



THE HEATHER TRUST
Promoting Integrated Moorland Management

The Rural Development Sub-Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CARDIFF
CF99 1NA

30th September 2009

Dear Sirs,

The Future of the Uplands in Wales Inquiry

The Heather Trust welcomes the opportunity to respond to the questions posed by the Rural Development sub-Committee. The maintenance of vibrant upland communities is essential for the future management and value of the upland areas of Wales. Such areas are too often taken for granted as always having been there and as 'wild' areas that need little or no management.

The Heather Trust is an independent charity dedicated to the promotion of high standards of moorland management. Working with a wide range of other organisations throughout the UK, the Trust seeks to improve moorland habitat for the benefit of wildlife, domestic stock, game, local communities and all people with an interest in moorland and upland areas. The Trust works with policy makers and researchers and provides linkages to those who manage the land or have an interest in it. The Trust has good links within Wales, for example: Welsh members of the Trust, FWAG Cymru, Farming Connect, The Heather & Hillforts Project, and the Welsh Black Grouse Group.

There are no restrictions on publishing any part of this response.

Yours faithfully,

S P R Thorp
Director

Encl: Response

Newtonrigg, Holywood, DUMFRIES DG2 0RA

Scottish Charity No: SC010204

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RESPONSE TO THE FUTURE OF THE UPLANDS IN WALES INQUIRY

- 1 What form should future public support for the uplands take (including a consideration of the European Commission's emerging proposals for the designation of Intermediate Less Favoured Areas)?**
 - 1.1 If the uplands are to regain and retain favourable condition they need sustainable management.
 - 1.2 Due to the nature of the ground, the most effective form of management in most areas is likely to be by grazing.
 - 1.3 Wild graziers exist but on their own they will have insufficient impact to provide the necessary management.
 - 1.4 Domestic grazing animals are required and they need management by farmers and the infrastructure to support this management. For farmers to be present they need to be able to run viable farm businesses.
 - 1.5 With the current return through farming incomes, farm businesses cannot be viable without additional financial support. In some areas, additional income can be generated from non-farming enterprises but this is patchy and unable to secure the number of farm businesses necessary to achieve the required management standards for the uplands.
 - 1.6 Therefore, if the uplands are valued, which they must be, public support of farm businesses will be required for the foreseeable future.
 - 1.7 Support should be targeted at those businesses that will provide value for money. A geographical boundary for a support scheme is likely to offer the most effective way of targeting support and the boundaries should be defined to ensure that public money is not wasted on payments to that will not improve the condition of the uplands.
 - 1.8 One of the most important problems facing the future of upland farming is the increasing average age of hill farmers and the lack of new entrants. Some form of new entrant scheme should be considered to encourage younger farmers to join the industry.

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2 How can the uplands be valued for their contribution to the social and economic future of Wales as well as the environment?

- 2.1 The traditional uses of the uplands (e.g. agriculture and forestry) play a vital role in supporting local communities. In turn these communities through their management activities maintain the infrastructure such as walls, tracks, fences & gates.
- 2.2 The 'new' uses of the uplands have an increasingly important role to play in providing income into these areas. Enterprises such as renewable energy, the provision of water, carbon storage and sequestration are all emerging uses that will have a major impact on the uplands in the future.
- 2.3 The sporting potential in Wales is under-exploited. In some areas a return to grouse shooting has the potential to revive a traditional income stream that would fund management work and provide employment.

3 How can government policy work with land managers' needs to achieve the best use of Welsh uplands?

- 3.1 We have covered the importance of viable farming businesses in the answer to question 1. Support for hill farming is crucial.
- 3.2 Clarity of purpose for the uplands is important, with an associated coordinated approach to issues. In Wales, we do not believe that there is a clear answer to the question "What do we want for and from our uplands?"
- 3.3 Based on our experience of running Scotland's Moorland Forum, we would support the formation of a similar organisation in Wales to bring together all the different interests to include for example: policymakers, researchers, landowners, farmers & farming organisations, representatives of sporting interests, conservation & other agencies, recreational interests.
- 3.4 Encouragement of appropriate management, to include sustainable grazing by sheep, cattle and ponies and prescribed burning in accordance with the Welsh Heather & Grass Burning Code.
- 3.5 Consideration should be given to the establishment of Fire Protection Groups in upland areas to share best practice and allow a coordinated response by private sector and Fire & Rescue Service assets to tackle any wildfire incidents. Climate change is likely to lead to an increased risk of very damaging summer wildfires.
- 3.6 There is room to improve the exchange of knowledge between land managers to allow best practice techniques to be transferred between areas. We would recommend the establishment of a series of demonstration events to focus on particular issues. Examples would be the use of cattle and / or ponies to restore grassland to heathland or prescribed burning techniques and the equipment that is available to control fires.

4 How can a value be put on the natural, ecosystem services provided by the uplands, such as carbon storage and flood management?

- 4.1 This is a specialised subject that is being addressed by economists in different parts of the UK.
- 4.2 As a general point, there needs to be an increasing awareness of the services provided by the uplands to include the four categories identified by The Millenium Ecosystem Assessment: supporting (carbon sequestration, water retention); provisioning (food, water, energy), regulating (control of water flow, reservoirs); and cultural (access & recreation, field sports, tourism, landscape).
- 4.3 The Heather Trust is well placed to assist with the awareness raising process through demonstration events, meetings and / or seminars.

5 How can climate change and the potential impacts of climate change be built into the planning for the future of the uplands?

- 5.1 Climate change offers opportunities and threats.
- 5.2 There is a need to initiate landscape or catchments scale demonstration projects that integrate climate change adaptation with other land management concerns and form feasibility studies to test future management options and markets.

6 What are the roles of farming and forestry in the future of the uplands?

- 6.1 Management of the habitat, production of food, fibre and fuel, maintenance of the landscape.
- 6.2 Provision of income into the local community that will provide support for local services such as schools and shops.

7 What role does common land have in the future of the uplands?

- 7.1 Common Land is a traditional method of managing the land. It may not be an ideal arrangement in the modern era but it is likely to remain a feature of the Welsh & UK uplands.
- 7.2 Legislative review has fallen short of allowing only active graziers to take part in the management of common land. This can be a significant handicap where large numbers of inactive graziers need to be consulted before any changes to the management of the common can be made or before any application for a grant scheme is submitted. It is likely that this problem will remain in place for the foreseeable future.
- 7.3 In current times there is often insufficient coordination of the management input between graziers, agencies, sporting and other interest groups. To address this:
 - 7.3.1 The work of the Welsh Commons Forum should be supported.

7.3.2 The establishment and support of Commons Associations and their formation should be given every encouragement.

7.4 This is an example where better knowledge exchange would have benefits. For example, the success of the Gower Commoners Association is well known and the commoners' effort to spread the word about their work is to be applauded. More of this approach is required and could be achieved if funding for this was made available.