

**Notes of the meeting of the Wye Catchment Nutrient Management Board held in Conference Room 1 - Herefordshire Council, Plough Lane Offices, Hereford, HR4 0LE on Friday 26 April 2024 at 2.00 pm**

**Attendees:**

**Voting Members present**

Merry Albright (MA)	Herefordshire Construction Industry Lobby Group
Jamie Audsley (JA)	Herefordshire Wildlife Trust
Helen Dale (HD)	Country Land and Business Association
Simon Evans (SE)	The Wye and Usk Foundation
James Hitchcock (JH)	Radnorshire Wildlife Trust
Christine Hugh-Jones (CHJ)	Council for Protection of Rural Wales
Georgie Hyde (GH)	National Farmers Union
Sarah James (SJ)	Farm Cymru
Andrew McRobb (AM)	Council for Protection of Rural England
Councillor Sid Phelps (SP)	Forest of Dean District Council
Martin Quine (MQ)	Environment Agency
Councillor Elissa Swinglehurst (ES)	Herefordshire Council
Richard Tyler (RT)	Save the Wye
Martin Williams (MW)	Farm Herefordshire

**Welcome and apologies**

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting.

**78. NOTES AND MATTERS ARISING FROM LAST TIME**

The minutes of the previous meeting, dated 10 April 2024, were approved.

**79. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No public questions were received.

**80. DEFRA PLAN FOR THE WYE**

Anthea McIntyre (Champion for the River Wye) introduced herself to the board.

Will Lacey (DEFRA) introduced himself to the board and noted that he was involved with the creation of the plan.

The Chair recommended that the background to the plan and key issues in relation to it are discussed prior to the board discussing the nine commitments made in the plan.

Some of the key issues that were discussed were as follows:

**1. Citizen Science:**

- a) The Chair noted that no money has been set aside for Citizen Science in the plan and that support is needed to help them carry out their work.
- b) The role of citizen science was discussed in relation to monitoring river health, noting the work of volunteers involved.

- c) Cllr Catrin Maby raised concerns about a credibility gap where citizen scientists are not getting enough clarity on the use of knowledge accumulated.
- d) Anthea McIntyre pointed out the lack of funding for citizen science in the current plan and suggested providing support without making it a paid occupation.

## **2. River Pollution and Management:**

- a) Catherine Osborne shared insights on an integrated catchment approach, stressing a holistic view to tackle river pollution.
- b) Will Lacey discussed the issue of phosphorous in the Wye Catchment, highlighting that a one-size-fits-all solution is ineffective. He advocated for evidence-based, site-specific actions.

## **3. Collaboration and Cross-Border Coordination:**

- a) Catherine Osborne emphasized the need for collaboration between DEFRA, Welsh Government, and other stakeholders.
- b) The river summit in Wales was noted, emphasizing its importance in fostering collaboration across borders.
- c) Anthea McIntyre noted that she is working closely with Welsh Government, Natural Resources Wales, and DEFRA.
- d) Andrew Blake and Merry Albright highlighted the necessity of cross-border coordination, as the River Wye's health affects both England and Wales.

## **4. Challenges and Potential Actions:**

- a) The Chair identified the four main challenges listed in the plan: excess nutrients (especially phosphates), excess sediment, climate change, and invasive species.
- b) Suggested interventions included catchment-sensitive farming, improved evidence and data management, and supporting local cooperation initiatives.

The Chair then proceeded through each of the nine commitments made in the plan.

## **5. Appoint a locally based River Champion**

- a) It was noted that Anthea McIntyre was appointed as the locally based River Champion for the Wye.
- b) It was asked whether Anthea McIntyre's position as River Champion could be subject to change following the outcome of the next general election.
- c) Anthea McIntyre noted that her appointment is in the gift of the Secretary of State and that it is her hope that the next Secretary of State can and will reappoint her as River Champion.
- d) Anthea McIntyre restated that she is an independent person and will be looking to work toward a five-to-ten-year plan, but was not going to put a specific timeframe on work done.

- e) It was agreed that more collaboration on understanding plans such as the NMP and the DWPP would be helpful and that to have a meeting with Anthea McIntyre after this NMB meeting would be useful.

**6. Amend, subject to consultation, the Environmental Permitting Regulations:**

- a) Amendments to the Environmental Permitting Regulations (EPR), particularly for poultry and pig farms, to control nutrient pollution were discussed.
- b) Will Lacey noted on the permitting change, a duty would be placed on the poultry farmer to ensure that they are sending the nutrients to a farm that will not over-apply it. The current thinking is that it will be on the basis of a NMP and will be informed by soil testing and an appropriate nutrient management guide such as RB209.
- c) The Chair responded that this is already being done within the catchment by Avaro who are already exporting the vast majority of litter and are having to show that it is not being applied in excess of crop and soil need.
- d) Will Lacey clarified that the intention is to give additional legal control rather than relying on voluntary action undertaken by companies.
- e) Martin Williams added that RB209 is currently under review at the time of this meeting.
- f) Christine Hugh-Jones added that it was hoped that in any proposed changes to the EPR, that poultry farms and pig farms would be seen with lesser numbers brought in to the regime.
- g) Martin Williams stated that 3d buffer strips would be great if there are no drains underneath them. Over time, farming practice will change and with SFI, it is being taken up and will come to a critical mass where it will become the norm.
- h) It was noted that EPR only applies to England and not Wales.
- i) It was argued that EPR is overly complex and it was suggested that simpler regulatory frameworks should be explored to achieve environmental objectives more efficiently.
- j) Sarah James added that the Welsh side is already recording and needing to import and export from a manure perspective.

**7. Help farmers retain more nutrients and soil in the field**

- a) The Chair asked in relation to SFI payments if anything is Wye-specific.
- b) Will Lacey responded that those actions are across England and that they are relevant to the Wye.

**8. Support the management of poultry manure by funding poultry manure combustors and; Pilot the use of on-farm micro anaerobic digesters (AD):**

- a) Will Lacey noted that there was ministerial interest in looking at the role of AD in rural energy generation and manure and nutrient management. However, the response to it was cautious due to issues raised and therefore it will be a controlled pilot scheme with a contractor working with

the farmer to operate the AD and exercising control over how it will be used.

- b) The Chair asked if phosphate stripping was considered.
- c) Will Lacey responded that the evidence did not exist to do a proper cost-benefit analysis on phosphate stripping.
- d) It was asked if the money allocated to these developments are from existing national budgets or whether it was new money specifically allocated to the Wye-catchment.
- e) Will Lacey responded that it is existing national budgets allocated specifically to the Wye-catchment.
- f) Cllr Maby asked if AD is a proven technology, why money is needed to be spent on a pilot and can existing examples be used to develop effective regulation.
- g) Will Lacey noted that this is specifically a micro-AD pilot and that the purpose of the pilot is to test its ability to improve the cattle manure nutrient use.
- h) It was noted that AD plants already exist and have been operational for several years.

#### **9. More than double grant approvals for slurry stores:**

- a) It was noted that conditions placed on Nutrient Management Plans by planning authorities in granting planning permission for agricultural development have not been monitored.
- b) The Chair asked how permitted development rights which support farm productivity and diversification projects addresses nutrients in the river.
- c) Will Lacey responded that the logic behind permitted development rights is to allow farmers to generate extra income through other sources and will reduce the pressure on farmers to intensify their operations.
- d) It was asked how it would be ensured that grant approvals for slurry stores will be more than doubled.
- e) Will Lacey clarified that the funding allocated to slurry store grants has been doubled this year compared to the previous year. Therefore, DEFRA is agreeing to fund twice as many projects as last year. This is nationally and there are increasing numbers in the Wye which are being approved.
- f) Anthea McIntyre emphasized the need for a long-term (5-10 year) catchment plan, building on existing efforts rather than starting from scratch.
- g) Martin Quine and Sarah James discussed the importance of a single, integrated plan that incorporates cross-border considerations and ensures sustainable funding.

#### **10. Work with partners on the Wyescapes and Wye Valley – Ridge to River Landscape Recovery Projects:**

- a) Concerns about funding and political uncertainty were raised in relation to development funding on projects.

- b) Will Lacey clarified that the government, regardless of the election, will honour existing commitments and signed agreements. Beyond that, it is not in the power of DEFRA to pre-commit a future government to anything as it is their right as the elected government to take whichever course they deem necessary. If the development phase is complete, then the funding, as pledged in the existing scheme, will be provided.

**11. Provide funding for at least 2 projects delivered with local partners in the next financial year:**

- a) Martin Quine clarified that the two projects referenced in the plan meet criteria for the allocation of funding and will therefore receive WEIF funding.
- b) It was noted that WEIF funding has not been allocated yet as it is for the business year 24/25.
- c) Merry Albright asked if there is an agreement to quantify how much phosphorous will be saved in order to receive WEIF funding.
- d) Martin Quine responded that it is not just about nutrients. A lot of the work that is partnered with is also about education and the wider habitat enhancement and creation.
- e) Sarah James asked if there are equivalent funding pots set aside for project work on the Welsh side of the border.
- f) Ann Weedy responded that there is the commitment from the Welsh Government to fund the Upper Wye restoration project which is about to launch in June.

**12. Cross-border research on mitigating phosphate pollution in the unique geography of the River Wye catchment**

- a) The Chair asked if there is any funding to support this research.
- b) Will Lacey responded that the DEFRA research budget will be used to fund that project. Once the scope is known for the research project, the funding will be secured.

**Conclusion:**

- a) The Chair asked the board how it would like to respond to the plan.
- b) It was unanimously agreed that the board write to the Secretary of State and relevant minister for DEFRA.

**Action: That the board trusts the Chair to write a response to the DEFRA plan to be sent to the Secretary of State and relevant minister for DEFRA.**

**81. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

There was no other business raised at the meeting.

**82. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting is 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024, 14:00.

The meeting ended at 4.49 pm

**Chairperson**