



c/o British Ecological Society, Charles Darwin House, 12 Roger Street, London, WC1N 2JU

Contact: Ben Connor, Policy Manager | Ben@britishecologicalsociety.org

Rt Hon Andrea Leadsom MP

Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Defra

Nobel House

17 Smith Square

London

SW1P 3JR

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Dear Secretary of State,

Environmental land management policy after leaving the European Union

As learned societies and professional bodies operating in the environmental sector, we represent over 17,000 members with academic, technical and practical expertise in ecology, environmental science, and landscape planning and management. We are writing to express our support for some key recommendations outlined in the Environmental Audit Committee's report following its inquiry into the Future of the Natural Environment after the EU referendum. A key opportunity identified in the report is the development of a new system of land management funding to replace the Common Agricultural Policy. We also wish to outline our perspective on the principles that might underpin future policy in this area, and to offer the support and advice of our collective expertise as the Government formulates its approach.

The decision to leave the European Union presents substantial risks, but also significant opportunities, for the UK's natural environment. It is essential that the effective framework of environmental legislation and enforcement of standards provided by the EU is maintained – or better, improved – to ensure that we not only meet our international obligations but also to help Government fulfil its commitment to improve UK's natural environment during its time in office. A new Environmental Protection Act could be one mechanism through which to achieve this.

However, despite the strong legislative framework provided by the EU, the UK's biodiversity remains in decline. Where scientific evidence shows that current approaches are ineffective, building our own policy framework for the UK natural environment post-Brexit presents a unique opportunity to embrace innovation, evaluate all available options, and combine best practice from the UK, EU and beyond, so developing policies which can reverse this decline whilst delivering a range of other benefits to society.

Developing a replacement for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) represents one such opportunity. Agricultural intensification, supported for the last 40 years by the CAP, has had a detrimental effect on the UK's biodiversity and ecosystem services – the benefits we derive from the natural environment. While agri-environment measures under Pillar 2 of the CAP have improved over time, these schemes have not been effective enough to reverse the damage done, and often remain in conflict with the aims of Pillar 1 basic payments.

The UK now has the opportunity to develop a world-leading, sustainable environmental land management policy that is adapted to the UK's environmental, social and economic needs, resilient in the face of climate change and able to deliver both a healthy natural environment and sustainable food production in a truly integrated manner.

The Environmental Audit Committee recommended that Government recognise the interdependence of its 25 year plans for food and farming and for the environment, something we wholeheartedly support. The integration of these plans would facilitate the identification of a common vision for the UK's rural landscape and natural environment, and ensure the Government worked towards a multifunctional countryside that meets the challenges we face in the 21st century.

We suggest that this policy should be based on the following principles:

- A shift in the balance away from income support towards **investment in the delivery of ecosystem services**, such as biodiversity, carbon storage, flood management, clean air and water, recreational opportunities and healthy soils. This investment should be based on a principle of 'public money for public goods'.
- A **strategic, systems approach to land management**, integrating agriculture and the delivery of environmental benefits at a landscape scale. Land owners and managers should be incentivised to co-operate at scales beyond the single farm to aid delivery of desired outcomes. Regional and local differentiation, for example greater intensification or land sparing, should be considered within this strategic framework. Environmental systems are complex and interconnected, so a degree of adaptability to reflect local system dynamics will be required.
- A recognition of the **connectivity between rural and urban systems**, and the impact of land management beyond the immediate locale. This framework should encourage both urban and rural residents and businesses to engage with and invest in the environment, promoting schemes that can deliver significant benefits to large numbers of people.
- An **evidence-informed approach**, drawing on our extensive knowledge of what makes an effective agri-environment scheme. Monitoring, research and evaluation at agreement and scheme level should be embedded within the policy, including collection of baseline data and field studies of interventions. Investment in monitoring and evaluation should be increased beyond the current level of less than 1% of agri-environment scheme value.
- A focus on **targeted outcomes and payment by results**, rather than a prescriptive approach to environmental land management. Land owners should be involved in the design and implementation of agri-environment schemes, with flexibility to determine how to meet objectives, supported by practical and technical advice from appropriately experienced and competent advisors.

The development of a new environmental land management policy should involve substantial engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including the public, to establish a collective vision for the future of the UK's rural landscape and natural environment. To effectively deliver on this vision, it must be informed by the best scientific evidence and expertise: the UK is a world-leader in environmental research.

Over the coming months we will be working collectively and as individual organisations to bring together the scientific evidence and technical expertise that can inform the development of a new environmental land management policy. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this work and the above principles with you, and to explore how we can best work with Government to inform the development of an ambitious new approach to agriculture and the environment in the UK.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Sue Hartley, President, British Ecological Society



Dr Stephanie Wray CEcol CEnv FCIEEM, President, Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management



Merrick Denton-Thompson, President, Landscape Institute



Noel Nelson, Chair, Institution of Environmental Sciences