



The All Party Parliamentary
Game and Wildlife Conservation Group

Inaugural Meeting and Minutes

Tuesday 11th July 2017

12:30pm -13:30pm

Jubilee Room, Westminster Hall

Acceptances:

Name	Representing	Name	Representing
Sir Nicholas Soames	MP	Robin Page	Rural commentator/CRT
Angela Smith	MP	James Somerville-Meikle	Countryside Alliance
Geoffrey Clifton-Brown	MP	James Legge	Countryside Alliance
Owen Paterson	MP	Shirley Trundle	DEFRA
Rishi Sunak	MP	Christopher Graffius	BASC
Bill Wiggin	MP	James Cooper	Woodland Trust
Sir Henry Bellingham	MP	Jeremy Moody	CAAV
Jamie Goldsmith	Parl Asst to Scott Mann MP	Stephen Trotter	Wildlife Trusts
Bernard Jenkin	MP	Gareth Morgan	RSPB
Nusrat Ghani	MP	Belinda Gordon	CPRE
Victoria Atkins	MP	James Bartholomeusz	CPRE
Richard Benyon	MP	Naomi Langford-Wood	Independent commentator
Lord Cameron of Dillington	House of Lords	Gordan Corner	NFU
Baroness Young of Old Scone	House of Lords	Debbie Winstanley	Sainsburys
Lord of Home	House of Lords	Christopher Price	CLA
Lord Dear QPM	House of Lords	Teresa Dent	GWCT
Lord Shrewsbury	House of Lords	Alastair Leake	GWCT
Baroness Byford	House of Lords	Andrew Gilruth	GWCT
Lord de Mauley	House of Lords	Gillian Kenny	GWCT
Lord Lindsay	House of Lords	Jen Brewin	GWCT

2017 Parliament Inaugural meeting and election of officers

The following were duly re-elected as officers of the APPG:

Chairman: Sir Nicholas Soames MP

Vice Chairman: Angela Smith MP

Officers: Lord de Mauley and Kate Hoey MP

Minutes:

Presentation by the Secretary of State for DEFRA Michael Gove – key points:

The decision to leave the EU gives the chance to revisit the basis on which the state provides support for farmers and land managers for the first time for effectively 40 years; an opportunity which we have to get right. In the past support and subsidy was provided to those who managed our land to ensure food security, protect our environment and support the rural economy. But CAP has not always incentivised the best form of environmental management.

Those who are involved in game conservancy and shooting are people who already understand the vital importance of maintaining a diverse and rich range of habitats (whilst also attracting cash into the rural economy). So by definition those who are running land and managing land with a view to sporting activity, have an interest in sustainability.

The agricultural bill provides an opportunity over the course of the next five years for Defra to ensure that the support given by the taxpayer to those who manage our land goes to those who create the right environmental outcomes and in many cases that will mean working with organisations like GWCT to look at what has worked already.

The number of people employed in agriculture is around 460,000 - 470,000 and around 470,000 people are involved in field sports and game shooting in our country. So those involved in game and wildlife conservation are equal in number, and in my view just as important to listen to, as those who are managing the land for the traditional agricultural enterprises.

Secretary of State Q&A session:

Q: Baroness Young of Old Scone (Chairman of the Woodland Trust): I wonder if the Secretary of State would comment on the need to join up whatever the 25 year environment plan is going to say with the Agriculture bill so that we get a truly integrated approach to management of our landscapes and land.

A: Reply by Secretary of State: Absolutely, as a lot of people will know the 25 year environment plan was a product or a consequence of the Natural Capital Committee's recommendation that we should develop an appropriately forward looking strategy for recognising how we observe and enhance natural capital and a critical part of that is

making sure that the incentives that we have in any replacement for the CAP, are incentives aligned with the environmental goals that we wish to set.

Now I touched on some of those and I think that critically what we need to do is to ensure that we encourage uses of land which contribute to the fight against global warming, which contribute to enhanced biodiversity and also that can help us deal with flood risk. Now as you will know better than me Barbara, trees and woodland play a part in all three of those. Trees provide a very, very effective carbon sink, a very effective way of dealing with flood risk and of course trees are integral for making sure that we have and help protect the range of species that we would all want to see protected and preserved in this country. So it is absolutely integral to any plans that we have in our Agriculture bill that the 25 year environment plan works in conjunction with it as to the two are interlinked.

Q: Angela Smith MP: Can we assume therefore that the plan will be public before the Agriculture Bill is presented?

A: Reply by Secretary of State: I won't give you an exact timing on either, but I don't expect that the bill will be until next year. That is the plan at the moment.

Q: Alastair Leake, GWCT Director of Policy: One of the problems with the CAP was its complexity and a great example of that is agroforestry for instance. Can we see/likely to see a better approach to dealing with those complexities?

A: Reply by Secretary of State: ... well I hope so, I think you're right. Of particular concern is what is called *disallowance*. In essence we sought as a country to make sure the CAP would better protect and to defend environmental interests. Wholly admirable, but in seeking to green it, we made it more complex than it might have otherwise needed to be. Once we had made it more complex, the European Commission, entirely fairly, said you have put on all these bells and whistles, but in order to ensure that the money is being allocated fairly, that means that we have to police the use of allocation even more rigorously than in some other countries. We need to make sure that the border around every field is exactly the prescribed length and so on, and when we found that there were occasional moments where a farmer or a land manager didn't abide by the absolute and precise letter of the policy even though he was doing everything in a broadly admirable fashion, then the EU's auditors would say terribly sorry you are not consistent with your own policies, we are going to take hundreds of millions of pounds out of CAP.

Understandably the Rural Payments Agency and Defra thought, we can't have that we want the maximum amount of money to go out to the front line to farmers and land managers and therefore we developed a very bureaucratic response and approach towards allocating that cash. I think we can do a lot better and I think one of the things that we can also do is to have an appropriately mature approach towards risk so that we don't require people whom we know to have proven themselves to be good land owners and good farmers over time to subscribe to every micro regulation that exists, because it would be onerous to spend time policing those whom we already know are producing good things.

Q: Teresa Dent, Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) Chief Executive: Sir Don Curry's plans introduced a broad and shallow agri environment scheme (Entry Level Scheme – ELS) which at one stage had 70% farmers in England in it. GWCT would dearly love to see in a post Brexit policy a much broader agri-environment scheme again, with much greater number of farmers in it as farmer numbers are falling again. I think if we are going to achieve the sort of reversal of biodiversity loss that we are looking for, it would be a big help to remove some of those barriers eventually. Is that something you are considering?

A: Reply by Secretary of State: Completely agree. As I think people will know here, at the moment 20% of the CAP goes in agri environment schemes and the countryside stewardship schemes and 80% goes through PILLAR 1. Pillar 1 of course has been greened over time but as we have just been discussing some of the mechanisms are less than perfect and I think that having 80% of CAP going essentially on acreage or hectareage creates all sorts of perverse incentives. Incentives for people to buy agriculture land as a tax shelter and incentives also for people not to necessarily invest in being more productive. But critically the big problem is the one that you have put your finger on - public money should be used for public benefit. We need to support farming, but what we also need to do is to make sure that we are justifying that £3 billion expenditure on the basis that the environment is being enhanced not just maintained, and therefore I hope that we can work with you and others in order to design a scheme that is as un-bureaucratic as possible but also incentivises the sorts of goods that you value so much and that the country values as well.

Q: Christopher Price, CLA Director of policy: First of all thank you SofS for a fantastic speech, it was music to our member's ears. When you and your officials are devising new policy two things to bear in mind:

- First of all can we just focus on things we know work? We know that taking land out of production works for nature, we know that beetle banks work for nature. Can we focus on those sorts of measures rather than getting overly scientific with lots of complicated interventions?
- Secondly when looking at the money can we base it on the amount of money that is needed to bring about the sort of behaviour change to bring the results rather than having lots of economists trying to go and value things as again it must add to the complexity? If we can work on that basis, we can run with something much more workable and something that is much more likely to get buy in from farmers, than something that is restrictive and more complicated.

A: Reply by Secretary of State: That is incredibly helpful and I take both of those points. I think that one of the things we've got to do in designing a future system of support is exactly as you say, acknowledge what works, ensure that we can support those who are already doing the right thing to continue and encourage others to move into it. And exactly as you say, while I am a fan of the Natural Capital Committee and the way in which it has operated I recognise that it is not the only mechanism and the only tool by which we should allocate spending in order to ensure support and continue to do the right things.

Q: James Bartholomeusz , CPRE: Thank you Secretary of State for talking to us today, I want to ask about international trade deals. Many of us in this room are proud of the very high quality of produce that we have in this country but clearly one of the potential risks of some new international trade deals would be cheap low quality imports that will damage our farming sector and potentially the environment as well. What assurances can you give us on that?

A: Reply by Secretary of State: Absolutely, thank you for asking because it gives me an opportunity in front of this audience to repeat what I said to the Food and Drink Federation yesterday. My view is that the days have gone, if they ever existed, when Britain could compete on the basis of producing "pile it high, sell it cheap" bulk protein or any other type of food. British food will succeed on the basis of quality. One of the consequences of what happened in the 80s with salmonella and in the 90s with BSE is that

the consumer in Britain, and indeed globally, became far more concerned about the provenance of what they were eating and they became more interested in the journey from farm to fork and therefore phenomena like the Red tractor scheme, environmental regulation, bio security measures and other animal welfare tests, became more important to the consumer and indeed to enlightened retailers like Waitrose.

As a result we now have a situation where people are asking serious questions about the manner in which any animal might have been fed or the circumstances in which it was reared before it eventually ends up in the supermarket, the butcher or on a plate. The same thing applies of course to natural produce that has been grown as well. People want to know the circumstances under which it was grown. The significant growth in organic produce, and I recognise that not every farmer wants or needs to be organic, but there is significant growth in the production of organic produce which again reflects that concern. We are not going to compromise animal welfare or environment standards, we are not going to allow products to come into our market which would undercut those standards and we are going to succeed in both satisfying the domestic consumers and exporting on the basis of quality.

One of the things that I would like to do is to work with people in this room and elsewhere in order to ensure that we can make the importance of game a central part of a strategy for stressing the quality of British food.

Q: James Somerville-Meikle, Countryside Alliance: How much consideration has Defra given to what level of variation a new scheme could allow from CAP and how much does he think realistically we can differ from CAP in order to maintain tariff free access?

A: Reply by Secretary of State: Take the example of Norway. Norway has significant differences in the way in which it allocates agriculture subsidy and the way in which it manages its fish stocks. But Norway, and I'm not suggesting that this is the right course for Britain, above my pay rank, but Norway has territory access because it is a member of EFTA and it is within the Euro economic area.

Similarly, Switzerland even though it isn't in the economic area, is a member of EFTA and has broadly territory access as well, and it manages to have a different system of agriculture support which puts environmental goods at the top. If we look at the overall

meat market as it were, the sheep meat sector is the one that is most exposed to European trade. It is the one with the highest proportion of exports and the highest proportion of exports to the EU. It is also the case that lamb farmers are often those who are most responsible for maintaining a viable economic lifestyle in remoter and more beautiful parts of England. It was fantastic news for example, just the other day, that UNESCO designated the Lake District a World Heritage site and I think it would be almost impossible for any of us to visualise the Lake District without thinking of sheep there. And that is not to say that the sheep are dotted around the hills purely as decoration, it is to say that the reason that this department exists is that supporting upland hill farmers is good for the environment and helps support the rural economy and therefore I have a responsibility to try to ensure that whatever trade deal we seek with Europe and elsewhere, takes those delicate balances into account.

The Chairman thanked the Secretary of State who then departed. The Chairman then welcomed the next speaker Professor Georgina Mace, Professor of Biodiversity & Ecosystems at University College London and a member of the visionary Making Space for Nature Review panel.

Presentation by Professor Georgina Mace – key points:

Professor Mace highlighted the following from the Lawton Report:

- The report was very firmly about wildlife. Many of the things that have happened since have been more about other kinds of environmental goods, services and benefits. The Lawton review acknowledged that many of those other goods and services depend on species and habitats, but conserving species and habitats is not exactly the same thing as maximising the production of those environmental goods and services.
- The report set a benchmark with biodiversity enhanced compared to 2000 and a resilient and coherent network established to sustain these levels.
- The review of the nature conservation areas across England emphasised that the wider landscape needed to be involved.
- The action plan highlighted the need for:
 - a shared vision with a common understanding of what the ecology network could become
 - a long term focus

- multiple stakeholders - it is not enough to just to have the local nature conservation groups or the protected area managers, you need the wider set of land owners, land managers, public and private to be involved
- co-ordinated actions across jurisdictions and boundaries.
- strong local leadership.

She then went on to highlight three things that happened after its publication:

- Nature Improvement Areas (“NIAs”) – this was initially a pilot scheme to see what coordinated local actions (reflecting the Lawton framework) could deliver. There were 12 NIAs with the last review in 2015. “My understanding is that they have been very good at creating partnerships and sharing the added value of cross sector working...”. Although not sure yet what they show in terms of the environmental outcomes.
- UK National Ecosystem Assessment - similar timing to Lawton review but focussed on the value of ecosystems services and environmental benefits. The two reports converged a bit within the NIA’s but didn’t draw them together. This has more or less led into the Natural Capital Committee which was first formed in 2012 and is now in its 2nd iteration, following the election last year.
- Natural Capital Committee - takes a holistic approach to the environment with overall objective of trying to ensure that the quality of the environment doesn’t deteriorate. The Secretary of State had commented that it is very strong on valuation and the monetary side but as a participating member Professor Mace didn’t see that as being it’s defining feature. The natural capital view can be all encompassing; it can bring in multiple land owners and land uses, outcomes, goods and services, so long as the desired outcomes are clear.

In conclusion she hoped that future policy would:

- have a common vision – absence of this is one of the reasons why good initiatives have stalled
- recognise the capabilities and capacities of different regions
- break down barriers between the different land managers and their interests
- recognise the multiple land use demands on our land.

The Chairman thanked Professor Mace for her presentation and introduced the next speaker, Dr Alastair Leake, the Trust's Director of Policy, who set out the Trust's vision for a post-Brexit agri-environment policy.

Presentation by Dr Alastair Leake, Director of Policy, GWCT – key points:

Dr Leake set the scene for the Trust's vision by highlighting that the guest speakers at the last two APPG meetings, Lord Curry and Professor Mace, were involved in the production of two policy reports which were written without the hand of the Europe on them and so provide a very good framework for domestic post-Brexit policy.

The broad and shallow scheme advocated in the Curry report was embraced by 70% of our farmers. It needs to be improved but as many of the constraints put on it were derived from the need to audit it rigorously to meet European standards if regulation can be reduced it is anticipated that the farming community will re-embrace environmental stewardship. The key point from the Lawton review is the "more, bigger, better, joined". There is only one group of people that can really do that, and that is the farmers and land owners.

The Trust's vision therefore envisages a foundation environment scheme, which is voluntary but embraces all the current cross compliance and modified greening measures. The farmer would pay to be reviewed each year similar to the current farm assurance scheme. 70% of farmers are already in farm assurance. There is absolutely no reason why that review can't look at covering environmental legislation. Above that would be a broad and shallow stewardship scheme which is open to everybody. This scheme could just incorporate hedgerows or be more complex such as grey partridge conservation with the landowner rewarded accordingly. Farmers and landowners who want to work at a landscape scale, as they are doing in the *Farmer Clusters* that GWCT has helped to pioneer, would receive a higher level of reward. He also emphasised the need to pay more attention to longer term environmental goods and assets. Stewardship schemes tend to run for five or ten years, but some conservation options require a longer life span.

He concluded by saying that the Trust's advocates a simple, voluntary scheme with a light regulatory touch, in order to achieve the widest possible farmer participation, with more,

bigger, better and joined outcomes for nature, environment and most importantly, for the people who are paying, society generally.

Q&A session (key points):

Angela Smith MP asked Prof Mace about the importance of the role of water and water management which she felt was undervalued in terms of our attitude towards conservation, biodiversity and environmental health. Prof Mace responded that it made sense to focus landscape scale units around catchments as it deals with connections across the landscape although this approach didn't work for everything. Dr Leake added that the key to working at the catchment level is to get the landowners engaged.

Lord Cameron asked whether the right structures were in place for this vision and for operation at the landscape scale. Prof Mace responded that she thought the structures were wrong as they dealt with different sectors such as food, water and energy and that it made more sense to focus on the outcomes from the land and the extent to which they are mutually compatible or incompatible. Dr Leake added that it made sense to change the approach to regulation. Instead of being the victim the landowner/farmer should become the customer employing his own inspector and receiving a single annual inspection that covered all aspects.

Lord Cameron asked how to encourage participation. Dr Leake felt that if people were incentivised they would do it whilst Teresa Dent added that the *Farmer Cluster* initiative has informed GWCT a lot about how to get change in behaviour in the farming community with regard to improved conservation.

Gareth Morgan (RSPB) commented about the need to be careful about using the phrase light touch regulation, as the taxpayer who pays for all of this is going to want to be sure that they are getting something out of this and that involves proportionate regulation that people understand and want to buy into. Secondly he felt that the problems with the ELS were that it didn't deliver the environmental benefits to the level that the Treasury wanted and so it would be important to address this in order to create a new successful ELS equivalent.

Dr Leake responded that the proposal for a light touch approach actually involved higher levels of inspection than currently. At the moment inspection is not targeted at all. The Trust's vision is that the majority of farmers will voluntarily go into in the Foundation Scheme, and will thereby opt to be 'verified' (inspected) every year, and will be incentivised to do so. This leaves a minority of farmers who 'opt out' of the Foundation Scheme, and government inspectors can concentrate on these leading to a much higher level of overall inspection/verification. And secondly that farmland birds at the Allerton project doubled because management is understood. Farmers will be equally successful if we get the replacement ELS scheme right.

A member of the audience asked Dr Leake about the difficulties of creating long term confidence as we repatriate policies. The CLA had been speaking to him about a 'contract' approach, thinking that contracts might be more substantive than grants, and so he expressed interest in what sort of work the GWCT had been doing. Dr Leake replied that the previous Government ran a consultation on Conservation Covenants which have the potential to be a vehicle that could be used as it is a contract between land owners and say an NGO. This approach is particularly attractive as a) it is voluntary, b) it avoids areas of particular nature value from being designated, and c) they have the willingness of the land owner. He encouraged the Government to look again at that Consultation.

Jeremy Moody (CAAV) added that they supported the proposal in principle but that the model the commission put forward was very narrow and prescriptive as it was designed very specifically for the charitable NGOs. More productive would be the American conservation covenant which is more open being not limited to NGOs. In addition need to be careful about the timescales because people will accept a conservation covenant for say 25 years but ambitions for 50 or 80 years or perpetuity are more difficult. A shorter horizon will actually deliver a great deal more contractually, than some of the larger aspirations.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP asked whether the panel thought that the current planning regime protected designated areas sufficiently. Professor Mace commented that this needed consideration but that the key was to consider whether National Planning Policy Framework was properly aligned to future outcomes.

Baroness Young of Old Scone, Chairperson of the Woodland Trust, asked the panel to comment on the dysfunctional nature of the current woodland grant schemes in terms of increasing woodland cover and how can we get more planting particularly in appropriate parts of the uplands where it will help with ecosystem services. Dr Leake invited Baroness Young to see the partnership between the Woodland Trust and the Allerton Project where a 20 acre agro-forestry scheme has been planted outside of any grant in order to look at sheep grazing, harvesting timber for renewable energy, soil fauna and water infiltration to see how the trees could potentially help with flooding. The key will be that if the right tree density can be found the farmer can continue to produce livestock, which gives him an income, as well as helping to reach our target for trees which we missed by 93% last year. Prof Mace added that more trees would come from looking at the benefits that trees provide - carbon storage, water regulation, nutrient circulation, habitat and shelter and recreation. So on the basis of public money for public benefits, trees are an extremely efficient way to get those public benefits.

The Chairman brought the meeting to a close by thanking Professor Mace and Dr Leake and the audience for a very good meeting and the best discussion ever for this APPG.

26th October 2017