

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales
Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig | Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee
Ymchwiliad i ddyfodol Polisiâu Amaethyddol a Datblygu Gwledig yng Nghymru | Inquiry into the Future of Agricultural and Rural Development Policies in Wales
AAB 10
Ymateb gan Ymateb gan unigolyn
Evidence from Individual response

“For over forty years, Welsh agriculture, the landscapes and environment shaped by it, and the rural communities that depend on it, have been supported by policies set at a European level, albeit with a degree of local adjustment.

Following the United Kingdom’s decision to leave the European Union, the Climate change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee is carrying out an inquiry into the future shape of policies and funding to support agriculture, land management and rural communities which will be decided in Wales.

The Committee wants to identify the principles that should underpin the new Welsh polices that will be needed to replace those currently set by the European Union

- *What are the fundamental outcomes we want to see from agricultural, land management and rural development policies?*
- *What lessons can we learn from current and previous policies? What about polices elsewhere?*
- *To what extent should Wales develop its own agricultural, land management and rural development polices or should it be part of a broader UK-wide policy and financial framework?”*

1. PREFACE

My comments are personal views of this very complex issue (or issues) from my background of participating in a working family hill farm in the Brecon Beacons (producing & selling meat locally), many years of interest in the wildlife and biodiversity issues in our area, and volunteering with Campaign for the Protection of Rural Wales (CPRW) for many years. I am also a Chartered Environmentalist. So my views are always shaped by my strong support for the aims of CPRW in protection of our beautiful and uniquely varied countryside and its rural life, for residents and visitors, but are not the views of CPRW..

2. SUSTAINABILITY

One of the few recent Welsh Government innovations I like is the aim within the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act to assess every public policy and decision in terms of environmental, economic, social, and cultural sustainability for future generations, especially with the appointment of a Commissioner to enforce the Act

3. WALES, WFG ACT & ENVIRONMENT PRIORITY

So my comments are largely related to the four elements of the WFG Act. But as a preface to comments on the questions posed by the Committee, I would mention the critical issue of environmental degradation of the planet by humanity, which cannot be separated from Welsh environmental policy, and must be taken into account if WG is to change from participating in this global devastation of our planet's natural environment. If we do nothing, our future generations will be fighting for survival within a heating planet, with catastrophic storms, insufficient food and drinking water, rising sea level, reduced living areas resulting in huge population movements and wars..... I say WG is participating because of (to pick a few examples) the utter failure to achieve biodiversity targets; the obsession with economic growth which in planning policy has led to continual loss of countryside all over Wales to unnecessary development; and the obvious political interference affecting independent advice from NRW. Real independent comment and advice from organisations such as CPRW, Friends of the Earth, the Wildlife Trusts – with expert analysis, and representing many thousands of Welsh residents - are needed more than ever, and should be given much more weight by WG than they are at present

So in terms of a sustainable future, if humanity, including WG, fails to change course, whatever the WFG Act says, our descendants can forget about maintaining any economic and social standards, and culture will be a historic memory, because the environment will not provide us with enough food, clean water, safe air, and civilisation will collapse.

Environmental sustainability, stabilising our planet by living within its limits, has to be top priority of the 'triple bottom line' (now quadruple it seems), and WG policies must accept that fundamental basis, or the wish to safeguard our future generations is meaningless rhetoric.

4. COMMITTEE'S QUESTIONS

Of the three questions asked by the Committee, my views are mostly concerned with the first; the second and third appear to be aimed more at professionals.

5. 'FUNDAMENTAL OUTCOMES'

5.1 Main issues - the interaction between countryside 'protection' (largely ineffective, often ignored by WG), farming, and development is a major factor and often a concern to Welsh environmentalists, and CPRW is often at the sharp end of conflict. Brexit has increased concerns in two areas: -

- whether EU-originated environmental protection legislation will be maintained (or enhanced);
- whether Welsh farms, especially hill farms, will survive, with or without subsidies.

There is currently debate within CPRW on these questions, and the word that keeps coming up is 'balance'

5.2 Balance - so the outcome I would be seeking for rural Wales is to balance the four basic elements set out in the WFG Act. It is so apparent that recent WG policies have sidelined any consideration of the natural environment. How to achieve balance will be a long process of negotiation

and action. I have no hesitation in saying that environmental sustainability should come first – if we continue to degrade and use it inappropriately, the Welsh natural environment will be less, tourism will suffer, our future generations will not be able to enjoy it as we have, and the Welsh contribution to fighting global climate change will be reduced.

5.3 Natural environment – higher priority - with the long-term ‘future generations survival’ scenario firmly in mind, shorter-term policies must accommodate a much better valuing of the environment and its vital ecosystem services. Government must realise that the priority of economic growth in isolation is unrealistic. I believe WG post-Brexit policies must include: -

- Reducing drastically loss of countryside, green spaces and habitats; greenfield development must become a rare exception in a general policy of none. Biodiversity loss must be reversed. In respect of this, I hope the Committee will consider WG’s perverse and appallingly blind disregard for Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) as in the proposal for a new motorway across the unique Gwent Levels, trashing large areas of four SSSIs.
- Maintaining a core of indigenous agriculture and farms for several reasons, including : -
 - retaining food production in Wales, especially indigenous, traditional production that is suited to the Welsh countryside
 - retaining farmers and countryside workers with knowledge of and commitment to both farming and rural life, particularly for continuing employment for young people
 - Managing the countryside for biodiversity and landscape through much better and more focussed agri-environment investment, for the natural environment, but also for the valuable tourist industry and appropriate diversification businesses and ventures to maintain rural communities. (This must include high-class internet access for all, so that rural buildings can be utilised for enterprises as easily as urban offices)
 - Managing and working the increased woodland

5.4 COP 21 - just after the surprisingly successful 2015 Conference of the Parties 21 (COP 21) (the latest round of the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change), the World Bank reported on recognition of the role that the natural environment has in reducing CO₂, within that conference. To quote:

‘at COP21 in Paris, international governments recognized and acknowledged the key role that resilient forests and landscapes play for both climate change and development. nearly 80 countries identified the land sector, which covers agriculture and forestry, in their climate action plans as an area of focus for reducing emissions’.

I hope that Wales is one of these countries? If not, it should be, and the Committee should factor in the necessity: if it is, then WG should start fulfilling its promise.

6. **SUMMARY** - to summarise what I want to see as an **Outcome** (the first question)
 - 6.1 EU Environmental Legislation retained, but ...
 - 6.2 Legislation for protection of countryside strengthened, including much stronger justification requirements for any use of countryside and urban green space for development, and real statutory protection for wildlife conservation areas such as SSSIs
 - 6.3 Much better, effective consultation with communities and residents for strategic planning such as LDPs (there should be a requirement that a high % of residents know what is proposed, at present the crucial consultation towards the local authority decision is participated in by a % probably in single figures of the local population who will be affected), together with open and transparent business cases for LDP proposals, which are often non-existent.
 - 6.4 WFG Act must prevail, not a vague and incoherent 'growth at all costs is necessary' policy - as the Commissioner for FG is thankfully indicating
 - 6.5 Agricultural policy must be tilted towards hill farming (conserving areas of beauty and visitor attraction, and retaining farming and heritage – eg stone walls – and rural life), and away from lowland grain barons. The EU CAP should be replaced with a UK (or failing that, a Wales) Agricultural Subsidy Cap.
 - 6.6 The second question I cannot address (**Lessons learned, policies elsewhere**)
 - 6.7 On the third question (**UK and/or Welsh policy**) whilst there is a United Kingdom, there should be a UK policy, but the devolved administrations (and English regions) should make their cases for recognition within a UK policy of the special considerations needed and expected for their areas