

Written Response to the recommendations contained within the Sustainability Committee's Report on Carbon Reduction from Land Use by Elin Jones, Minister for Rural Affairs

September 2009

Playing our part in dealing with climate change and its consequences is at the heart of the Welsh Assembly Government's policies and actions. I am pleased to have received a report that endorses our policy approach and that also contains many helpful recommendations.

The recommendations contained in the report fit closely with our current policy direction and I am pleased to be able to accept the majority of them. Some require further consideration but I support the intent of the proposed action and believe that steps should be taken to achieve the intended outcome. Having such unity of views on what needs to be done is essential if we are to achieve these common objectives.

Recommendation 1: The Welsh Government should review the funding for Glastir annually to ensure that sufficient funding is in place to cope with demand.

Accept in principle. My officials regularly review and manage the funding made available through the Rural Development Plan to ensure that we spend what is available in support of the agricultural industry. However, it is important to point out that, in common with all other areas of Government, funds are limited by the availability of domestic and European monies. What is vitally important is that we work with farmers (suppliers) to ensure that the environmental goods and services we buy from them with this money are fit for purpose.

Recommendation 2: The Welsh Government should promote the economic benefits of the carbon saving measures contained within Glastir as part of the scheme.

Accept. I am pleased to be able to announce that, as part of the Glastir scheme, we will be making £5 million per annum available in capital grant support for the installation of carbon abatement technology on farms. Applicants for this money will have to demonstrate that installing this technology on their farm will reduce their costs and their carbon footprint (a carbon footprint assessment will be part of the application process). In addition, the new Climate Change strand of the Farming Connect service will provide mentors who will be able to advise farmers on the adoption of appropriate technologies that will reduce their emissions and costs.

Recommendation 3 : The Welsh Government should lobby the UK Government and the EU to ensure that carbon reduction is a key objective of any payment scheme covering all farms in the next review of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Accept. The CAP plays a strong part in addressing and mitigating the effects of climate change and steps have already been taken to integrate climate change concerns into the CAP through the Challenge Agenda. In addition, climate change was identified as a priority area by the Standing Committee on Agricultural Research (SCAR), and a working group of national programme managers has been set up to consider how climate change affects agriculture, and how agriculture can suitably adapt to and mitigate these effects.

The Welsh Assembly Government will continue to work closely with both the UK Government and the European Commission to ensure that agriculture plays its part in tackling climate change by reducing its own gas emissions, enhancing the carbon sink function of agricultural soils, and contributing to the production of renewable energies and bio-products.

Recommendation 4: The Welsh Government should establish a dedicated carbon reduction information service for farmers and land managers.

Accept. The Farming Connect Development Programme for Climate Change in Wales will raise awareness of the issues (risks, responsibilities and opportunities) and work with partners to develop practical and sustainable options to help land managers to address climate change. The programme will support the industry through a range of knowledge transfer and training services, ensuring information is available to help land managers adopt new approaches, demonstrate best practice and new technologies on farm, share ideas and encourage innovation.

Delivery will be local and relevant to the needs of the industry using proven techniques such as demonstration farms, events and discussion groups. Activity will be supported by Regional Knowledge Transfer Extension Officers, with a proven track record of technical expertise and communication skills. The new Climate Change Development Programme will work in collaboration with the existing Farming Connect Development Programmes (Dairy, Red Meat, Organic and Land Management). Together they will deliver support to the industry on other cross cutting themes of environmental management, animal health, welfare and information and communications technology.

Recommendation 5: The Welsh Government should support the development and roll out of a carbon footprinting tool which can be accessed and used by all farmers and land managers as soon as possible. The rollout of the tool should be accompanied by the production and provision of advice and help for using the tool which is accessible to all farmers and land managers.

Accept. The Farming Connect Development Programme for Climate Change has been awarded to Bangor and Aberyswyth University who have considerable experience of calculating carbon emissions for farmers and land managers. This includes equipment to measure emissions on-farm in addition to carbon footprinting tools.

The rollout of information on managing energy use and reducing carbon emissions will be cascaded through a range of knowledge transfer

mechanisms such as discussion groups, development farms and demonstration farm events. This will raise awareness of the benefits of carbon footprinting to the industry. Farmers and land managers can request further subsidised advice and help on managing carbon emissions through the subsidised Farming Connect Whole Farm Plan.

Recommendation 6: The Welsh Government should develop methods of sharing new scientific advances with farmers and landowners with a view to promoting their positive effect on carbon reduction as well as economic benefits.

Accept. Welsh Assembly Government has awarded the contract for the Farming Connect Climate Change Development Centre to Bangor University collaborating with IBERS. This will help to facilitate the transfer of science and technology from researchers to farmers and landowners.

Recommendation 7: The Welsh Government should agree a baseline figure of the amount of carbon currently held in organic soils in Wales and that figure should be used by all the organisations working on the issue in Wales.

Accept. The ECOSSE 2007 report provided the most accurate estimate for total carbon stock and carbon distribution in Welsh soils. This is regarded by Government organisations, agencies and research bodies as the baseline figure. However, this figure of 408 megatonnes of carbon is subject to significant but unquantified errors. Establishing a more accurate figure for soil carbon stocks would require substantial soil survey work. Estimating trends in total soil carbon stocks is impossible without this survey work. Instead of monitoring trends in soil carbon stocks, effort is focused on monitoring changes in soil carbon concentrations at sites across Wales, based on a representative sample of soils. We have adopted the Countryside Survey soil carbon stock method as a means of monitoring change in the top 15cm of soil where changes are most likely to occur and be detectable.

Recommendation 8: The Welsh Government support the research currently being done into the conservation of carbon in soils in Wales and uses the findings of the research to inform land use and agricultural policy as soon as it becomes available.

Accept. The Welsh Assembly Government participates in the management of the shared research budget with DEFRA which holds the England and Wales R&D budget. It also funds a small amount of research itself to cover specific Welsh soil issues, particularly on soil carbon management. ECOSSE 1 was funded by Scottish Executive and WAG, and follow-up work has been funded to assess the application of the ECOSSE model in parts of Wales. Findings from these projects are being incorporated where appropriate into Glastir.

Recommendation 9: The Welsh Government lobbies the UK Government and the EU to ensure that soils are given high level regulatory protection.

Accept. The Assembly Government is liaising with DEFRA which leads the UK negotiations on the EU Soil Framework Directive. It is agreed that soils need

to be given high level regulatory protection, but the negotiations cover mainly the best methods of delivering that protection.

Recommendation 10: The Welsh Government support the research currently being done into carbon fluxes in soils for tree planting in Wales and uses the findings of the research to inform land use and agricultural policy as soon as it becomes available.

Accept. The Welsh Assembly Government provides funding for the Forestry Commission (FC) in Wales. In collaboration with FC England and Scotland, FC Wales manage the direction of research for the Forest Research Agency. Once completed, this research will be incorporated into forestry policy in Wales. Since this inquiry took place, Forest Research has delivered more 'carbon numbers' which will allow the Forestry Commission to quantify all the carbon impacts of Welsh forestry policy options e.g. new native and mixed woodland on mineral soils managed without clearfelling. A comprehensive report on these impacts will be provided to both the Ministers Climate Change Land Use group as well as for the ongoing development of the Climate Change Strategy.

Recommendation 11: The Welsh Government support the Forestry Commission in establishing and marketing wood products as alternative materials on a commercial scale.

Accept in principle. Helpfully, this recommendation recognises that the use of timber as a substitute for other materials, especially in construction, can contribute significantly to the reduction of emissions. However, this action extends beyond the remit of the Forestry Commission and requires co-ordinated action. Other parts of WAG including procurement, economic development and public services have a major role to play in specifying and supporting the use of wood products [even if imported] as a low carbon material that supports the Government's wider climate change agenda.

Recommendation 12: The Welsh Government carries out research into the ways in which it could implement a carbon trading scheme wholly or partly within the land use sector.

Reject. DEFRA has funded a feasibility study for developing a carbon trading scheme within the agriculture sector. The report concluded that the cost of administering a scheme in the UK would be high in comparison with the potential savings. This is because

- it is difficult to validate the carbon emissions saved or sequestered from a particular land management/use
- carbon needs to be sequestered permanently and not released sometime later because of change of land use and management,
- the large number of farmers and landowners makes administration expensive.