



Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF)

Minutes

Title of meeting: Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF)

Location: Skype Meeting

Date of Meeting: 11th May 2020

Present:

Zoe Henderson, NRW (Chair)

Dennis Matheson, TFA

Ruth Jenkins, NRW

Bob Vaughan, NRW

Marc Williams, NRW

Martyn P Evans, NRW

Katy Simmons, NRW

Aled Jones, FUW

Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU

Geraint Davies, NRW

Chris Blake, NRW

Antony Geddes, Confor

Tim Kirk, Confor

Elliott Rillie, CLA

Spencer Conlon, WG

Additional Attendees Present: none

Secretariat(s):

Marc Williams (WLMF Agri-Pollution Co-ordinator, NRW)

Apologies:

Mark Alexander, WG

Hedd Pugh, NFU

Sian Thomas, Wales YFC

John Browne, NRW

Dominic Driver, NRW

Item 1 Introductions, Apologies and Declaration of Interest

1. Zoe Henderson welcomed all to the meeting noting apologies.
2. No declarations of interest were raised in respect of Agenda items to be considered.

Item 2 Minutes from the last meeting and any matters arising

3. The Group reviewed the minutes from the February 2020 Meeting and approved as a true record.
4. The Chair reviewed the Action Log, noting actions discharged:
 - February AP02: Spencer Conlon to chase with Mark Alexander and circulate the Emergency Information Pack.
 - February AP03: No further development or future engagement events planned due to Covid-19.
 - February AP04: The invitation for Dr Ceris Jones to attend a future meeting will be carried forward to later in the year due to current circumstances.
 - February AP05: Spencer Conlon to follow this action up with Mark Alexander and circulate.
 - February AP06: Ruth Jenkins provided an update on the release of beavers to the Dyfi Valley:

NRW have received two separate licence applications with regards to releasing European beavers in the Dyfi Valley, one from the Montgomery Wildlife Trust and another from the Wildlife Trust Wales. For both applications NRW requested additional information and clarification as part of the licence assessment process. This information has been submitted and the application is now being formally assessed in line with standard licencing procedure. A steering group of local stakeholders has been established for the project, on which NRW is represented. NRW are also awaiting a full Disease Risk Assessment for

evaluation by the Welsh Government's Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer. Once all information is received the Permitting Service intend to undertake a public consultation on the application; this will be an online web format.

- February AP07: Outstanding

Item 3 WLMF Woodland Creation Task and Finish Group

5. Chris Blake, Chair of the WLMF Woodland Creation Task and Finish Group, provided an update from the first virtual group meeting held a couple of weeks ago. The meeting was well attended with over 20 members signing in via Skype. The Terms of Reference have been drafted along with the minutes from the meeting, these can be circulated to the WLMF. The group is fixed for 12 months and the aim is to make recommendations on what can be done to support more woodland creation throughout Wales, towards a target of the 2,000 Ha a year. The recommendations will be presented to the WLMF and if they are approved by the group these will be submitted to the Minister in good time before the elections next Spring.
6. Two presentations were given at the meeting by NRW on the review of internal regulation process and the National Forest process.
7. The Chair highlighted that it was a positive meeting. Anthony Geddes echoed that comment but raised concerns that there is a variation and range of opinions on woodland creation. The next step for the group is to bring everyone together and find a common ground.
8. Ruth Jenkins appreciated that a large group can be difficult, but it is extremely valuable to obtain a wide range of thoughts and views around the opportunities and barriers to woodland creation. Resources can be sought to help facilitate and manage the group.
9. Dennis Matheson confirmed it was a useful meeting but highlighted that there was no mention of tenants. There was a tendency to focus more on land owners, but tenants should be included. Chris Blake confirmed that was noted and would be taken into account.
10. Geraint Davies questioned whether any of the attendees sitting on the group will be delivering this target of tree planting and will be on board with the recommendations. Chris Blake highlighted that there will be sub groups set up to focus on particular issues. Farming Unions were unable to attend the first group meeting due to Covid-19 issues but will ensure they can attend the next meeting. The group is looking to make recommendations on how to implement and sent out a clear path forward, when that has been completed a further group will be set up or mutated from the current group to form a delivery plan.

Item 4 NRW Update

11. Ruth Jenkins provided an update on the NRW Business Plan, which will be available on the NRW website soon. There is still a strong focus this year on NRW's key themes around climate change, on both mitigation and adaptation. Another key theme is responding to the Nature Emergency and critically along side that is how NRW will be working with partners and land owners in supporting the delivery of the themes.

Another area of work that NRW is still focussing on is Brexit, providing advice and supporting WG, and how the organisation can respond to the different Brexit scenarios. However, some of the staff employed to carry out the Brexit work have been moved to deal with the Covid-19 response, particularly on NRW regulatory approach and changes in policy.

AP May 01: Members to contact Ruth Jenkins if they wish to view the NRW Business Plan (All).

12. NRW have developed good business continuity plans during the Coronavirus crisis and many staff have been able to work from home but conscious that there should be support to those looking after children and vulnerable people. Staff have also been re-planning their work around NRW budgets on how to deliver projects. NRW continues to follow the guidelines set out by WG on how to work safely, especially for those working in the field.
13. NRW have been working with WG on the capital spend and the provision of capital funding for specific areas of work, focussing around water quality. Money will also look at fisheries management and environmental management round rivers across Wales. Further information on the grant funding strategy had already been circulated to the group. There are three types of grant including Shared Outcomes Request, Strategic Allocated funding or Competitive Grant. However, NRW have decided to suspend the Competitive Grant this year as it is difficult for people to apply for competitive style grants until the other two bed into place.
14. Land Management Agreements have traditionally been used to fund the Natura 2000 sites but with changes to the Environment Act (Wales) 2016, NRW has facility to use the agreements in a wider capacity. This is currently not part of the Grant Funding Strategy.
15. NRW will be undertaking a review this year and setting up a Business Improvement programme on how the Land Management Agreements can be used and how NRW can work with land owners. The review will include communications with customers. It must be noted that NRW are not suspending the management agreements whilst the review is being undertaken.
16. There were concerns over the Glastir Woodland Restoration funding window 7 and 8 which is currently at risk of being removed by WG. This seems to go against what is being set out in the NRW Grant Funding Strategy. As a result, there will be concerns of another year of planting will be lost. It would be important to know if funding has been suspended in order to encourage land owners to apply for the Glastir Woodland Creation (GWC) window 9, where there is secure funding. NRW understands that the smaller package of money NRW has to support projects is different to funding packages by WG. Spencer Conlon confirmed that due to Covid-19 all WG budgets are currently being reviewed. NRW have not seen any instruction from WG to stand down on any current work on GWC window 7, 8 and 9.

AP May 02: Spencer Conlon to find out the latest position of WG funding support and circulate to the members.

AP May 03: NRW to provide an update on the long-term Forest Management Plan (John Browne, NRW)

17. Bob Vaughan provided an update on the second State of Natural Resources Report (SoNaRR). NRW staff have been working closely with some members of the group on the content for the different chapters. The majority of the chapters are well prepared and NRW are in the next steps to pull the document together to be published later in the year ahead of the WG elections.
18. The Area Statements (AS) were published on the 1st April and a letter was circulated to the group setting out the precautionary explanation why they were going live at the time. Martyn Evans explained that NRW have had to revise the engagement plans due to current circumstances. However, it will look forward to reconvening face-to-face engagement at the local and place level, along with some national engagement. There are ways to continue the engagement remotely and interactively online. There have been plenty of feedback being received on each of the seven areas on the website, which are being analysed by NRW staff. The National Area Statement Workshop held last year was extremely useful and was valuable to continue building trusted relationships. NRW will explore a similar engagement with farming and forestry sectors later this year.

AP May 04: NRW to circulate further information to the group on Area Statements future engagement planning (Martyn Evans, NRW)

19. Anthony Geddes has received feedback in relation to forest creation for productive timber output and there are concerns of the lack of understanding on what large scale forest can provide. Confor will be providing a response to NRW with comments on the Area Statements. The text around the Area Statements needs reviewing particularly on forestry. Therefore, it would be an opportunity to discuss with all Area Statement leads to develop their understanding on forestry. Martyn Evans confirmed there was scope to explore this further and was willing to set up a meeting with any members of the group to discuss with the Area Leads.
20. Martyn Evans confirmed the Area Statements were not written from a professional capacity but rather to capture the sense of input from all stakeholders. Confor are in the process of publishing a paper on biodiversity within forestry and commercial forestry. They hope that this would be able to inform and educate what is missing from the Area Statements.

AP May 05: Martyn Evans to set up a meeting to discuss Area Statements with the AS Leads and Confor.

21. Dennis Matheson asked whether the sustainability of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land project funded by WG have been taken into account into Area Statements about the suitability of growing crops and trees up to 2050. Ruth Jenkins confirmed that both SoNaRR and Area Statements are live processes and NRW respond to any new evidence they receive.

AP May 06: NRW to share the Sustainability of BMV agricultural land report to WLMF members (Marc Williams, NRW).

22. Geraint Davies raised that RDP funding are disappearing and changing into the next stage, but a large amount of money is still allocated in that pot. It would be beneficial in the short term to use those funds before changing to the future payments system. The Welsh countryside are missing out on many opportunities with no funds being available. WG mentioned again that all packages of funding including RDP are being reviewed due to current circumstances. These packages of funding are not unavailable, but all are within the review process.

Item 5 Update from other WLMF Members

23. NFU Cymru: Rachel Lewis-Davies explained that all their efforts are currently on supporting their members during the Covid-19 crisis. The main concerns have been around access, milk disposal and collection issues, and a drop in milk prices. They welcomed the support package being offered by WG to the dairy sector most hard hit. There is still an ongoing crisis within the beef sector due to changes in the supply chain.

24. FUW: The same concerns as NFU Cymru were echoed but Aled Jones has been focussing on dairy over the past couple of months. FUW have received more reports of fly-tipping due to lack of facilities to collect and dispose of the waste safely. There have been complaints made by FUW members on how slow the Glastir payments are made to farmers. Around half of Glastir Advanced and Commons have been paid which is disappointing that this is income they had foregone last year.

25. TFA: Dennis Matheson expressed his concern that the Prime Minister announced altering the rules different to Wales over the weekend which will raise further access issues, particularly on the borders. The risk of fires being spread has increased due to the continued dry weather and messages must be highlighted for the public to be vigilant if lighting fires. Dennis attended the Water Forum in Wrexham and there were discussions on removing existing weirs to aid fish migration. He pointed out in the meeting the benefits of hydroschemes and before removing structures considering the other benefits. Ruth Jenkins confirmed that any installations of hydroschemes will require an abstraction and impoundment licences and gaining permission. Therefore, there will be interactions with NRW and any issues with fish passage will be addressed.

26. Confor: Mentioned the issues still faced with Ash Dieback and the number of large ash trees with problems and cost implications to farmers. Due to the dry weather the nurseries are facing difficulty with the number of trees that will be available for next year. They currently have concerns with the National Forest programme which will now only have small pockets of national forest across Wales. Forestry is very much a social distancing project and maintenance of the planting areas continues. The mill industry has started again, and it is hoped within the next month business will pick up. Ruth Jenkins wanted to reassure that NRW staff have continued to manage the woodland estate and to keep the forestry side of the business moving.

27. CLA: No further updates to make and were all covered by other members.

Item 6 Fora Updates

28. No specific updates from the Fora. The minutes from the Fisheries Forum has been circulated to the members on the group.

29. The Chair wanted to update the group on the new appointments that have been made within NRW. These include:

- Executive Director of Communications
- Customer and Commercial – Sarah Jennings
- Executive Director of Finance and Corporate Services – Rachael Cunningham,
- Head of Customer Experience – Naomi Lawrence
- Head of Knowledge and Evidence – Professor Peter Freer-Smith.

The Chair looks forward working with them all and will strengthen the leadership team within NRW.

30. The Chair also introduced Katy Simmons to the group as the new Communications Officer for the WLMF and the Sub Group on Agricultural Pollution.

Item 7 Details of upcoming meetings

31. The Chair confirmed that the next meeting date is:

- Wednesday 9th September 2020

Item 8 AOB

32. Dennis Matheson asked for an update on General Licences from NRW. Ruth Jenkins mentioned that there are no specific updates. However, NRW are currently undertaking a review of the General Licences this year and are dealing with a Judicial Review on some aspects of the General Licences.

Close meeting