

Minutes

Title of meeting:	Wales Land Management Forum (WLMF) Sub Group on Agricultural Pollution
Location:	Microsoft Teams Meeting
Date of meeting:	16 th December 2024
Members present:	Professor Rhys A. Jones, NRW Board Member (Chair) Michelle Griffiths, NRW Dennis Matheson, TFA Sarah Jones, Dwr Cymru Welsh Water David Ball, AHDB Nichola Salter, NRW Chris Mills, Afonydd Cymru Einir Williams, Farming Connect Creighton Harvey, CFF Matt Walters, Welsh Government Andrew Chambers, Welsh Government Betsan John, Welsh Government Cat Osborne, Welsh Government Gemma Haines, FUW Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru Marc Williams, NRW Jon Goldsworthy, NRW Fraser McAuley, CLA Ruth Johnston, NRW Delyth Lewis-Jones, AHDB
Additional attendees:	Dr Susannah Bolton Dean Roden, NRW Nick Young, NRW Alison Soper, NRW
Apologies:	Gareth Parry, FUW Sarah Hetherington, NRW
Secretariat:	Bronwen Martin, NRW

Item 1. Introductions, Apologies and Declaration of Interest

1. Professor Rhys A. Jones (NRW Board Member and WLMF Sub Group Chair) welcomed all to the Microsoft Teams meeting and noted apologies.
2. The meeting is being recorded for the purpose of capturing the minutes and the digital file will be deleted once the meeting minutes have been approved.

3. No declarations of interest were raised in respect of agenda items.
 - NB: All members of the group have completed declaration of interest forms already but should also declare if they have an interest in anything on the agenda.

Item 2. Pre-presentation discussion: SAGIS

4. Dean Roden, NRW joined the meeting to understand what the group want from a subsequent presentation regarding the SAGIS modelling.
5. Dean provided an overview of:
 - What is presently in place - modelling is currently water company focused. We have delivered our statutory obligation for Review of Permits; significant National Environment Plan (NEP) improvements programmed for delivery in AMP8.
 - What is planned (currently in development) - Modelling is still water company focused. Will inform AMP9, potentially with the addition of climate change scenarios.
 - What is the potential in future (development opportunities) - We need to have clear agriculture modelling outcomes - what are we trying to achieve/deliver? We need to agree rules for modelled representation of agricultural land use.
6. Chris Mills, WEL recalled that NRW are currently using SAGIS data to define the investment need for the water companies and asked why wouldn't you apply exactly the same principle to the agricultural sector. Dean said this is related to the confidence we'd have in the modelling outcome. The water companies are point discharges and for the review of permits, we're modelling the full impact which assumes that every single discharge is discharging for all consents simultaneously. Chris suggested it doesn't seem very equitable, this is a tool that's been used to ensure that the water companies invest to resolve the problem, and the same principle should be applied to the agricultural sector. Ruth Johnston, NRW disagreed, hopefully we will be resourced to look at this, but we want the agricultural sector to agree to the outputs and therefore it is important to have these early and honest conversations. Dean explained that it could be done now, but it would be grossly unfair on the agriculture sector because they'd be stumping the bill for private discharges and other things that haven't been adequately represented. Chris said he accepts that there has to be fairer apportionment, but it's also got to be a fair apportionment between the water company sector and other sectors. Dean reminded the group that the water company have point sources (they are actually paid to collect, treat and discharge), this is different to an unintentional diffuse loss from agriculture (e.g. polluter pays and principal apportionment) – these are two very different impacts.
7. Rhys suggested the group should not get into the technical discussion at this stage. Some key things have been highlighted which the group need to consider. Perhaps there are some questions in terms of the level of ambition, funding and resources in order to support this potential extra work. Maybe there are options to explore in relation to a 'basic' version versus a 'gold standard' version of this modelling. Additionally, there is a need for representatives on this call to have conversations with their own organisations to be able to come back with suggestions for the future 'wish list' and modelling output discussion. Rhys said this will likely be difficult for us to do by January and suggested that the SAGIS presentation could be provided in February which would give the group more time to consult with their organisations. We need to think about

what is realistic and achievable on the basis of whatever funding might be secured if it is presented to Welsh Government or other funders as a high priority.

8. Rachel Lewis-Davies, NFU Cymru asked when referring to SAGIS, is this the same modelling undertaken by Dwr Cymru Welsh Water (DCWW). Dean said it's the same modelling jointly done by DCWW and NRW. If we looked at other sectors that would be done by NRW. These models are NRW models that were built when we were EA Wales – we have also been involved with the last calibration. Rachel explained that NFU Cymru has had long held concerns about the SAGIS modelling and its suitability for agriculture and have fed back on numerous occasions. It would be really beneficial if NRW were able to provide a written briefing of what specifically is being considered now, and particularly what is asked of the group. We will then be able to provide very detailed responses. We want to see modelling undertaken where agriculture doesn't become the 'catch all' for everything else, not misquoted in the Senedd and mis-apportioned. Therefore, we would like the opportunity to provide detailed feedback and to guide the development of any future modelling.

AP 16th December 01: Dean Roden, NRW to circulate a written briefing of what is asked of the group regarding the possible future development of agriculture modelling using SAGIS.

9. Jon Goldsworthy, NRW recalled discussions at the Teifi hackathon events. Unfortunately, the original Ofwat bid was unsuccessful. Revisiting the SAGIS modelling and looking into agriculture in more detail was part of that original Ofwat proposal. We've since moved on and there are various bids live at the moment. DCWW are submitting an Ofwat bid for the Teifi, which is slightly different, and we are also developing a Heritage Lottery bid looking to improve water quality and work with communities within the catchment. If funding is an issue, perhaps it is a good time to think about including the agri SAGIS modelling in this work, so that it can be explored on a pilot basis within a specific catchment. Seeking feedback from the Welsh Farming Unions and all the other agricultural representatives is very important (e.g. exploring this problem and process through a Task and Finish Group). Modelling often includes various assumptions, but the various sectors have to come up with and agree to those assumptions. We have spent the last six months bringing together all the relevant evidence that exists for the Teifi Catchment and we're reaching a conclusion that there's an obvious gap, particularly in the modelling around agricultural sources. Jon said he is really keen to bottom that out and perhaps this demonstrator project is a mechanism.
10. David asked about the mechanics of wastewater treatment and whether that process results in some element of diffuse pollution, as well as the outflows that would be deemed point source. If there is a diffuse pollution from the outputs of a plant, is that taken into account in the modelling given that it's difficult to quantify diffuse pollution from agriculture. Dean said there shouldn't be any diffuse from the water company. There's some storm discharge intermittence, but they have been accounted for as there is a load that's been put in the model to represent those. David said separate from any storm discharges, are you assuming that 100% of the nutrient is extracted from what is discharged from a treatment process in the normal course of events. Ruth clarified that in terms of the modelling for the water companies, it is those direct discharges from the wastewater treatment works, plus the intermittence and any nutrient impact within those discharges, is regulated through a permit. The only other alternative source of nutrients coming from the water sector is an application of sewage sludge to land. We'd

like to be able to take this out as a separate number in the agri modelling approach so that we can potentially encourage the sector to have an alternative use for that sludge. The permits would regulate the nutrient impacts as required by legislation for those discharges. Ruth said she is happy to have an offline conversation with David.

11. Rhys concluded that Dean and Ruth would circulate a short note to the group along with some of the key questions in terms of determining the agreed outcomes and establishing what the suggested modelling for agriculture would achieve. Creating a Task & Finish Group could also be considered to help inform the initial discussions and support the possible future modelling work. Dean said it would be helpful to have a point of contact for somebody to make decisions on what's acceptable to the sector.

AP 16th December 02: Dean Roden, NRW to provide a SAGIS presentation at the February 2025 meeting.

Item 3. Upper Wye Catchment Restoration Project

12. Nick Young, NRW joined the meeting to provide an introduction and update regarding the Upper Wye Catchment Restoration Project. NRW launched the project at the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show in July 2024 - [Upper Wye restoration: Ambitious new project launched to help restore beloved river.](#)
13. Nick provided a brief introduction, described the project area, outlined the objectives, summarised the actions, explored some of the specific focus areas, mentioned how they communicate and engage with stakeholders and the public and described the next steps.
14. Dennis mentioned some consequences of historical work undertaken locally by the National Rivers Authority (e.g. fencing off the local river, destabilising banks etc). Dennis discussed some of the more successful methods he has observed in Australia (e.g. floodgates) and Conway Falls (e.g. batting back the bank).
15. Sarah Jones, DCWW asked if Nick had linked up with the Wye Catchment Partnership to showcase the work within the project – this is run through the Wye & Usk Foundation. Nick confirmed that he has made links. Sarah also mentioned the work of the Beacons Water Group and provided some examples of how they support Natural Flood Management. Nick said the project team have attended a few events including those linked to the Wye Catchment Partnership and the Beacons Water Group. They have also made links to the 4 Rivers for LIFE and the Dee LIFE Project.
16. Rhys mentioned that there is a lot of work and activities going on within different catchments and asked if there is anything distinctive about the approach of the Upper Wye Catchment Restoration Project. Nick mentioned that the River Wye was the river without any LIFE project funding so Welsh Government has provided funding to rectify that. The River Wye is made up of a number of quite sizable rivers, therefore the catchment is hugely varied. The project also includes a full time Agricultural Officer who will be working directly with farmers and land managers to resolve problems or issues. We are looking at a series of solutions and taking people along with us. Nick said the project would be more than happy to host a site visit for the group next summer.

Item 4. Intensive Poultry Emission Factors

17. Alison Soper, NRW joined the meeting to provide an overview and update regarding the new intensive poultry emission factors. Emission factors are used to estimate emissions from intensive farming installations, and they were last updated in 2013.

18. The Environment Agency commissioned ADAS to produce a report to:

- Appraise and review current emission factors.
- Establish whether current emission factors are relevant.
- Assess the potential impact of mitigation methods on emission factors.

19. The report included recommendations:

- List of updated emission factors
- Identification of evidence gaps
- All UK agencies to adopt the new emission factors.

20. Some of the outcomes from the review include:

- Recommendations to change some emission factors.
 - Reduction in EF for broilers
 - Increase in EF for turkeys.
 - Reduction in EF for free-range laying hens
- Recommendation to change the ratio of indoor to outdoor time for free-range poultry.
 - Currently assumption is 20% of time spent outside.
 - Consultants have been using 12% recently.
 - Proposal is for 10% going forward.

(Evidence shows that hens don't go outside very much, particularly when they're kept in large flocks in modern housing).

21. The Environment Agency published their new emission factors on 29th November 2024. We propose 01/01/2025 for changes to go live for both Permit and Planning applications (if approved). The NRW website and guidance will be updated accordingly, there will be direct communication with regular agents and consultants, and we will include information on the Emissions Inventory reminder email which is sent to farmers in the new year.

22. Dennis discussed the situation in Powys where the Council has approved another 4 poultry units, but they are awaiting Welsh Government approval. Dennis asked about research around egg and poultry production outside of the UK. If the government puts a hold on increasing the number of poultry units in the UK, we will need to increase our imports – perhaps this impact needs to be investigated. Alison mentioned that the background levels of ammonia in Wales are high and the sudden increase in chicken rearing in Powys was quite a concern. Alison was not aware of any research on this specifically, but it was an interesting point.

23. Rachel asked if the report can be shared. Alison said the ADAS report has not be finalised but can be shared when it is. Rachel said her understanding was that NRW was not currently determining permit applications, they're all suspended. Rachel asked if this is still the position and when would that likely change. Alison said that is still the position, we are still working with Welsh Government on this. Rachel requested a future update and written communication on what is happening so that NFU Cymru can keep

their members updated. Alison said she spoke with colleagues ahead of this meeting and there was no update to share, the position is the same. Rachel reminded the group that farmers have invested a lot of money in trying to get their applications this far, some of them have got permits but are not able to take forward the application even though it's been through planning. Rachel said in terms of ammonia specifically, there has been an increase in technological solutions like ammonia scrubbers and asked how widespread this is being seen by NRW. Alison agreed that there has been an increase, and the subsequent technology is very interesting. The ones Alison has observed have been quite positive about how well they are working, so perhaps there will be a gradual increase in use, particularly with the more modern units.

Item 5. The Water Resources (Control of Agricultural Pollution) (Wales) Regulations 2021: 4-year review

24. Dr Susannah Bolton (Independent Chair for the Review) was grateful for another opportunity to engage with the group. Susannah thanked the group for their valuable input during the last meeting – there was some really important material captured.
25. Susannah is in the process of collating information captured during the last few months including hard evidence from NRW and other sources, reports and material from various meetings. There is a very tight and ambitious timeframe and an early first draft of the report will be produced by the end of January 2025. Regarding the actual report, Susannah clarified that it is not going to be a long document, it will be clear and accessible. However, there will be an accompanying evidence pack with an index that will be easily searchable to find the relevant bits of evidence.
26. Susannah recalled that this group had not previously discussed the closed period with her. For completeness, Susannah offered the opportunity for members to share any commentary or views in relation to the closed period.
27. David said the closed period is a fairly blunt instrument to try and control the timing of applications. We understand why it's been the adopted method because it's fairly easy to enforce and implement. However, there are more sophisticated ways of assessing suitability of application based on readings for things like soil moisture, rainfall figures (pre, post and anticipated) and soil temperature as an indicator of crop growth. There may be suitable conditions just a shade within the closed period and therefore, there are alternatives to that blunt instrument that could be considered. Susannah said these comments reflect much of the commentary she has heard from others. There seems to be a bit of a trade off between creating flexibility and removing the bluntness of the instrument.
28. Creighton Harvey, CFF said on behalf of WEL, he is preparing something in relation to this particular issue. Creighton discussed some observations he has made over the past few weeks since the closed period came in. It is a blunt instrument, but it's very difficult to assess the success or otherwise, when you don't know how many farms are compliant with the storage requirements; these two things really go hand in hand. You can't judge the closed period until you know how many farms are compliant and how many farmers are taking that into account in the way they manage their farms. Locally, within the first few weeks of the closed period, there were a number of farms spreading. Creighton observed one farm in particular spreading for three days. Although, there was of course a lenient approach being taken by NRW, having been guided by the Cabinet Secretary. There are other examples of spreading taking place in good

conditions just inside the closed period. However, if you're going to have a more flexible approach, what resources are available to NRW to make sure that any application made is appropriate. Ultimately, there are two issues; the balance between the closed period and the storage requirements and also what resources NRW have for managing any applications that take place during that period.

29. David suggested perhaps something could be devised whereby a farmer needed to demonstrate and record that he'd taken all the variables into account (e.g. soil moisture, rainfall, soil temperature, crop growth, crop requirement etc.) and it was determined that the current conditions were a safe time to spread at a particular rate. All that information could be recorded for later scrutiny if necessary. David acknowledged the suggested trade off between simplicity and complexity, but perhaps there is some middle ground somewhere.
30. Chris Mills, WEL mentioned crop need and which is another factor that needs to be taken into account. Spreading without crop need is going to have a different impact to spreading where there is a crop need. Susannah asked Chris to expand on these comments in terms of how that could perhaps be implemented or how we better understand crop need. Chris said he was no expert in this area, but it is another factor to take into account – if there is absolutely no crop need, should you really be allowing the spreading. David agreed with Chris but suggested it becomes a question of how you judge crop need. There is a discussion ongoing in England about crop need and how that is determined. Currently, RB209 is used but that also is somewhat of a blunt instrument. However, if there's some sort of monitoring in place that could demonstrate there were growing conditions and the crop would indeed take up nutrients prevalent at the time, maybe that could be the source of evidence of crop need.
31. Dennis mentioned the need to clarify the definition of farmyard manure and slurry. Dennis was aware of cases where people are adding a bit of straw to slurry and thereby calling it farmyard manure to get around the closed period.
32. Susannah opened the floor for any further commentary for things that the group may feel have been overlooked or for things that haven't been discussed in this group that are pertinent to the regulations, assessing the effectiveness, understanding the impact or exploring alternatives.
33. Gemma Haines, FUW said in terms of the review, the 'farm workbook' is something that has caused FUW Members quite a lot of difficulty. Gemma asked if there was a position in terms of reviewing the actual workbooks themselves and how farmers are supported to meet the record keeping requirements, or perhaps this needs to be further discussion. Susannah said this is a point that's been raised with her a number of times in relation to the effectiveness and to make the implementation of the regulation simpler. This is certainly something that we are looking at as part of the review. This is linked to an area around how we look at removing any barriers to implementation, how we ensure that any particular behaviours are encouraged, motivated or incentivised. It is important to understand the factors that influence behaviour change. Gemma said FUW could share their experiences if Susannah required any specific examples.
34. Chris asked if the review covers the scale of the problem that the regulations are trying to deal with. Susannah said she is keen to ensure that we put the regulation, its purpose and what it was set up to achieve into context. We are looking at the big picture across the whole of Wales and ways in which we can represent that as simply

and effectively as possible. Chris suggested that it's quite hard to determine the effectiveness of the regulations if you don't know what the scale of the problem is. Susannah agreed, however there are many factors influencing the effectiveness, water and pollutants generally. There are many places where we don't have the evidence or the data, but that's something that we have to recognise as part of this process.

35. Chris asked if one of the recommendations will be regarding how we can gather that data in a more effective way going forward. Susannah said she will be looking at how understanding where there are significant gaps in the evidence will help with monitoring and potentially improving the regulatory environment into the future.

Item 6. Review of Minutes and Actions

36. Rhys confirmed that once the meeting minutes have been reviewed and formally agreed by the group, they will be published on the NRW website for the public to access. Therefore, it is important that the minutes are an accurate record of the meetings.

37. The group reviewed the draft minutes from the meeting held on 18th November 2024. The minutes were accepted by the group as a true record.

38. Bronwen shared the outstanding actions log and verbal updates were provided where possible.

- AP June 03: Professor Rhys Jones and Bronwen Martin to draw together the group responses to each of the recommendations within the SAC Rivers Agricultural Technical Group report and circulate it to the group.
 - Rhys said this action has become slightly more complicated than we initially envisaged. Rhys recalled that a useful meeting was held a few weeks ago with Cat Osbourne and Matt Walters from Welsh Government, David Ball from AHDB and Marc Williams and Bronwen Martin from NRW. During that meeting, we discussed the SAC Rivers Agricultural Technical Group report and its recommendations. Marc mentioned the outcomes from that meeting:
 1. Sending a copy of the report to the SAC Rivers Nutrient Management Boards because it could help them with the development of their new Management Plans.
 2. Inviting representatives from the SAC Rivers Nutrient Management Boards to the next WLMF Sub Group meeting in January to discuss the recommendations and whether they can support or take anything forward within their new to Management Plans.

Rhys said we will come back to this in January.

- AP Oct 04: Andrew Chambers, Welsh Government to provide information regarding a breakdown of all the schemes and the windows to which that £52 million was allocated.
 - Andrew provided the following information:

Scheme	Budget allocated	
Sustainable Production Grant 2021	£8.0m	Previous RDP funded support
Farm Business Grants – Yard Coverings 2021	£3.0m	
Nutrient Management Investment scheme 2022	£15m	
Yard Coverings Scheme 2022	£3.0m	
Yard Coverings Scheme 2023	£3.0m	
Nutrient Management Investment scheme 2024	£17m	2024 £20m commitment
Yard Coverings Scheme 2024	£3.0m	
Total	£52m	

Item 7. Any Other Business

39. Rhys thanked the group for all of their contributions this year and wished everyone a relaxing break over Christmas.

40. The next WLMF Sub Group meeting will be held in January 2025 (date TBC).

41. No other business was raised.