

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: Skype

Date of Meeting: Monday 13th July 2020

Present Members

Zoe Henderson, NRW (Chair)

Anne Noord (NRW Note taker)

Dennis Matheson, TFA

Aled Jones, FUW

Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru

Creighton Harvey, CFF

Bob Vaughan, NRW

Sarah Hetherington, NRW

Sarah Jones, Dwr Cymru

Marc Williams, NRW

Nichola Salter, NRW

Katy Simmons, NRW

Spencer Conlon, WG

Shane Thomas, CFF

Jamie McCoy, AHDB

Kate Snow, United Utilities

Lee Price, Menter a Busnes

Frazer McAuley, CLA

James Ruggeri, HCC

Stephen Marsh-Smith, WEL

Liz Franks, HD Cymru

Apologies

Andrew Chambers, WG

Kirsten Hughes, HCC

Sophie Straiton, DCWW

Matt Lowe, NRW

Item 1: Welcome

Welcome to Sarah Jones from Dwr Cymru who is taking over from Stephen Bradley. Zoe expressed her thanks to Stephen for all of his contributions to our group. He will be missed. Sarah said that she will pass the message on to Stephen and hopes she can live up to his record. Sarah explained that she has worked for Dwr Cymru for 5 years in the CAP Team, mainly in the West, upscaled to operate across Wales in the Disposal team.

Declarations of Interest

Stephen Marsh-Smith declared an interest in that he is the owner of a large length of the River Wye which is affected by pollution and will be discussed in the meeting today.

Sarah Jones declared that her family farms in Gower.

Shane Thomas declared that he is a fisherman and is doing a masters in Fisheries Management.

NB: All members of the group have completed declaration of interest forms already but should also declare if they have an interest in anything on the agenda.

Item 2: Minutes from previous meeting on 15th June 2020

Corrections

Page 6 4th Para should read “well documented” not “WEL documented”.

Page 8 para 3 should read “Objective” not “Objection”

Action Points

AP March 3: Discussions to take place on how to move the Agrisgôp groups forward and draft a proposal to take back to the Sub Group (Mark Squire, NRW).

Marc Williams will follow up

AP March 5: Circulate the structure chart for the Evidence, Planning and Permitting team to the Sub Group (Nik Salter, NRW).

Chart is still under construction. Nik will follow up

AP May 2: NRW to investigate the dates when NRW staff were instructed not to attend incidents and to limit attendance to incidents with a risk to human health, and when the restrictions were lifted (Bob Vaughan, NRW)

Marc has sent an email with the guidance and an explanation

AP May 7: Circulate information on how NRW will explore the scale of the environmental challenge in context of the current ammonia guidance consultation to Rachel Lewis-Davies (Marc Williams, NRW)

To be discussed in meeting

AP May 10: Circulate a briefing note on changes in Dairy Farming Practices in Wales to the Sub Group members (Nik Salter, NRW)

Briefing note has gone out. Rachel (NFU Cymru) has had lots of comments which she will send to the Sub Group for discussion at a future meeting

AP June 1: Provide a more detailed report on what SPG has been spent on, in what areas, what the farmers are contributing, and where the funding has gone that has a direct relationship with nutrient management – send to the Chair for circulation (Kevin Taylor, WG).

Kevin has sent us a report which has been circulated.

Dennis said that there has been an audit of how RPW works and is funded. Might this be relevant to SPG spending? Rachel confirmed that the audit applies to direct applications so doesn't involve RDP funding spent with farmers. There was a finding that £53m of the funding had not had a control to ensure value for money. Rachel will share this report. Lee Price stated that there has been a mid-term evaluation and the Statutory Advisory Board met 6 weeks ago. WG are looking to include mid term assessments to inform future actions, greatest impact etc. The Chair commented that some counties have a higher spend than others. There is a need for a breakdown of timescale in relation to SPG5 and treasury guarantee.

Bob will chase Kevin for these.

AP June 4: Information to assist in the finalisation of an RIA of the current pandemic to be sent to Spencer Conlon, WG (All). All to send information to Spencer

AP June 5: Check to see if the current case made by Afonydd Cymru in the European Commission Court has any implications on the timing of the Ministers decision (Spencer Colon, WG). *Spencer reported that initial findings say that there is currently no impact, but this may change*

AP June 6: Circulate link to the sub group on the guidance for farmers on water for livestock and the environment produced in 2018. This has now been reviewed and will now be published on the NRW website. (Marc Williams, NRW). Completed

AP June 7: Provide a report at the next meeting on the findings of both Nutrient Management Plans and infrastructure applications (Lee Price – Menter a Busnes). *Lee has provided a report which will be discussed later in the meeting*

AP June 8: To review the action plan and prioritise some of the projects based on discussions and try show the progress made on all the recommendations by the next meeting (Sarah Hetherington, Marc Williams, Bob Vaughan, NRW). *To be discussed later in meeting*

AP June 9: Speak to the Team at NRW who looks at external funding to see what opportunities might be available in supporting the Water Standard Report and taking forward the next steps (Bob Vaughan, NRW) *Outstanding*

AP June 10: Speak to John Owen, Gelli Aur about external funding as per AP 7 (Bob Vaughan, NRW). *Outstanding*

AP June 11: Review format of the Action Plan for the Water Standard Report (The Chair and Marc Williams, NRW). Outstanding

AP June 12: Review Communications plan based on comments received around Objective 2 and send the amended draft around for the next meeting (Katy Simmons – NRW). To be discussed later in the meeting

AP June 13: Review communications plan questions and feedback to Katy Simmons or Marc Williams, NRW (All) To be discussed later in the meeting

AP June 14: Clarify whether the Water Industry statistics includes CSOs (Nik Salter, NRW)

Bob explained CSO's are essentially designed to protect treatment processes at a treatment works by ensuring the flow entering the works is manageable and in line with the works design. They are designed to only operate during heavy rain periods when adequate dilution is available in the receiving water for any polluting discharges. They also act to provide a 'relief' in periods of high rainfall to prevent business and domestic properties from flooding by alleviating surcharging and backing up of soiled water into properties.

Spill events would not be routinely reported and recorded as an incident if they are operating within permit conditions; however should a CSO operate during dry weather and NRW become aware by way of a complaint from a member of the public or directly from the water company as way of a 'self-report' the event would be regarded as an incident as the CSO is operating outside of its permit conditions. These events would normally be recorded on NRW's Wales Incident Reporting System (WIRS).

Rachel asked is CSO discharges counted in the pollution incident stats? Nik believed it is and asked Rachel to send more details regarding incidents in Llanwrtyd. Rachel said that the information is on Dwr Cymru site and it does not look as if it is as the numbers are so high. Bob asked were they reported to NRW, but Rachel did not know. Bob said that they are permitted but are only allowed to discharge a certain number. If they exceed this, they are required to report this to us.

Action Point July 01: Rachel to circulate the CSOs statistics link to the Sub Group to review.

Zoe said that we need to be satisfied/confident that all areas of pollution are being scrutinised. Creighton highlighted that Afonydd Cymru are concerned and that NRW and Dwr Cymru are criticised because the public need to be informed.

Kate said that CSOs are permitted and only count as an incident if the permitted number of occasions are exceeded. Lots of time and money has been spent on this but has been exacerbated by worsening weather conditions/heavy rain/floods.

Dennis said that there are 2 places where untreated sewage goes straight into rivers when there is heavy rain. Bob said that this should be reported, should not be raw sewage, should be diluted. Septic tanks are different and can cause problems when people don't empty them as often as they should.

Stephen said that Dwr Cymru are regulated and permitted and they do turn themselves in, but he feels that Agriculture seem to be able to empty whatever they like whenever it rains.

Rachel and Zoe said that the agricultural sector need to understand that other areas are being brought to account not just them. Zoe encouraged members to read Marc's notes as they are very good and explanatory.

AP June 16: Quality check and amend Agricultural Pollution Statistics as per feedback and circulate graphs to the Sub Group (Marc Williams, NRW) Stats have been provided by Marc, comments made as follows:

Stephen said that he is concerned about the quantity of nutrients involved rather than just the number of incidents. He wants to know How much nutrient is produced, how much is stored and spread and how much leakage and seepage is there. He considers that it is not the big leakages/incidents but the constant seepage on a daily basis. Fraser is also interested in knowing how the figures were arrived at.

Bob said that monitoring has been done for many years and is used to establish general conditions. We also undertake modelling to understand what is happening. This is reported to WG and EU. Stephen asked where can these reports be found; he has asked for FOI and it doesn't seem to be available? Zoe said that this would be discussed later in the agenda and at a future meeting. She added that the root cause is interesting and management failure appears to be the cause of incidents. A range of solutions is needed

AP June 17: The Sub Group members to provide any messages on Gravel Removal for a further press release to Marc Williams, NRW (All)

Stephen reported that he did a project on gravel removal 10 years ago and produced a leaflet.

Action Point July 02: Stephen to send gravel removal leaflet to Marc for circulation to the Sub Group.

AP June 18: Clarify whether there is a limited consent on the amount of gravel which can be taken (Bob Vaughan, NRW).

Outstanding.

Item 3: WLMF Sub Group Action Plan

Bob explained that lots of effort has gone into this plan despite the extra work caused by Covid-19 and also financial constraints. Due to this we are prioritising and also asking for help. Is there anybody on this group who could help? Creighton said that he would be happy to help, and Lee also volunteered.

Marc has not sent the Action Plan out yet but shared his screen for those who were on Skype. Zoe asked if it could be sent out so that people not on Skype could see it.

Marc went through the priority recommendations and explained what has happened with a further column identifying what next steps are needed to move forward the recommendation.

Action Point July 03: Marc to circulate the priority recommendations document to the Sub Group

Jamie McCoy was going to identify what resources were available in AHDB on soils impacting on water quality for recommendation 4.12. Kate mentioned an initiative on the River Dee to look at where erosion is coming from and using sowing of maize to help. A number of sondes will be deployed to measure turbidity and will be running for approximately 24 months.

Action Point July 04: Kate to send the NRW contact on the River Dee project to Bob to keep up to date.

For recommendation 6.1 Lee Price mentioned the CPD records are available online where farmers can sign-in and access. As part of the CPD record All Farming Connect related meetings, events and training packages are automatically updated to the individual's CPD record, along with a section to upload any certificates or qualifications outside of Farming Connect. This could be used as a one stop shop to capture all information for the individual landowner.

Creighton mentioned that in the last minutes Recommendation 3.1 Root Cause Analysis to be a priority. He advised that things had moved on since the report back in April 2018 and requested that this information be updated as some of the evidence has changed.

Action Point July 05: Marc to add recommendation 3.1 to the priority list on the document.

There was a discussion on the one stop shop for information for landowners and work has been undertaken by NRW to improve their website.

Sarah H said that Andrew Chambers has taken an action to look at where the information best sits between NRW and WG websites.

Zoe asked whether information was ready to put everything in one place. Sarah replied that everything is ready but not in accessible format. The Digital Team are working on this at the moment, particularly with the WLMF Sub Group minutes as they are all in a pdf format and will need to be changed.

Recommendation 6.10 Lee explained that Farming Connect have been working on the priority catchments with on-farm events, but due to Covid-19 no targeted events have taken place. However, in the long-term webinars and virtual events will be used to provide information to landowners who are engaging with digital activity. These are easier to organise, with no travelling involved and reduces costs. This will be a good opportunity to provide advice and information to farmers in the targeted catchments.

Sarah H highlighted there is a need to ensure we have competency frameworks for change agents to provide consistent and good quality advice. Sarah J mentioned having a discussion with the pesticide voluntary initiative how they provided training or produced briefings to agents that was consistent.

Rachel commented that the change agents requires a very special set of skills, expertise and knowledge. To build up trusted relationships with the farming community will develop over a period of time.

Action Point July 06: Sarah H help develop a Competency Framework pulling together the training packages from each organisation.

Jamie stated that AHDB are happy to support any farmer facing delivery, but they need good advisors available to deliver the work along with clarity on regulations before farmers are likely to engage. The AHDB team are specialist facilitators but are only a network of only 3 or 4 across Wales compared to much more in Farming Connect.

All recommendations in chapter 7 (investments) were listed and will be looked at in the next meeting. Bob thanked everybody for offers of support to move forward the recommendations. Bob also highlighted that NRW will be advertising for a Project Leader shortly to help to take this forward.

Item 4: WLMF Sub Group Communications Plan

Katy S shared the Communications Plan on her screen. Zoe asked everybody to sign up to this and support it

Creighton said that Farming Connect produced a video a couple of years ago regarding agricultural pollution, but it has only had 192 hits. 34, 000 Farming businesses and only 192 hits (although some of them will have seen it at other events.) There needs to be a way of getting comms over to farmers. Katy asked how farmers want to be communicated with.

Stephen MS said that paragraph 2 of Background/Context only mentions number of incidents and does not include diffuse pollution. Jamie M asked if these were substantial incidents. Stephen MS said that these are incidents and that diffuse pollution is standard practise and is not counted. Zoe said that this work needs strengthening in this document. Sarah H said that diffuse pollution is hard to quantify. Kate is highlighting bites to interest people.

Dennis said that the Dairy Project is pointing out Best Practice to farmers. This needs to be done face to face. Farmers don't always read or watch anything.

Bob said that the Comms exercise needs to tie things together, to encourage people to do the right thing. Sarah J said that it takes time to build trust in new stuff. Need to tell people 7 times in 7 different ways, share message across trusted partners. Do Farming Connect or NRW have media analytics regarding what works for different groups? Katy said we can use that on our own sites. Sarah J said that it is also possible to target postcodes.

Katy says that of the 5 key objectives number 2 needs work. Any other suggestions? Zoe said that we are not targeting communities we are targeting pollution. Stephen MS said that COGAP says not to spread when it is raining but this is when they do spread. This guidance is always breached. SSAFO is out of date. Level of storage needs are greater. Sarah H said that COGAP is not a statutory code. Zoe said that we need to be discussing Communications just now and not COGAP.

Katy said that there are incidents but that most farmers do follow the guidance and we need to focus on those who do breach the guidance praise the ones who follow it. Katy talked through the key messages.

Bob said that all pollution is included but mainly slurry as this is the main problem. He added that this is not an NRW document but a WLMF Sub Group document. We have made progress and it is hard work but will pay dividends.

Zoe said that getting comms right is a good step forward and that all members need to play their part in putting forward key messages. The video needs to be seen more but will need to explore how to improve this.

Action Point July 07: All members to send comments regarding the comms plan by a week on Friday to Katy.

Item 5: Farming Connect Update – Nutrient Management and Infrastructure Report

Lee, Farming Connect, provided a brief update on the report that was circulated to the WLMF Sub Group members on the Nutrient Management and Infrastructure reports. There were 617 businesses that have received reports and were provided advice. The applicant applies and has work undertaken either 1:1 or as a group scenario. Once the report is completed Farming Connect undertakes a follow-up impact assessment 12 months after the report was completed. This is only a snapshot of the number of businesses across. The evidence shows that the advice is having an impact. Lee can map geographically the location of the 617 businesses.

Rachel questioned whether there would be any scope to incorporate the similar survey undertaken on the targeted catchments work? Lee said that this could be done and can do a follow-up study for the various catchments over a period of time.

Item 6: River Wye Algal Bloom

Bob reported that there is lots of interest in this. This spring and summer there have been a lot of incidents of algal blooms. We have done lots of monitoring, we are going through a thorough review of data for all rivers.

The focus for the media is the number of Poultry Units, many which are below the EPR permit threshold and the widespread belief is that these are causing the problem. Many large sewage units are reducing their phosphate discharges.

Water quality data report will be published shortly, we are working with producers, LAs, WG to ensure that it is complete and accurate first. Planning issues are being reviewed.

Stephen MS said that there are 2 main tributaries feeding into the Wye. The Ithon went green above the sewage works in April and by the beginning of June the whole river was green. Warmth, sunlight and phosphate are all needed to cause this. There are 63 IPUs near the Ithon, all poultry food is imported, not recycled as in dairy production. Too much is going into the watercourses. Clear breach of habitats. There should have been a HRA for each of the 59 recent units. Hereford halted plans, Powys didn't.

Bob responded that we are working hard to get to the root cause and will publish our findings. We are working with WG and LAs. Hereford LA can do things that we can't. There has been an increase in poultry units but not an increase in the levels of phosphates. We are taking it seriously.

Item 7: Ammonia Guidance Consultation Update

Bob provided an update on the consultation relating to the ammonia guidance and due to Covid-19 the closing date has been extended. The consultation picks up issues raised from the previous ammonia conditions with comments to improve the conditions and ensure they are more effective.

Action Point July 08: All members of the group to look at the consultation documents and make comments. A meeting with NRW can be arranged to discuss further.

Item 8: Arrangements for future Sub Group meetings

All meetings will be via Skype going forward

- Monday 17th August 2020
- Monday 14th September 2020
- Monday 19th October 2020
- Monday 16th November 2020
- Monday 14th December 2020

Item 9: Update on relevant diary activities or cancellations/postponed events

Marc mentioned the online RWAS event that will be taking place Monday to Thursday next week

Item 10: Any other Business

Sarah J mentioned there was an announcement by WG on funding opportunities to improve water quality in Wales, which mentions the Nature Recovery Action Plan, Small Grants Glastir and NRW water quality improvement projects.

Action Point July 09: Sarah J to send the WG funding opportunities link to Marc for circulation to the Sub Group.

Sarah H explained the WG funding to NRW is for the Water Framework Directive delivery. Information is being compiled together on the projects which is being led by Mark Squire and can be circulated to the Sub Group.

Action Point July 10: NRW to circulate information on the WFD projects funded by WG to improve water quality in Wales.

Sarah H highlighted the regulatory decision regarding the U10 Waste Exemption application of milk to land has passed the 3 months review and will now be withdrawn. The exemption will go back to the original conditions prior to lockdown.

Action Point July 11: Sarah H to provide a briefing on the U10 Waste Exemption and circulate to the Sub Group.

Dennis asked Marc if there was an update on Waste Plastics Service. Marc said he does not have any updates, but Andrew Chambers should have some information. Creighton said he provided details of a company in Carmarthen collecting plastics to Andrew but has not received any feedback.

Action Point July 12: Marc to ask Andrew Chambers for further information on the Waste Plastic Collection Service and circulate to the Sub Group.

Close meeting