

Lesley Griffiths AC/AM
Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros yr Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig
Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-05-733
Ein cyf/Our ref LG/06921/16

Mike Hedges AM
Chair - Petitions Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Ty Hywel
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

government.committee.business@wales.gsi.gov.uk

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December 2016

Dear Mike

Thank you for your letter of 2 December regarding Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) in Wales.

The Nitrates Directive (1991) (The Directive) aims to protect water quality by preventing nitrates from agricultural sources polluting ground and surface waters and by promoting the use of good farming practices. Measures introduced under the Directive in Wales intend to safeguard both human health and the natural environment, for example by avoiding or reducing pollution by toxic substances in drinking water and reducing eutrophication of watercourses. The European adopted targets for Nitrate levels reflect international World Health Organisation guidance which the Welsh Government means to follow.

The main objectives of the Directive are compatible with the Welsh Government's sustainability principles enshrined in the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 and the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Legislation introduced under the Directive is one of the key instruments in achieving improved water quality across Wales and reducing the impact of intensive agricultural practices on our environment.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1NA

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Lesley.Griffiths@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Lesley.Griffiths@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The Directive gives Member States the option to designate discrete targeted NVZs or to adopt a whole territory approach whereby all land within Wales will be subject to the action programme.

I am currently consulting on the implementation of the Nitrates Directive in Wales and the consultation closes on 23 December.

This consultation document invites opinions from individuals and organisations on:

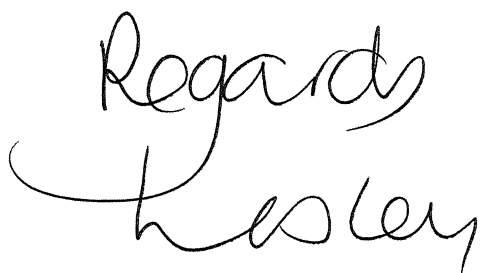
- options for future designation of NVZs – a targeted approach to designation of discrete NVZ areas or applying the action programme throughout the whole of Wales.
- Proposals to modify the Action Programme measures implemented within the NVZs.

These proposed new areas follow the latest evidence and data from Natural Resources Wales about waters in Wales which are classed as nitrate polluted waters under the current Nitrate Pollution Prevention (Wales) Regulations 2013.

Implementation of the proposals in the Action Programme following the designation process will contribute to an integrated approach to tackling diffuse pollution in water courses. This will, in turn, contribute to meeting other water quality requirements and the Welsh Government's wider aspirations for the environment in Wales.

The Action Programme proposals in this consultation document are underpinned by detailed scientific evidence generated through research commissioned by the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) to inform the implementation of the Nitrates Directive in the UK. The existing Action Programme measures and the additional measures contained within this consultation are likely to have greatest operational and financial impact upon dairy and beef farming practices. This is a proportionate response. Between 2010 and 2015, an average of 61% of recorded agricultural pollution incidents per year, were from dairy farms and 19% from beef farms.

The consultation exercise will help the Welsh Government to develop its policies for tackling water pollution with the aim to reduce Nitrate levels in water courses. The UK's withdrawal from the European Union may provide an opportunity in the future to review our approach to tackling diffuse pollution in agriculture. However, it will be imperative for any future policy decision not to have a detrimental effect on public health and Wales' natural resources.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Regards" on the top line and "Lesley" on the bottom line. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Lesley Griffiths AC/AM

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