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Arfon Williams and Roger Thomas  
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22 June 2020

Dear Roger / Arfon

## **Re. Wales Land Management Forum Agricultural Pollution Sub-Group**

Thank you for your letter outlining your concerns on the remit and outcomes of the Wales Land Management Forum Agricultural Pollution Sub-Group. Your feedback is welcomed.

In responding to your concerns, I would like to assure you that NRW does fully grasp the seriousness of the situation with agricultural water pollution which has been a cause of unacceptable and preventable impacts to our water environment for many years.

The sub group of the Wales Land Management Forum has been set up as a collaborative group with self-autonomy to tackle this issue, which we felt was important in helping people to work together and jointly own the drivers and risks to the environment and support each other in developing solutions.

We recognise that this way of working can at times feel out of touch with the urgency of the issues and impacts on our environment. However, what we have seen is different sectors joining together to explore all the options to tackle this long-standing issue, which can be more effective at tackling the systemic across sector changes required and can be far more innovative and impactful.

As you will know this way of working is embedded in the principles of the sub-group and align with our own remit for delivering sustainable natural resource management; Our role here is to create the space to bring people together and bring evidence to all parties in way that helps them to recognise the root causes of pollution and take steps to fully understand all the challenges and then own and deliver effective solutions. We are committed to helping this way of working to bring the solutions we need, but it is naturally testing at times and we would urge you to have faith in this approach to bring about longer-term embedded change.

What I have seen is that the sub-group has developed a strong culture of acceptance of the issues and challenges and a collective and very broad approach to drive forward five key components which, in combination, will help significantly towards the goal of eliminating agricultural pollution. This approach was signed up to by all members in 2018, and I hope that all members can accept that no single approach can solve the complex set of issues associated with this problem; only by employing a range of principles can we hope to deal with the complexity. These 5 principles are: Regulation, Voluntary actions, Advice and guidance, Investment, and Innovation.

I would encourage you to take a fresh look at the 2018 report as well as the action plan which outlines in detail the programme of work to deliver the recommendations. Rather than the group being overly focused on voluntary measures, I would suggest that there is a range of recommendation within the report which need to be delivered together. My team would be happy to go through this with you and discuss where you might be able to further assist in its development and delivery. Perhaps someone from the group could attend your own Land Use Working Group to outline the 5 Principles to everyone and provide details on the ambition of the sub-group, the progress made, and the challenging forward plan.

I welcome your suggestions to enhance the working of the sub-group, and I will ask the NRW attendees to look at the points you have raised. I will also ask them to discuss the points with your representative on the sub-group to consider how best to present them in one of the upcoming monthly meetings. For some of your points the sub-group, and indeed NRW, are probably not well placed to act upon them; and I suggest these may better be address directly with Welsh Government. For example, Welsh Government provides the main route and funding for farming advice, and as shown with the draft regulations sets the Policy agenda and Legislative programme.

As an organisation with many roles we continue to apply all relevant activity to stop unacceptable impacts on our environment. In parallel to the programme of work identified by the pollutions group we have a wider programme of work to enhance water quality and prevent further deterioration. For example, we continue to use our regulatory and enforcement powers across a range of sectors and are working to tackle metal mine remediation and provide planning advice where activity may impact on water quality.

It is worth noting that recent progress of the sub-group has been slower than planned due to the focus and time spent by members assisting Welsh Government as they have prepared their draft water regulations. Although this has been challenging, I believe the value of the group has been demonstrated through members continued engagement and Welsh Government using this avenue to test and comment on the regulation and the associated Regulatory Impact Assessment.

The sub-groups Action Plan is, I believe, being discussed at the June meeting in order to re-prioritise projects and look at what is essential to take forward ahead of the launch of the water regulations and the 18-month transition window for them. The collective ambition of the group is, in my mind, without question significant, and to make progress we need all members and the organisations they represent to commit to help take forward the recommendations. I am sure the sub-group would therefore welcome the support you

outline in your letter, with any offers of resources in kind or otherwise, from WEL members gratefully received. To help explore this I have asked my staff to discuss with you where the broad range of knowledge and skills across WEL members might best be targeted

I look forward to continuing to work with your members on this urgent and important work

Yours sincerely,



Clare Pillman  
**Prif Weithredwr, Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru**  
**Chief Executive, Natural Resources Wales**



Zoe Henderson  
**Chair of the Wales Land Management Forum sub-group on Agricultural Pollution**