

## A New Approach is Needed to Ensure that Agricultural Pollution Does Not Threaten the Long-Term Sustainability of Wales' Water Environment

Afonydd Cymru has long been concerned about the deterioration in the state of Wales' rivers and there is mounting evidence that the health of our rivers continues to decline. The latest State of Natural Resources Report 2020 published by Natural Resources Wales reveals that 66% of water bodies are failing to achieve Good Ecological Status under the Water Framework Directive, the majority of freshwater Special Areas of Conservation features are in unfavourable condition and continued widespread agricultural diffuse pollution has resulted in elevated nutrient and sediment loadings in our freshwaters.

The River Trust's work to improve the quality of our rivers takes us all over Wales and in carrying out River Habitat Surveys and during our work providing funding and advice to help farmers eliminate pollution, we regularly observe examples of agricultural pollution due to farmers engaging in bad practice, particularly with regards to the spreading and storage of organic manures.

We constantly observe examples of agricultural pollution particularly in those areas where there is intensive livestock farming. In our opinion, the substantiated reports of 3 agricultural pollution incidents reported each week in Wales, shocking as this is, in no way reflects the true extent of the problem.

We very much support the need to provide Farmers with advice to improve their practices and financial assistance to improve their infrastructure. We have contributed to these initiatives. We are glad to see that the regulations include transitional periods for certain elements to allow farmers to adapt and ensure compliance. We welcome the opportunity for the agricultural industry to provide an alternative suite of measures if that can more effectively reduce or prevent agricultural pollution.

However, despite repeated warnings from the Government to farmers outlining the need to prevent pollution there has been little improvement in the situation.

Consequently, we recognise that the time has come to adopt a different approach. The measures outlined in the new Agricultural Pollution Regulations are both necessary and needed now if we are to prevent further deterioration to our rivers and their biodiversity and to avoid detrimental impact to our rural communities, tourism, and the many users of our water environment.

Our rivers are a vital resource upon which all life depends. There must be no further delay in addressing the long-standing problem of agricultural pollution. Not to do so is simply inconsistent with Wales's aspirations to be a nation that maintains and enhances a biodiverse natural environment with healthy functioning ecosystems as enshrined in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.