



Via e-mail
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30 September 2009

To Whom it May Concern

RE: FUTURE OF THE UPLANDS IN WALES INQUIRY

Thank you for giving the Welsh Association of National Park Authorities (WANPA) this opportunity to provide a written submission to the Rural Development sub-Committee inquiry examining the future of Wales' uplands. The three Welsh National Park Authorities collaborate on pieces of work such as this to collectively promote the benefits of Wales' three National Parks to rural regeneration, especially in upland and coastal areas.

The National Parks have two statutory purposes in the 1995 Environment Act:-

- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park.
- Promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the Park by the public.

In fulfilling these purposes, the National Park Authority has a duty to:-

- Seek to foster the economic and social well being of the local communities within the National Parks.

It is within this context that we offer our response to the questions posed by the Rural Development sub-Committee.

Before we arrive at our response, please be aware that it is supplemented by a couple of pieces of work supported by National Park Authorities in Wales.

In July 2009 the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority submitted to the Welsh Assembly Government the report entitled "The Brecon Beacons National Park: a good place for the

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Glastir Sustainable Land Management Scheme". This report explains the value of the uplands of the Brecon Beacons National Park and their strategic importance to Wales in terms of investment through an agri-environment scheme.

Please visit, <http://www.breconbeacons.org/environment/farming-in-the-brecon-beacons/a-good-place-for-glastir/view> for a copy of the report.

We would also draw to the attention of the inquiry the socio-economic review of Rhaglen Tir Eryri (an emailed annex to this correspondence). The objective 1 funded scheme operated jointly between Snowdonia National Park Authority and CCW. Completed in December 2008 we consider the scheme to have particular relevance to this inquiry given the evidence that it has helped to maintain farm incomes and provided additionality to other agricultural schemes. The scheme also had measurable tourism and cultural benefits that helped to further justify the investment.

We would be pleased to hear whether the sub-Committees' inquiry into the role of Wales' uplands is related to the Glastir scheme announcement, and the recent publication of the Rural Affairs Minister's "Farming Food and Countryside Strategy" earlier this year.

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)?

It is not easy to offer advice based upon a consideration of the "emerging proposals" for designating intermediate LFAs because the EU could choose to follow any of a range of four options or blend thereof –

- **'Status Quo+'**, empowering the Member States to delimit LFAs according to national indicators of natural handicaps and excluding previously used socio-economic criteria, establishing a 'no policy change' reference scenario, consistent with the new LFA rationale and close to the current situation;
- **'Common Criteria'**, combining an LFA delimitation based on common and objective criteria referring to natural handicap with a limited revision of the eligibility rules, in order to improve effectiveness;
- **'Eligibility Rules'** placing emphasis on a common framework for coherent eligibility rules to be applied at farm level within the designated areas, in order to further enhance the territorial targeting;
- **'High Nature Value'** linking the support to agriculture in areas affected by natural handicaps to the preservation of high nature value farming systems defined on the basis of common criteria;

More generally, whatever proposal is eventually adopted, we would hope to see the recognition of high valued landscapes as an objective in an LFA in accordance with the

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European Landscape Convention. The risk of abandonment is a serious issue that needs ample consideration at a European level. It's not limited to Wales, and the development of a mechanism that allowed for the sharing of different approaches across Europe would be welcomed. Abandonment will and does have consequences for landscape, water, carbon, and biodiversity management.

We believe that the Commission will approach the problem with LFA support for businesses including, but not exclusive to, the agricultural sector. If managed properly at a landscape scale, this could provide an opportunity to improve the infrastructure (service, transport, processing and telecommunications) within Wales' uplands.

It seems that a number of bio-physical criteria based upon soil and climate might also be available, somewhere. Under the Government of Wales Act, the final outcome for Wales will be determined by the EU with only limited flexibility or interpretation available to the Assembly Government. Therefore "hitching Wales' wagon" to any of the 4 options above might be unproductive at this stage.

Ideally public support within an intermediate LFA should maximise the provision of public benefits whilst stimulating a market in which existing upland farm businesses remain viable, sustainable and open to new opportunities. Public support might be based upon the natural handicaps that limit food production but which instead offer other public benefits such as ecosystem services. For example, continuing only to farm for livestock might be handicapped or unviable but farming for water conservation, water quality improvements, water supplies for small scale hydro-electricity systems, for conservation of carbon-rich soils and hillside woodlands might become increasingly viable and more resilient economically as the demand increases. Increasing demand becomes increasingly likely now that the 2008 Climate Change Act, the 2009 Low Carbon Britain Transition Plan and the 2009 One Wales One Planet Sustainable Development Scheme are underway.

Livestock production would still be possible under this arrangement but this would not be the 'be all and end all' for a farmer's business if s/he is also able to be productive via these other public benefits/ecosystem services. This would tackle the natural handicap, and create eligibility based upon what the land can actually produce most profitably, maximising the public benefit. Where appropriate, this would also reflect the land's high natural value, for example where there are SSSIs, SACs, SPAs and/or extensive areas of habitats of principal importance to Wales (NERC Act 2006 Section 42).

This approach would enable Wales more fully to deploy the recommendations in CCW's uplands strategy and it could also capture the soil and climate criteria if these are used to prioritise where most vulnerability exists (e.g., risks to ecology, water quality (Water Framework Directive), flooding, loss of biodiversity and conservation of carbon-rich soils).

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Biodiversity would be enhanced as a consequence because farming and land management to produce these public benefits would produce improvements in ecological status that in turn would benefit biodiversity and underpin livestock production. Healthy biodiversity has always been a serendipitous bi-product of different forms of land management.

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

A large proportion of Wales' protected landscapes and protected areas (National Parks, SSSIs, SACs and SPAs, former ESAs) are uplands. National Parks form 20% of Wales by area and as was emphasised in the Assembly Government's Axis 2 review consultation, their upland areas are largely coincident with the areas of organic and organo-mineral soils of importance to soil carbon conservation. Other important areas such as the Cambrian Mountains, Pumlumon and the Berwyn Mountains are also co-incident with these resources.

An exercise to value the environment of the National Parks was undertaken and reported in 2006. The economic contribution of the environment within National Parks is significant, supporting in the region of 12,000 jobs and generating £205 million in GDP (http://www.nationalparks.gov.uk/voe_national_parks_summary_english.pdf). The study considered a range of activities including agriculture and tourism, and noted that much of the economic benefit occurs beyond their boundaries. Products produced and sourced from within a National Park may attract a premium due to quality, location and name recognition. However, while they are well known iconic "brands" that add value and prestige to producers and operators situated within National Park boundaries, retaining a greater proportion of that benefit within local communities is a considerable challenge we have to overcome.

Already noted above, under the 1995 Environment Act, the National Parks are designated for two statutory purposes namely to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the Parks and to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the Parks' special qualities. As a consequence of Section 62 of the 1995 Act (which re-enacts Section 11 of the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act), all public bodies and statutory undertakers including the National Assembly for Wales and Welsh Assembly Government, are to have regard to these purposes when making decisions or carrying out activities in relation to or so as to affect land within a National Park.

As is true for those in Scotland and England, Wales' National Parks are Category V protected landscapes as defined by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) under its Guidelines of Protected Area Management Categories 1994. Category V protected

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landscapes are living and working landscapes with characteristic qualities, features and services that have been moulded by the interplay of natural forces and human activities over the course of time. The Parks and their communities are integrally linked but people cannot be actively engaged in the Parks' management if their own well-being is in question. Therefore ensuring the vitality of local communities closely entwined with the conservation and enhancement of the Parks and their resources is very important.

Management and valuing Wales' uplands is now governed by the 2006 European Landscape Convention. Therefore upland landscape management in Wales must now, like all landscape management, be integrated into all relevant policy including cultural, social and economic policies and the public must be involved in the development and implementation of these policies.

Achieving public involvement depends upon individuals and communities believing that they have a say in Wales' uplands. The uplands have always been important to Wales; they have and continue to be a source of raw materials (latterly wood, water, minerals). However, Wales' uplands will continue to pose a bio-geographic and socio-economic challenge to Wales because they form natural barriers to environmentally sustainable commerce, travel and regional development, most significantly north/south, but also east/west. In the face of climate change, declining biodiversity and energy descent pathways, these barriers can be removed by a shift in emphasis, re-prioritising the uplands as natural power stations (hydro-electricity) and natural reservoirs (watersheds, carbon stores, flood containment areas, biodiversity), as well as extensive pasture for a stratified breeding system at the fulcrum of Wales' and England's livestock industry. Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 they are also essential areas for Open Access, as well as for recreation activities on public rights of way.

As a largely upland country, Wales can re-calibrate its socio-economic future by integrating what the uplands have to offer rather than seeking to emulate a standard lowland, market-led economic model that leapfrogs and ignores the uplands. The new or rediscovered value for energy and water should be both promoted to the public and prioritised for investment by the privatised energy and water utilities companies (i.e., investing in catchment management), which would be an effective way of highlighting their contribution to the socio-economic future of utility customers.

Page 17 of the BBNPA's Glastir report (see web link above) outlines The Green Valleys Project and Community Interest Company, which is an example of how local people now value their uplands for the water supplied, the hydro-electricity this generates, the revenue that is earned from this and the additional projects that this profit can be invested in, including upland habitat restoration; the uplands are an integral part of these people's future. The Green Valleys Project is one example of a National Park Authority working with its local communities to enable them to become more self-reliant. However, this does

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require significant investment in infrastructure that once existed but has since been allowed to deteriorate or removed all together. To promote local production, self reliance and build self confidence the local infrastructure must be allowed to exist, from a small-scale hydro electric turbine to local, small-scale abattoirs.

We are also keenly aware of the value played by culture and cultural activities to the social and economic wellbeing of the uplands and would welcome its recognition. The Welsh language (for large parts of Wales, the working language of the uplands), Eisteddfodau, small county shows and other examples (young farmers) continue to survive within our uplands, albeit on the back of a diminished agricultural sector. Cultural expression has social and economic benefits, contributing to the wider societal fabric of our uplands, but they require a critical mass of people to guarantee their survival. The cancellation of planned events over the summer of 2009 (and during 2008) paints a worrying picture and should be a concern for the inquiry.

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

Farmers and other land managers are primarily concerned with the profitability of their land and being able to maintain a viable income from it. Exceptions to this are conservation land managers whose uplands are managed predominantly to achieve conservation objectives. However this emphasis may change (it is already changing in the Brecon Beacons National Park) where market values for water conservation and carbon soil conservation may emerge and where market values for renewable energy generation are emerging already.

For large estate owners, who may have abandoned their interest in their upland estates, this has been to the detriment of upland farming and upland commons grazing. Estate owners may have been discouraged for a number of reasons including the imbalances in stocking rates between commons introduced during the Commons Registration Act, as well as the effects of excessively high numbers of livestock encouraged by headage payments and the effects of industrial air pollution, the ecologically damaging effects this led to and the uncertain profitability of livestock farming. Where there is a desire or likelihood of farmers and graziers continuing to use the uplands, Wales needs to work hard to help re-establish close and mutually beneficial working relationships between upland estate owners and tenant farmers and upland commons graziers.

Page 16 of the BBNPA's Glastir report outlines a new business model for deploying Glastir within the BBNP. For the purposes of this uplands consultation, the detail of Glastir and the BBNP can be ignored. The important points are that Government policy should be aiming to use the limited public funding allocated to RDP agri-environment and rural support schemes to create real markets; to solicit and support entrepreneurial flair in farmers and

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other landowners; and to use small, limited investments to attract and accumulate bigger investment by other interested parties rather than simply relying on buying whatever public benefits the Assembly Government can afford from land managers each year. The aim should be to use limited public money to grow more money and to re-circulate the limited public funds rather than spending it in a one off transaction until the money runs out. Otherwise Governments will fail to help farmers and other land managers to escape from the straightjacket of reliance upon public funding and will fail to enable them to respond imaginatively to local and regional markets that will emerge for carbon and water conservation, renewable energy, localised food production and so on. A real, sustainable market will never emerge if it is only bought each year by the Assembly Government; this would be an artificial market, vulnerable to political fortunes, CAP allocations and money shortages.

A further point to consider, related to the above paragraph. Traditionally the policies of Government, whether in Westminster or Wales, have only ever existed for full-time farmers. The Committee may want to consider whether there is a role for the development of policies that seek to support and include semi-viable/part-time farms – or are all farms semi-viable in the uplands if you take out the public support? The “Sustainable Farming & Environment Report – action towards 2020” highlighted the need to maintain a profitable and competitive agricultural sector and recommendations on how to do this in great detail. It suggested that there might be polarisation in the scale of farm enterprises and recognised the potential role of part-time units. If sufficiently defined and appropriately targeted, could a policy shift provide improvements in the socio- economic functionality of the uplands, incorporating the priorities summarised in this response?

During their 2009 annual workshop, the National Park Ecologists of Wales, Scotland and England agreed on an action plan to seek closer working relationships with research institutes and councils (e.g., BBSRC, ESRC, NERC), with the aim to see whether it would be possible to develop a research funding theme to answer the sorts of questions raised by this consultation. Perhaps the Assembly Government could assist this endeavour?

Also, with the lead role envisaged for Wales’ National Parks in the Assembly Government’s 2007 National Parks Policy Statement, National Parks could be given more assistance to help fulfil this role and thereby develop rural solutions and working models for Wales’ uplands:

“[Wales’ National Parks] are places that experiment with new approaches in sustainable development and environmental conservation, providing exemplars of best practice for wider Wales, and helping to shape and lead future rural policy and practice.”

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

Their value could be enhanced to become equivalent to a currency value: an area's soil carbon value, water retention value, potential renewable energy value (e.g., hydro-electricity) should be established as a regional fiat currency or reserve currency, which land managers and farmers, as well as communities are entitled to trade and invite investment in. It is possible that this approach will emerge anyway, independently of any guidance or assistance from the Assembly Government. We believe it's in the best interests and future sustainability of the agricultural sector to have schemes that move away from simple "income foregone" policies.

In that case we pose the question, Should the Government act as facilitator? They would broker developments, ensuring that barriers are removed wherever possible, with the objective of supporting resilient and environmentally-led trading systems. However, Government would have to remain aware of potential abuses of emerging markets that may face exploitation, for example, water demand from the south eastern England may lead to unreasonable and unsustainable demands being placed on upland water resources.

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

The Countryside Council for Wales' Uplands Strategy is already addressing this question. The Wales Assembly Government has also completed its remote sensing exercises, re-surveying the country's habitats. Similar data may already be available (e.g., by infra-red GIS, LiDAR, soil depth GIS methods) that can or have identified the extent of Wales' carbon soils and water tables. Analysis should be carried out to identify the most valuable upland zones for a range of public resources and ecosystem services, risks and vulnerabilities and, in line with the European Landscape Convention, these should be integrated into the Wales Spatial Plan areas.

Wales' uplands have a role in mitigating climate change (e.g. through renewable energy generation and carbon management) as well as increasing resilience (e.g. through improved catchment management). World farming and food systems are inherently unsustainable and lack long-term resilience if the extent to which relatively cheap fossil fuels are used to interfere with the nitrogen, carbon and water cycles is taken into account. For example, there is not enough nitrogen in the natural cycle to feed the world's population and we are already dependant on artificial fertilisers. Longer term, the sustainable use of our uplands can produce food and other outputs in a more resilient manner and be less susceptible to reductions in energy supply.

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This question should also address the potential impacts of Peak Oil and energy descent pathways, as well as declines in the cheap availability of other finite resources such as phosphate (Peak Phosphate), all of which will change the face of farming. World farming and food systems are inherently unsustainable and lack long-term resilience if the extent to which relatively cheap fossil fuels are used to interfere with the nitrogen, carbon and water cycles are factored in. For example, there is not enough nitrogen in the natural cycle to feed the world's population and we are already dependent on artificial fertilisers and not reliant enough on species-rich, grass-led agriculture. Longer term, the sustainable use of our uplands can produce food and other outputs in a more resilient manner and be less susceptible to reductions in energy supply.

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

In addition to answers provided above, presumably the Welsh Assembly Government already has its answers to these questions in the form of "The Cherished Heartlands: the Future of Upland Wales" (2005), the 67 recommendations in the Future Farming report (2007), and also the Woodlands for Wales Strategy. The Wales Climate Change Group report to the Climate Change Commission includes a natural resources response from the Adaptation Sub-Group, which provides some answers too. Also, the Rural Affairs Minister has established a Land Use Climate Change Group, due to report during November 2009, whose evidence will be germane.

Please excuse this terse response, but a similar Inquiry into Welsh food commented on the plethora of agri-food strategies but the lack of action on the ground, is this becoming the case within farming/forestry?

They are key elements of the management of land required to manage the special qualities of the Uplands. They are also more important socio-economically when compared to lowland areas. A diversified economy, one that features forestry in its mix is likely to be more resilient.

The importance of grazing livestock and the factors that contribute to this should be emphasized and that if policies are correct then other elements may fall into place. The food inquiry suggested that concentrating centrally driven high level marketing support on the sheep and beef sector was a weakness, but we suggest this is not always the case (e.g. concentrate on your strengths, 80:20 rule) and in the right places this can work alongside other emerging priorities summarised in this response. Other sectors might best be supported through smaller-scale processing and marketing grants helping local level niche entrepreneurs.

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Highlighting the importance of farm-scale deciduous woodlands in delivering carbon (through carbon retention and wood-fuel provision) and biodiversity objectives cheaply & easily might be worthwhile and is already being incorporated into the new Glastir scheme.

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

Wales' upland commons are part of the Welsh upland resource and therefore are equally important to it. Commons provide additional special qualities as well as their own challenges. There is an argument that they are more worthy of public support in order to manage these special qualities and that they may be the best value option in delivering new public benefits (described as ecosystem services) such as water and carbon management. In bye land (i.e., not subject to common rights) is likely to be more flexibly managed to meet changing market conditions.

Implementation of the Commons (Wales) Act 2006 may be influential, though this depends upon the number of active commons associations that wish to take advantage of the provisions within the legislation. It also depends upon the form and function of the Commons Councils as set down by the standard constitution that will be issued under Regulation by the Assembly Government. The establishment of new Commons Councils under the Act will be made by Order issued by the relevant Minister. Therefore the new Councils will act under statute and are publicly accountable. Therefore they will be required to uphold the requirements of the Habitats Regulations (as amended), the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended), the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (e.g., the duty to conserve biodiversity), Section 62 of the 1995 Environment Act (to have regard to National Park purposes), the European Landscape Convention and EU Directives (such as the WFD and Habitats Directive).

Given the clear aim from the EU and from member states to provide public benefits from the management of Europe's uplands, the Assembly Government may therefore feel inclined to accelerate the implementation of the Commons (Wales) Act, in order to provide a clear framework and delivery timetable for providing public benefits, which should be reflected in the standard constitution.

The contributors to this written submission would welcome any further opportunity from the Committee to expand upon the content above, and would be happy to attend an oral evidence session were it considered appropriate.

Should you require any additional information in the first instance please contact Greg Pycroft, Welsh Policy Officer at WANPA.

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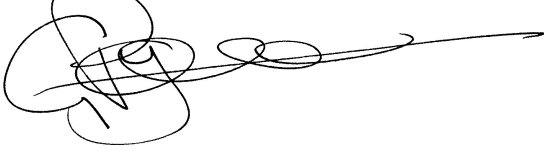
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