently and there's no expected changes to that in Wales. They allow handling of certain types of waste but for low-risk activities only. A permit is chargeable, much more onerous, we will come and inspect and there are various other things associated with a permit. Exemptions are much more low risk and much less involved and, on a farm, these would be things like building tracks, burning clear vegetation tyres on silage clamps and some land spreading. Most farms need 7 or 8 of these. However, this regime is open to abuse by unscrupulous operators because they are a low risk. The agricultural industry is a major user of exemptions and around 75-80% of all exemptions are registered on farms.

33. The changes are not aimed at the agricultural industry at all, they are to tackle waste crime and poor performance in the waste industry. There should be minimal implications for farmers, but there will be somethings to be aware of and they will especially apply to farms that have diversified away from agricultural activities. Effectively the changes mean that if you can't benefit from an exemption, you will need a permit or you will need to stop operating. The idea is to raise standards, create a level playing field for industry and help make sure that waste ends up at the right place.

34. The changes are coming in are prohibiting exemptions at a permitted site. Currently you could have a waste operation site like a scrap yard, or a waste transfer station and you can register an exemption at that site. However, in future that won't be allowed. That's currently the case for installations, which are larger operations like anaerobic digesters, pig and poultry units etc. There is already a prohibition on exemptions at those sites. Geraint said he doesn't see this having too much of an impact on farms because farms are not registering waste operations.
35. There's some work to be done around defining what that means in the regulations and still some work to be done by Government. We will likely have some sort of common-sense definition of what a place means for the farming community is very different to a single location for a transport station. There are also some changes around record keeping but we are not expecting this to have too much of an impact. We are looking at the regulator being able to require certain information about the waste used under an exemption which should already be available. So, anyone bringing in waste to a site to use will have a transfer note for each movement for each transfer. Geraint discussed electronic record keeping which links to a new system that's been proposed to track movements of waste called the Electronic Waste Tracking System.
36. There are 60 odd exemptions in total and there will be changes to ten of the most commonly abused exemptions. We have looked at the data and evidence and around ten of those were identified as a higher priority. Some of these are ones that we see on farms, the one that is probably most registered on farms is the U1 The use of waste in construction. This is often abused by unscrupulous operators to dispose of waste in a mini landfill where they are disposing waste and then pretending to build something. It's not something we see it on farms particularly but it we have had to change this. This one allows the building of tracks, creation of hard standing for parking vehicles or for putting bales etc. We've factored in the agricultural needs so it shouldn't impact on the common agricultural activities, but it will disrupt illegal operators looking to dispose of waste. This is probably worth highlighting more than any of the others for the farming community. The other one is around clearing scrub and burning it. That's been abused by some operators in order to bring waste onto a site and burn it. However, it's never intended to be that it's waste generated at the site and to be burned. This has been clarified to say that it's waste generated at that site.
37. Regarding timelines on the changes, this is up in the air – we are dependent on Senedd and Parliament. We've seen the Government response this year, but it the changes won't kick in until the Regulations are laid (the Environmental Permitting Regulations), which is the enabling regulations. We're looking at possibly spring next year for the changes to come in, but it may be later. Some changes will be immediate but most of them are staggered which gives time for operators to adapt their operations. Probably within the next two years, most of the changes will have been enacted.
38. We have a detailed comms plan that includes the agricultural industry but obviously today is a good chance for us to raise awareness of this. Geraint said he is happy to come back to this group at a future meeting if that is helpful.
39. Rachel said we just want to make sure that there are no unintended consequences for the farming community. Rachel asked if Geraint circulate a short paper summarising the changes, and if so, is there an opportunity to provide comments on that. Geraint agreed to provide a summary of the changes and what we're expecting the timescales to be. WLMF members are welcome to get back to Geraint if needed. Geraint reminded

the group that the detail will be in the Regulations which are still being written. However, if any issues can be raised with Geraint, then he can influence the direction and can try and avoid any those unintended consequences.

40. Dominic Driver said the way Geraint has approached the forum has been great, this discussion is happening early on in the process, the context has been provided and Geraint has been clear about the potential impact on farming. Dominic asked about the potential unintended consequences for land managers who include forestry as part of their Land Management. Geraint said it is not something we've engaged with too much, so it would be useful to have any thoughts on that. Geraint suggested that the summary paper can quite generic and then we can look at it from all the different aspects of the group. Geraint said he hasn't engaged a huge amount with forestry and waste management. And he is not aware of it being a problem sector. However, we need to make sure we consider any unintended consequences.
41. Rhys acknowledged the role of this forum and its ability to try and influence the development of some of these policies and regulations. It is good to be consulted earlier on in the process and having the opportunity to highlight some of the issues.
42. Dennis Matheson mentioned sheep dip disposal and the need for a licence. Dennis questioned whether it is sensible for NRW to put the fee up for getting a licence to spread sheep dip at a vast amount just as Welsh Government is launching a scab eradication programme. Geraint said it is not an exemption, which would be something called a Groundwater Authorisation. It does fall under the Environmental Permitting Regulations as it is a type of permit for the disposal of a waste. Geraint mentioned that this is not his area of work.
43. Rhys said we have received a specific paper on Sheep Dip Disposal ahead of this meeting. Rachel referred to the NRW paper and said arguably it stands in stark contrast to the presentation we've just had from Geraint in terms of approach. Rachel asked if there is an opportunity to discuss that paper today because we would have some comments to make. Rhys suggested coming back to this in AOB.
44. Anthony Geddes mentioned woodland management and farmers can register an exemption for small scale brush burning. Anthony asked at what point that becomes commercial disposal and then potentially licensable. Anthony also asked about material that is sold off site. Geraint said waste can be complicated but generally, virgin timber generally falls outside. Anthony said forestry has a couple of areas of sensitivity around things like disposal of materials for machinery maintenance and obviously they are dealt with in a controlled manner anyway because they are controlled substances, but have you got any plans to look at forestry. Geraint said yes, the discussions today has raised this. However, it is likely going to be similar where there should not be any implications because most of the forestry activities fall outside of the waste management regime so it would be similar to what farmers do like track building etc.

AP September 04: Geraint Richards to circulate a summary document of the expected changes to Waste Exemptions along with the likely timeframes.

AP September 05: The group to feedback any comments regarding the expected changes to Waste Exemptions (including issues and potential unintended consequences).

Item 5. NRW Updates

45. Prior to the meeting, the WLMF Update Paper was circulated. Members are encouraged to review the document beforehand and come to the meeting with questions. Dominic welcomed questions from the members.
46. Gareth asked when will the routine inspections start taking place for the Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) (Wales) Regulations 2021. The NRW staff have now been appointed but inspections have not yet taken place. Sarah Hetherington said she would follow this up with colleagues and get back to Gareth.

AP September 06: Sarah Hetherington to ask colleagues when inspections for the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations will start and feedback to Gareth Parry.

47. Regarding the report on land acquisition, Gareth asked if there a percentage figure of how much of that was agricultural land previously and whether you have a percentage split of previous land use. Dominic said he doesn't know exact figures but nearly all of it was agricultural land. However, within each site there will be a range of land uses (e.g., trees on farms). The kind of land which is suitable for woodland creation which comes up for acquisition, tends to be agricultural land. We have tried to work with local authorities (and others) on other types of land but what we find in practise is that most of that land which has been brought forward is not suitable (e.g., contaminated land). John Browne said the actual type of land tends to be the poorer agricultural land of Grades 3B and less. Gareth mentioned a woodland restoration project in Scotland. Dominic said this activity is to create new woodland to compensate for permanent deforestation on the land already in our care it wouldn't work with recently forested land because it wouldn't new woodland.
48. Anthony said there was a good and comprehensive update from Miriam but pointed out that it is a larger area than 350 hectares that was lost in the creation of these energy sites. Larger areas of timber were felled to aid, either wind modelling or to aid the creation and development, and therefore the restocking of those areas immediately around wind turbines will not be undertaken. The compensation is actually for the small areas that the turbines physically sit on and for the road infrastructure and access routes. We have lost a far greater area of generally productive woodland off the Welsh Government Woodland Estate. It will be replaced with biological cover, but it is not productive woodland, it is not productive species, and it is not maintaining the productive increment that is required for decarbonization, for substitution into housing or into other products. This is an accounting exercise in many respects. There is one thing to replace trees lost under concrete and there is another thing in maintaining the productive area of the estate.

Anthony mentioned that this is his last WLMF meeting before his successor takes over in November. Anthony said this was his last opportunity to mention that the Welsh Government Woodland Estate and its productive element is incredibly important, as is its environmental and ecological tools. However, we've seen the Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) restoration programme take about 11,000 hectares of the estate in the last 10 years, so with each one of these land use changes and considerations, we see that productive area diminishing. Anthony expressed concerns that the areas of afforestation and fast sequestering in Wales are actually diminishing, not increasing. Those areas of land that are being acquired for compensatory planting

should seek to include the maximum in terms of a productive mix, because those are the species generally lost.

Anthony discussed details included within the update around felling licences and the Agriculture Act. Anthony emphasised that the Farming Unions need to be in the room for conversations that are going on around drafting of the conditions and the way in which people are given time to adapt to these new rules. NRW at present are still creating and are doing a very poor job of actually consulting. This legislation is enacted and has received Royal Assent, however, the rules, guidance, conditioning and the way in which they are used is supposed to be drafted in a consultation with forestry sector – it really does not feel like this at this point in time. Anthony explained that there is about 60,000 hectares of undermanaged woodland on farms in Wales and if the SFS promotes woodland management, we should see a significant proportion of that come into management, which means they will be seeking felling licences. The things that are being enacted now is going to make those felling licences more difficult, more time consuming and more costly to achieve. The drafting of this documentation and the way in which it has been done is pushing woodlands out of management, not bringing woodlands into management. There is a real problem on the horizon. The Minister has agreed to delay the implementation of the new Forestry Act legislation from the 1st of January to the 1st of April, but that is still not a huge amount of time. There are two likely outcomes of this change within the next year including quite severe unintended market manipulation for NRW timber sales, and secondly getting a felling licence for use on farm is going to be extremely difficult. Rhys thanked Anthony for all of his work and contributions to the WLMF and he wished him well for the future.

Dominic said the areas that we are focused on for acquisition, it is about permanent deforestation and in doing that, we're looking at all of the ecosystem services that are available that forestry provides, including timber. The area of woodland capable of producing harvestable timber on the estate was 104,000 hectares in 2018, it's now 102,000 hectares. The full projections are for it to reduce but to reduce slowly. At the moment, we harvest nowhere near the total sustainable timber harvest on the estate. There is a strong argument that we should be harvesting more, but it's not near the maximum sustainable cut. John Browne said the Welsh Government consultation on the 1979 Regulations has just closed. There was a stakeholder group looking at this. As a regulator, NRW is required to follow the Regulator's Code and Regulatory Principles, which basically are things like be intelligent, proportionate, use good information, consult with people etc. The Regs actually do bring the Forestry Act and permits in line with other permits.

49. Dennis mentioned that he attended a meeting on the new habitat scheme at the beginning of the week. Dennis mentioned that cross compliance will apply, which means that those that can't comply with the pollution regulations won't be able to access the scheme. Payment rates are going to be published shortly. Applications will be based on pre populated maps held by RPW, so areas of habitat shown on the map will be eligible for the new scheme. Dennis queried trees on a holding. In order to achieve 43,000 hectares of new plantings by 2030, a calculation was made that the existing tree cover on farms of around 7.5% would have to be increased to 10%. But tenants being exempted from having to plant trees wasn't taken to the consideration in the calculation. Commons and SSSI exemptions were accounted for but not exempting tenants. If you redo the calculation everybody else will now have to have 10.67% of their farm with tree cover and not 10%. RPW were not able to confirm this at the Royal

Welsh Agricultural Show. Dennis mentioned that traditional stock proof boundaries are currently designated as hedgerows on the RPW mastermap. In many cases, they are very old trees, but they will be designated as hedges. Dennis said he had suggested that a plant which needs a felling licence could be called a tree and if it's below that criteria then it could be called a hedge. This is important because farms that need the 0.67% cover could include old hedgerows as trees.

50. Anthony highlighted that NRW is acting as a regulator and dealing with felling licencing and application, however, NRW chooses to not acknowledge the either the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) or the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) as appropriate standards and methodology within their licencing regime. John essentially the management of the estate is managed to both the UKFS and to UKWAS. The regulator is to UKFS only, but they do only overlap about 2/3. The ultimate thing is we need to give as much emphasis to the wider issues of UKFS as it's the standard that we regulate to.

Anthony said in applying for a licence for felling and NRW as a regulator does not recognise the UK Forestry Standard as an appropriate standard for compliance. That is a real fundamental issue. When we're looking at restocking, we're looking at complying with best practise or the application of UKFS guidance. We need NRW as a regulator to be more balanced about what it sees as working towards applicable standards.

51. Regarding land acquisition, Rachel said it's a source of frustration to our members, which is often raised in meetings. NRW has a policy of acquiring more land but at the same time it's approach to replanting seems a little bit haphazard and often very slow. There's this perception that rather than acquiring more and more agricultural land, maybe they need to move ahead and get trees planted on the land that they already have. This was raised by Senior Officials in a meeting with NRW at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show when we were told that nothing is restocked, nothing's replanted for a minimum of five years due to the presence of a beetle. Subsequently, that raised another query because on farmland, if we fell small parcels then we're required to replant within five years – that seemed contradictory. Dominic clarified that the comments around 5-years was incorrect. Dom said he would look into providing a provide a full briefing on restocking. Dominic discussed the challenges around hot planting, leaving the land to fallow and contractor availability. Dominic reminded the group that these are the longest running, continuously certified estate forests in the world, along with England and Scotland estate forests. Every year we're externally audited to that standard. This year, for the first time in more than 10 years the number of gaps in that audit was minimal, so we've seen a steady improvement in the quality of our of our woodland management on the estate. Rachel said some enhanced communication around this issue would be beneficial because it is a source of frustration. Gareth said FUW had a similar meeting with NRW in the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show where we were told that it was a minimum of four or five years before replanting.

AP September 07: Dominic Driver to provide a full briefing on restocking.

52. Regarding the Consultation section of the Update Paper, Rachel mentioned that there is an event that's being held on the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations. Perhaps this is confusing that it is on the NRW Consultation Hub because it's not a consultation, it's an event. Rachel asked who was actually funding ADAS to do that event because it says it's not an NRW event. Jon Goldsworthy said it looks like we're

just using our Consultation Hub as a way to advertise the training event, which is probably inappropriate. Sarah said we'll take that action away to feedback.

AP September 08: Jon Goldsworthy and Sarah Hetherington to feedback comments regarding using the NRW Consultation Hub to advertise training events. said we'll take that action away to feedback.

53. Gareth recalled earlier comments made by Dennis about how much woodland is currently on farmland. Gareth said he had heard the figure is more like 6.6%, not 7.5%. Gareth asked if there is an accurate figure. We can understand the baseline and then effectively determine how much extra woodland will have to be planted under current SFS proposals. John said we can take an action to see if an accurate figure is available.

AP September 09: John Browne to look into whether there is an accurate figure for how much woodland is currently on farmland in Wales.

54. We could 2000 action must fine.

55. Rhys reminded the group that they can request specific updates by sending Bronwen an email prior to the next meeting.

56. No further comments were made in respect of the written NRW updates provided prior to the meeting.

Item 6. Updates from FUW / NFU Cymru / Wales YFC / Confor / CLA / TFA / Welsh Government

57. **FUW:** Gareth Parry said FUW continue to raise awareness of the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations. Gareth said they are concerned that there has not been an update from Welsh Government following the consultation on a licencing scheme for the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations. There is a Nutrient Trading Group meeting on Friday which comes as a result of the First Minister summit.

58. **NFU Cymru:** Regarding the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations, Rachel said it goes beyond awareness raising. There's been a lot of meetings to raise awareness, but that only compounds farmers concerns and anxiety. Farmers are grappling with an extremely complex piece of regulation with very complex record keeping requirements. It's going to take a long time for them to adapt to these requirements.

NFU Cymru are also involved with the phosphates work. We're all waiting now for the next phase of the Sustainable Farming Scheme proposals later this year. The NFU Cymru Sustainable Farming Conference is taking place at Bodwi, Pwllheli next Thursday, and there is a warm welcome to all. Rhys said he will be attending the conference.

Rhys asked if there is a process of evaluating the implementation and understanding the lessons learned, difficulties faced etc. Rachel said these regulations do actually build in a 4-year review which we are fast approaching. Rachel suggested that it would be good to include that on a future agenda so that we can understand NRW's role in the 4-year review. Rachel said she is not convinced the review will take in sort of the human/social considerations that are needed. This is a pan-Wales regulation which

effects an awful lot of farm businesses, and many people are worried and concerned about the impacts. Rachel mentioned that compliance with these regulations is not being helped currently by the planning system and by NRW as a statutory consultee to the planning system. Rhys asked if these concerns have formally been submitted to NRW in writing. Rachel said our concerns around planning and how the planning system will enable compliance with these regulations is one that's well versed. The level of concern within our membership has led NFU Cymru to actually writing to all the LPAS and instigating meetings with those planning authorities to see if we can address the issues. Rachel said she would check whether a letter has also been submitted to NRW.

AP September 10: Rachel Lewis Davies, NFU Cymru to check whether they submitted a formal letter to NRW detailing concerns around the planning system preventing compliance with the Control of Agricultural Pollution Regulations and NRW's role as a statutory consultee.

59. **Wales YFC:** An update was not available.

60. **Confor:** Anthony said Confor have been working closely on forest policy and ensuring appropriate and sufficient training has been given both to NRW staff and to members of the private sector. Our main work at the moment is trying to understand what the impact of the delay to approval of expressions of interest for woodland planning grants and for woodland grant schemes. Welsh Government have currently put a hold on any scheme approvals. Anthony mentioned interactions with NRW and that there has been some contraction due to staffing for the upcoming timber sales contracts. Anthony provided a brief overview of the current state of timber markets.

61. **CLA:** Fraser McAuley provided a brief written update. CLA are involved with the Cross-Party Group inquiry, the report into how to increase rural productivity will be launched on 15th November (the CLA are providing the secretariat) and there is a specific section of agriculture and the food chain.

AP September 11: Fraser McAuley, CLA to circulate a copy of the Cross-Party Group inquiry report when it is published.

Fraser mentioned that there are some concerns over the interim Habitat Wales Scheme, specifically the short turnaround in terms of application and there is still no clear budget at this stage. We are also awaiting the next SFS consultation.

62. **TFA Cymru:** Dennis Matheson mentioned that he attended the arson reduction event which was held in Merthyr over 2 days at in June. Dennis also attended the North Wales Game Fair. There were some clear messages which came from both events including the importance of grazing moorland with cattle and sheep to reduce the amount of vegetation and the importance of controlled burning.

Item 7. Any Other Business

63. The group discussed the Sheep Dip paper which was circulated ahead of the meeting. Rachel asked whether the paper was subject to consultation because it reads as though a decision has already been made. If it was not subject to consultation, then it should have been. Rachel expressed her disappointment and said that it feels like NRW are using the regime to drive action in a particular way and that may be

construed by the farming community as trumping environmental and animal welfare considerations. It is not always going to be practical to give 48 hours' notice. For example, if you're a hill farmer with common land who has gathered sheep in and upon inspection of those sheep you come across a scab outbreak in that flock. You're not going to want to wait 48 hours necessarily to put those sheep through the tub because you're going to want to get them through as soon as practical to avoid spreading it to the remainder of the flock. You might suggest that you can isolate those sheep from the others, but actually it's well-known fact that sheep scab can persist on areas like fence posts. So obviously, the sooner you identify the problem, and you tackle the problem, the better. Therefore, 48 hours seems impractical in all situations. NFU Cymru and probably others would have appreciated some consultation on this issue ahead of a decision being made. Hedd Pugh, NFU Cymru agreed and said farmers will be very disappointed to hear that they'll have to give notice 48 hours beforehand, it is just not practical. Welsh Government wants to eradicate scab, but this is a barrier to stop farmers getting ahead of the disease.

Gareth Parry said this was the first time he had heard of this change when reading the papers ahead of the meeting, so it is a surprise to FUW as well. With such a change like this it should have been consulted on. From reading the update, it currently won't apply to those that have had permits before April, but from the wording of the update, it will apply to all permit holders eventually. This is a significant change and should have been consulted on.

Jon Goldsworthy is the new Sustainable Land Manager for NRW, who has replaced Dav Letellier. There was a Strategic Review of Charges which this legislation was included in. There was a 12-week consultation between October last year and January, but that was around the charging review and the costs. In terms of a consultation on the change to the requirements, we will take this away as an action. NRW have been working on the Scab Eradication Project with Coleg Sir Gar as well.

AP September 12: Jon Goldsworthy, NRW to liaise with colleagues regarding whether there was a consultation on the changes to sheep dip requirements and provide an update to the group.

Rachel said she had responded to the Strategic Review of Charges and can categorically say that this change was not included in that consultation. That was potentially an opportunity for NRW to raise the prospect of this change if it was going to.

64. Bronwen mentioned that there was a request to have a quick chat about future meetings in person. Rhys said perhaps having one meeting a year in person is a sensible suggestion. It is a way of developing relationships and could be an opportunity to tie it in with some kind of site visit. Tim Kirk, Confor said these meetings are really a very lazy way about going about our business. The interaction we used to have at these meetings was twofold; a good round table discussion but also a chance to meet our colleagues and discuss the problems informally. What we have now is a very stilted presentation, which does not do the job. COVID has been and gone which was the reason we started these online meetings, but COVID has now gone, so let's start the real meetings again, please. Rhys acknowledged that more interaction does take place at face-to-face meetings. Perhaps this can be part of the discussion at the next meeting of the forum. Bronwen mentioned that a review of the Terms of Reference for the group will also be conducted.

AP September 13: Bronwen Martin to include a discussion about in-person meetings on the agenda for the next meeting.

65. The next meeting will be held on Monday 11th December – WLMF members are encouraged to suggest potential agenda items and discussion topics, please forward them to Bronwen.

66. No other business was raised.

Close meeting