

Environmental Audit Committee

The Future of the Natural Environment after the EU Referendum

Background to CIWEM

CIWEM is the leading independent Chartered professional body for water and environmental professionals, promoting excellence within the sector. The Institution provides independent comment on a wide range of issues related to water and environmental management, environmental resilience and sustainable development.

CIWEM welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Environmental Audit Committee consultation on the future of the natural environment after the EU Referendum. This response has been informed by our Members working across the environment sector.

Answer to Consultation Questions

1. What are the implications for UK biodiversity of leaving the EU, in particular the Common Agricultural Policy? To what extent do initiatives to support biodiversity in the UK depend on CAP-related payments? What risks and opportunities could developing our own agri-environment policy and funding present?

Between 2013 and 2020 agri-environment expenditure is due to be £3bn in the UK, with two thirds of this delivered through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Without this funding and if environmental regulations based on EU Directives cease to be imposed, it seems likely that biodiversity, soils and rivers will be at risk of deterioration across the UK.

CIWEM believes that developing the replacement to the Common Agricultural Policy represents a great opportunity to improve land management in the UK (although it is a devolved policy and each nation will need to develop their own scheme). If handled appropriately, by technical and professional advisors the UK biodiversity could be greatly enhanced, because UK-specific policies could be developed and implemented.

The replacement should address opportunities for biodiversity, water quality, flood risk management and soil quality. Agri-environment schemes should be targeted to where they are needed, rather than allotted competitively. There also needs to be better monitoring of the effectiveness of schemes.

There is greater scope to implement the 'polluter pays' principle outside of the EU, for example to reduce diffuse pollution. Discouraging farmers from polluting at source, such as reducing the amount of slug pellets used or keeping cattle out of rivers, would reduce the need for water companies (and their customers) having to pay for expensive treatment technologies to remove metaldehyde, nitrate and phosphate to meet drinking water standards.

2. How should future support for UK agriculture be structured in order to ensure there are incentives for environmentally-friendly land management? What are the positives/negatives of current schemes (e.g. Countryside Stewardship) that should be retained/avoided?

Future support should be underpinned by science and policy in that order to avoid perverse incentives. There should be a simple and funded mechanism to challenge decisions motivated by political expediency.

We consider that there is a need to maintain the present level of funding but it should be distributed more fairly and equitably to give farmers a sustainable income. Presently larger farms benefit more from agri-environment schemes as they can afford to fund Stewardship proposals.

3. How should future UK agri-environment support be administered, and what outcomes should it focus on?

In terms of outcomes CIWEM would like to see a focus on biodiversity, water quality, flood risk management and soil retention and quality alongside agricultural productivity.

Administration should be undertaken by technical and professional advisors who understand the science. Monitoring for compliance will also be important.

4. What are the prospects and challenges for future environmental stewardship schemes in the devolved administrations? How much divergence in policy between the nations of the United Kingdom is likely? How can divergence be managed?

In principle, the same technical and policy advice should be exactly the same everywhere in the UK, because ecosystems and biodiversity principles are exactly the same, scientifically. In many areas of environmental protection, Wales and Scotland are more forward thinking than England.

5. What are the future risks and opportunities to innovative land practices, such as managed rewilding? What role can rewilding play in conservation and restoration of habitats and wildlife? What evidence is there to support the incentivising of such schemes in any new land management policies?

If appropriately managed according to scientific principles there are no risks. The risks come from politically driven policy and advice. Re-wilding of rivers is generally well accepted but the re-introduction of species can have public perception issues.