



HOUSE OF LORDS

Environment and Climate Change Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Protected Areas

Wednesday 3 May 2023

10 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Parminter (The Chair); Baroness Boycott; Baroness Bray of Coln; Lord Bruce of Bennachie; Lord Duncan of Springbank; Lord Grantchester; Baroness Jones of Whitchurch; Lord Lilley; Lord Lucas; The Lord Bishop of Oxford; The Duke of Wellington; Lord Whitty; Baroness Young of Old Scone.

Evidence Session No. 4

Heard in Public

Questions 36 - 57

Witnesses

[I](#): Trudy Harrison MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Minister for Natural Environment and Land Use, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Edward Barker, Director, Natural Environment, Trees and Landscapes, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Examination of witnesses

Trudy Harrison and Edward Barker.

Q36 **The Chair:** Good morning and welcome to this session of the House of Lords Environment and Climate Change Committee. We are looking at the Government's target for 30 by 30 and how it is going to be achieved in England. We are delighted to have Trudy Harrison, a Minister from the department, to talk to us. She is supported by her colleague, Edward Barker. We welcome you both and look forward to what you have to say.

Perhaps I could open with the first question, because we have quite a lot of issues and supplementaries that we want to get through. We are very pleased that the Government are going to be producing a map later in the year of what you see as constituting and contributing towards 30 by 30. Perhaps you could say for us now which you see as contributing towards that and whether they will meet the international guidelines for what is generally recognised as Protected Areas.

Trudy Harrison: In reverse order, yes, they absolutely must meet those international criteria. This is part of an international pledge, as you will know, the detail of which is being worked up. We know that the sites will need to be protected for nature for a sufficiently long time—30 years to perpetuity is what we are currently looking at. It would involve existing sites but probably newly designated sites as well.

The Chair: I think that we are going to come on to what "newly designated" means in a moment. If any members have any interests to declare, make sure you say them before you ask your first question.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: I declare my interest as chair of the Woodland Trust, and vice-president and president of umpteen others. Could I ask a supplementary before I move on to my question? Could you confirm where you see the areas of outstanding natural beauty and the national parks in the 30 by 30 list of sites? Will they be included as well?

Trudy Harrison: As I see it, a national park, such as the one that I live in, which is 2,362 square kilometres, is vast. I do not think that it would be appropriate to declare the centre of Windermere or Ambleside as a site that is necessarily protected for nature. I see issues with protecting a national park in its entirety for nature. There may be other national park sites or areas of outstanding natural beauty that would be entirely possible to declare and designate as a site that was protected for nature. That is part of the process we are going through at the moment.

Q37 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** There are two schools of thought about our current system of protected sites. One is that they are quite nicely focused and have been honed, in terms of their definitions and the way in which we protect them, over the decades; therefore, they should be interfered with at our peril. There is another school of thought that says that it is a load of alphabet soup, nobody understands how they all relate to each other, and review is overdue. Where does government sit on

that? Depending on what your answer is, if you are contemplating a substantial review, what analysis has there been of the downside and the opportunity costs of that review? There is rather a lot going on in Defra at the moment.

Trudy Harrison: There has definitely been some excellent work. We are not short of designations. Over a million hectares are currently designated as SSSIs. We have 4,127 SSSI sites, as one example, but they are not all in favourable condition. The emphasis needs to be on the monitoring, the evaluation and, for me, the capacity building to ensure that those sites can get into favourable condition. We have a target, as stated in the recently published *Environmental Improvement Plan 2023*, to achieve percentages of favourable conditions.

The amount of money that we provide to Natural England has recently significantly improved, from around £190 million to £259 million¹, I think. I may get a correction on that. It is around about that figure. That is definitely contributing to the improved knowledge of those sites.

I also want to make it much easier for members of the public. Some of you may have had a look at MAGIC map, or the designated sites view, which enables you to identify SSSIs or whatever layer you are particularly interested in. I checked this out this morning on sites in my own community. The information is helpful, but it could be a much easier system to access. That is what Natural England is working on right now.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Is government contemplating a fundamental review of the various designations, rather than simply working with the current designations and improving them?

Trudy Harrison: I am not sure that a fundamental review would be the way to term it. It is perhaps a continuous improvement, but certainly with a focus on how we can involve more citizen science or capacity building with members of the public. As we move away from the common agricultural policy, with farming in particular, given the 13 million hectares or so that we have in England, 70% of that is farmed environment. Farmers would play an incredibly important role in the environmental stewardship.

As we move towards that, we want to focus on the role of farmers in assessing their land, working with Natural England and others to improve the condition where they are responsible for SSSIs. ELMS is part of that. There are a number of ways that we are improving it, but there is not something that I would determine as a fundamental review.

The Chair: Can I pin you down a bit on what you mean by “continuous improvement”? You will be aware that, at the moment, we have designations that come principally from the EU and the habitats regulations. You have SACs, SPAs and Ramsar. Then you have UK designations, such as SSSIs. Are you saying that fundamentally those are

¹ Ms Harrison’s office later submitted a correction – the funding for Natural England has increased from £162 million to £260 million.

all going to stay and it is just continuous improvement in terms of capacity building and various other things, or will those designations change?

Trudy Harrison: To my knowledge, those designations will stay where they make sense. If there is a particular SSSI site that really can no longer be maintained for the characteristic or the feature that it was initially designated for, for whatever reason, that would not make sense. They will be absolute outliers.

Edward Barker: As you say, we are not currently proposing any significant changes here, although we are looking at the options for ways in which we might simplify the framework. That would require legislative change, so is obviously not a short-term option. In the meantime, we are very focused on improving the condition of the sites that are currently protected.

Q38 **Baroness Boycott:** I do not know whether there is an answer to this or whether this is not a good question. I am thinking of Windemere because you mentioned it. Lake Windemere is incredibly polluted at the moment to a very bad level and people are getting parasites. I know someone who had a three-week parasite that demanded antibiotics and the doctor said they completely came out of it. Does the fact that you are in a national park give you any greater protection over your water than we seem to have in other waterways, or is it just the same, in that we seem to be unable to get the water companies to change their practices? This parasite came directly from human sewage.

Trudy Harrison: The reverse is the case in the Lake District. There is a resident population of about 500,000 and a visiting population of about 20 million. Because of that national park status and UNESCO world heritage status, there are a lot more visitors. The important thing is the catchment-sensitive farming and the plan for water that we have put in place. Some £56 billion of investment will be going in over the coming decades to improve the water quality. The answer to the question about whether a national park provides a difference of regulation is no, I think.

Baroness Boycott: The fact that it is a national park would not mean that you got a bigger punishment, as such, for polluting it on this scale.

Trudy Harrison: Not to my knowledge, no, but there is a lot more support for the area because of a number of things. You have upland farming there. You have catchment-sensitive farming. You have the farming in protected landscapes funding as well. There are a number of other measures to reduce the nitrogen and improve the run-off situation, but not because it is a national park.

Baroness Boycott: This happened three weeks ago, so it is clearly not happening very well yet.

Trudy Harrison: These things absolutely will take time.

Q39 **The Lord Bishop of Oxford:** Minister, we have heard a number of

submissions of evidence that encourage an ecological approach to these different designations, to see them as working together as a whole and particularly to connect them up through judicious extensions, corridors and so on. How much is that approach informing the Government's strategy?

Trudy Harrison: Connecting up all the various designations is a personal priority for me. As a relatively new Minister in Defra, just understanding the conflicts or the complementary nature of SSSIs, SPAs, SACs, AONBs, national parks and Ramsar sites is complex. Sometimes those sites are layered on top of each other. Sometimes they are separate. Sometimes it is about protecting nature and at other times it is about protecting natural beauty.

Understanding and helping the public be far more aware of why a site is designated, what for and how they can play a part in looking after that site is an absolute priority. That is set out in the environmental improvement plan. I can feel Ed wanting to come in on this question.

Edward Barker: The Lawton principles of improving, enlarging, connecting up and joining up these sites underpin a lot of what we are doing here, including in the EIP. You sometimes hear us talking about the nature recovery network, which is also about trying to join together these different points across the country to improve the ability of nature to recover as a whole.

Trudy Harrison: We will not improve the state of nature and, in particular, the apex target, which is goal 1 in the 262-page *Environmental Improvement Plan*, to halt the decline of nature by 2030 and increase nature's abundance post 2030, unless we have this joined-up approach.

Q40 **Baroness Jones of Whitchurch:** Hello. I should declare an interest first as a member of the South Downs National Park Authority. I have two questions. First, given my background, you will not be surprised to know that I am interested in the progress with the landscape review. It was initiated in 2019, so we have been waiting a long time. There have been various consultations. We now need some delivery mechanisms to take it forward. I would be grateful if you could update us on where you think that is going in the round, across all those recommendations.

The second question is more specific, to do with 30 by 30. There is a huge consensus that, if you gave the national parks more powers, they could play a leading role in delivering 30 by 30, but it requires a change in their designation in the legislation. There has been some frustration that the Government have not taken the opportunity so far in the levelling-up Bill to enact something that has broad cross-party support and would be a very simple thing to do. I wonder where you stand on that. It would be a very neat mechanism for delivering 30 by 30 and take some of the pressure off Defra. It would be the national parks that would have to deliver it, rather than you directly. It is actually a win-win in many ways.

Trudy Harrison: You will be familiar with the LUR Bill. There has been an amendment put forward. I cannot really speak to that, other than to say that it is absolutely being considered. We will be forthcoming with our response to the Glover report, the *Landscapes Review*.

We have had two monarchs, a different Prime Minister, a different Secretary of State, a different Government and a different Minister. From my perspective, having lived in a national park for most of my life, and in Cumbria for all of my life, I was also keen to see more of an emphasis on the people who live, work and learn in national parks and protected landscapes. I did not feel that this was quite strong enough.

The transition from basic payments to ELMS to farmers, who are the lifeblood of these protected landscapes, and the implications for farmers need to be fully understood. We should also ensure that people living in a protected landscape can thrive and that there is prosperity. Many of these areas are coastal, so they have additional pressures. That is a focus that I have applied to living, working and learning in a national park.

In my area we have certainly suffered—it is perhaps an unkind phrase, but it is the phrase used to describe young people moving away—the brain drain of the brightest young minds leaving the countryside in pursuit of a successful career. That is not sustainable. The fact that so many young people have to learn to drive, which is a minimum of about £6,000 by the time you have covered the costs of the lessons, the insurance and the purchase of the car, is such a barrier to young people—perhaps I am biased as a mother of a 20 year-old, a 21 year-old, a 23 year-old and a 24 year-old.

Those are the kinds of priorities that I am really focused on. Access is good and the diversity that the Glover report focused on is absolutely right, but I also want to ensure that the access is for local people trying to get to school, college, apprenticeships and work, to connect communities to each other, not just for the visiting population.

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch: There are big issues around public transport and the cuts that have been made, not just in national parks but across the country. Transport and moving around to get to school and college, and do all the things you have just talked about, is very difficult.

The national parks have a specific remit, which is nature recovery and improving access. They feel frustrated that currently they do not have the tools to deliver all that. If they were delivering it, it would create more jobs doing that nature recovery work, and because it would attract more visitors to come and look at the beautiful landscapes and so on. It is a difficult dichotomy to balance all that, but they need more help to focus on the fundamentals.

Trudy Harrison: We are certainly bringing forward changes to enable easier access and easier routes. I was previously the Minister responsible for walking, cycling and the future of transport in the Department for

Transport. I saw for myself the great improvements that can be made in people's lives, accessibility, connectivity and reduced emissions, through the good establishment of cycle routes. That is something I have recently focused on. I am really keen to pursue the changes to create easier access in protected landscapes.

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch: Do you think that we will see the outcome of the landscapes review being followed through before the election? We have waited a long time for it now. Might we see some action on it before the election?

Trudy Harrison: We are getting on with action every single day.

Edward Barker: To your point, Lady Jones, the way in which we invest in, manage and potentially reform protected landscapes affects the extent to which they are able to contribute to our 30 by 30 target. You will recall that we published an initial response in 2022 and we consulted on some ideas around legislative change. We had a lot of responses to that. As the Minister says, we are considering it.

In the meantime, we are doing some things to refocus a bit more widely on making sure that national parks and AONBs deliver for nature, climate, people and place, such as introducing an outcome framework, including targets, on nature recovery; looking at the way in which we fund the national parks; looking at the management plans they produce; and providing guidance on the strengthened biodiversity duties. There are quite a few things we are doing with the national parks and AONBs. This is all in partnership.

Indeed, that is another thing we are doing. We are supporting them in creating the protected landscapes partnership, which I hope is a way of helping to draw in additional external funding to do some of the things we would all like to do in national parks and AONBs. There is quite a bit already under way. As the Minister says, we are still considering whether there is anything else we need to do, but we did get a lot of responses to the consultation.

Q41 **The Chair:** Can I be clear? At the beginning, in a very welcome way, you stated that anything that was going towards the 30 by 30 would meet the international guidelines for what constituted a protected area. You are talking about things you are doing in the national parks and AONBs. Do you believe that national parks and AONBs without a statutory designation can meet those international guidelines?

Trudy Harrison: National parks in their entirety, for the reasons I alluded to earlier, I doubt will be able to achieve that. It will require more bespoke designations for parts of those national parks in some instances. Perhaps in other national parks, which are smaller, it might be more achievable to have the entirety within a boundary. That would be my view.

Edward Barker: To clarify, we are working very closely with international partners, including the IUCN, so that the approach we are

taking to the 30 by 30 target is consistent with the approach being taken internationally. That is the benchmark we are setting. Within that, you have all sorts of different kinds of Protected Areas, but that is something we are very focused on.

Trudy Harrison: As the Minister responsible for the land use framework, we are looking at that as well. We have a commitment in the environmental improvement plan to publish a land use framework this year. We are currently undergoing a phase of research, I suppose, to understand how much land is required for what. Of those uses, which are complementary, conflicting, inclusive, exclusive, extensive or intensive? Some uses could continue while also being a protected site for nature. Some absolutely could not.

We are currently undertaking that research and this will absolutely feature the 30 by 30 commitment, along with the 500,000 hectares that we have committed to in the environmental improvement plan. All the other protections for nature will absolutely feature as part of that land use framework publication.

The Chair: On the topic of the land use framework, that is a good point to move to Baroness Young, who has been a champion in the House of Lords on this issue for many years.

Q42 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** That was not going to be my question, actually. Never mind. On that latter point, do you have any feelings of when you are going to be able to produce the land use framework?

Trudy Harrison: My sense is that we will have a good understanding of the Defra implications for land use before the Summer Recess, in or around that period. It also needs to coincide with the national adaptation plan—NAP 3—that we will also be publishing, around climate change. To involve, as I very much want to do, other government departments, that will be a longer process and will take us towards the autumn or winter of 2023.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Are other government departments looking interested?

Trudy Harrison: Yes, absolutely. I think that other government departments will recognise that our environment is changing. It will not be possible to build houses, perhaps, in the way that we have, or have freeports coinciding with highly protected marine environments, for example. It makes sense for other government departments to provide us with the information and collaborate on this. It would be nonsensical for Defra to do this in isolation.

Baroness Young of Old Scone: Mr Barker answered the other question that I was planning to ask, so I am happy.

Q43 **Baroness Bray of Coln:** Given the importance of monitoring to get us towards those targets, do you have confidence that Natural England has the requisite powers and resources to monitor SSSIs and work alongside

landowners and others to deliver on the 2042 target to reach a 75% favourable rating for SSSIs and the 30 by 30 target?

Trudy Harrison: No, not at this stage. It would be untruthful for me to state otherwise. We have increased its resources significantly. The environmental improvement plan, published earlier this year, is key to this. I have required that all the actions—there are about 700—that have been pledged in that 262-page document are itemised, evaluated and managed. I think that it will become an emerging picture of where we need to deploy further resources.

I certainly see our fantastic farmers as an absolutely vital resource to improve the state of nature in the country. They are playing an increasing role in achieving not just food security for this country but environmental stewardship. How we ensure that our farmers can play their most active part is an emerging picture as well.

The honest answer is “not yet”. We are fully aware of that. I do not think that where we deploy the resources is fully understood at this stage. ELMS, for example, is a relatively recent change for farmers to be getting their heads round, whether that is countryside stewardship, sustainable farming incentive, or the big one, landscape recovery, which I think will make the biggest difference to nature’s recovery.

Baroness Bray of Coln: We heard in an earlier session from a range of managers of Protected Areas and that sort of thing. Some of them said that they did not have confidence that Natural England was going to be able to provide the kind of support and assistance that they needed. They already found that monitoring was a bit scarce and, indeed, that often advice was not immediately available when they needed it.

Trudy Harrison: That is a fair point. I am the lead Minister for Natural England. In all the meetings I have, which are frequent, with Tony Juniper and Marian Spain, the chair and chief executive, we talk about how we will monitor Natural England’s performance, but also how we can support Natural England to be the best it can be. I do not think that this will fall to one organisation; it simply cannot. It is a collaboration in which Natural England is an incredibly important player.

Baroness Bray of Coln: In the written evidence we received from Natural England, it has welcomed the increase in investment and said that that is a really important step forward. But it goes on to say that, in order to have a sustained and holistic policy, it needs a real funding commitment for the future. Is there going to be more funding available if it is necessary?

Trudy Harrison: I am not in a position to give an indication of future Governments’ funding commitments. The fact that we have increased Natural England’s funding by such a significant amount demonstrates the importance we place on Natural England being as resourced as can be, but it is not the only organisation in this great battle.

Baroness Bray of Coln: Presumably, whatever organisations we find

along the way will also need the funding to be able to do the work they need to do.

Trudy Harrison: For farmers, that £2.3 billion² is continuing. That is a huge amount of money, which also involves the monitoring, the evaluation and the feeding in of information about the state of SSSIs on a farm, for example, or in other protected landscapes. There will be multiple operators. It is a multipronged attack to reduce the decline of nature, which, at the moment, declines about 2% every year. It is the apex target in our environmental improvement plan and it is supported by many legal targets and moral ambitions. There are many organisations involved, of which Natural England is an incredibly important one.

Q44 **Baroness Boycott:** You mentioned the importance of ELMS in this. You talk about it as though everything is going brilliantly and it is all there. Over the course of the evidence, and certainly from talking to farmers and in Questions that are raised in this House, we have heard that ELMS is having a lot of teething problems. People do not think that there is enough money. It is very unclear how they are meant to go forward. People say that the forms are really hard to do. Is there enough incentive for people to move to more sustainable farming?

When you make your decisions in your part of the department, how do you relate to the people who are moving through with ELMS? Do you have a real honest discussion to say, "Actually, ELMS is not going so brilliantly and it's likely to not deliver quite as many wonders as it looks like delivering on paper"?

Trudy Harrison: First and foremost, I am a parliamentarian, an MP, who represents a farming area. I am a farmer's granddaughter. I live in a farming community. Over the last couple of months, when the ELMS prospectus was published, I embarked upon a series of suppers with my farmers, where I met about 210 farmers, many of whom are upland farmers. There is, most certainly, a nervousness about the reduction in BPS and a concern about how their lives and livelihoods will be sustained into the future, whether they will be able to hand down family farms and that kind of thing. I have certainly fed that back.

The Government are absolutely listening. My colleague, Mark Spencer, has made changes already to the standards, particularly for upland farmers. The pilots in the sustainable farming incentive have helped shape that policy, but we are adding new standards all the time. I also agree that farmers are saying that this is complex. We are trying to balance the need to be sensible with public money and make sure there is accountability with the need to make it accessible to farmers. That is a conversation that we have been having with Natural England and others about how to support farmers.

We are also embarking, all Ministers in Defra, on a roadshow this summer of the vast majority of the large agricultural shows and farmer-to-farmer

² Ms Harrison's office later submitted a correction – the figure is £2.4 billion.

networks. There are also organisations, such as the NFU, the CLA, the Nature Friendly Farming Network, the Woodland Trust and the Rivers Trust, that are also supporting farmers. We welcome that as well.

It is not easy. It is incredibly complex. Moving away from a decades-long common agricultural policy that was based on area rather than environmental stewardship was absolutely never going to be easy. We are definitely moving in the right direction and, every day, more and more farmers are getting on board with the standards and schemes under ELMS. But ELMS is just one part of how farmers will make a living. Lord Benyon, in this place, is working hard to support farmers through green finance and more private investment as well.

Baroness Boycott: What will you do, for instance, around chicken farms and things like that, in terms of the pollution that they generate?

Trudy Harrison: Standards are definitely in place already to reduce some of the run-off, but also this will be part of the planning requirements in the future about whether those chicken farms get the go-ahead if they are in particular areas. As with everything, it is a multipronged attack.

Q45 **Lord Whitty:** Coming from the Lake District, you will know that the landscape is defined largely by previous methods of farming. The extension of the CAP actually gave the upland farmers some premium, both in terms of area and in terms of less-favoured area. Are you confident that those upland farmers will receive similar levels of support for changing some of the methods of farming?

In particular, the anxiety of a lot of upland farmers is that extensive grazing is no longer going to be supported, for both nutritional and environmental reasons, and that therefore they are going to have to change their method of farming. At the moment, they do not see which ELM schemes are going to help them most. You said that they were in the pipeline. Do you see that there is a major problem, certainly in the upland Protected Areas, at the moment?

Trudy Harrison: I do. I see the challenge between the UNESCO world heritage status being granted for the manmade—or sheep-made—environment, and the balance with our legal and moral ambitions to restore nature. I certainly appreciate, from an extremely personal and local perspective, the challenge that our farmers have, but we should not put it in the “too difficult to do” box. We have to grapple with it. We have to find a way through.

There are some wonderful examples in my own area of Wasdale. There are 49 farmers who have got together. They have formed the West Lakeland CIC, very much hoping to be able to take advantage of the landscape recovery stream of the ELMS. They recognise that change needs to happen. We need to recognise that they need to be supported through that transition. Public money must be available for them where other forms of investment, incentive or income are not available. That is the work that Lord Benyon is undertaking as well.

In my experience, our farmers recognise that there can be no other industry where the experience, skill and knowledge of the land are passed down the generations. They absolutely recognise that they are pivotal to this. They also want to maintain food security, which is an equal priority for us in Defra, but they are working collaboratively, and, from my perspective, with the right mindset, to undertake these actions, providing we provide the support and it is not too bureaucratic.

Q46 Lord Duncan of Springbank: Following on from that question, you have said already that there has been a significant increase in money likely to be moved into this area. You have also accepted that a number of sites have not met, as you would see it, the standards expected of them. There are clearly shortcomings in the current method and structure for achieving that outcome. What assessment have you done to find out what the shortcomings are in the current methodology and what then are you going to do to improve the structure to ensure that more money delivers outcomes that you have set at the highest possible standard?

Trudy Harrison: I am going to let Ed talk more about the technical aspects of the current and future monitoring systems. The fact that Natural England is moving towards a more wholesale evaluation of the sites, rather than identifying one particular characteristic, is welcomed and will be very important. Farmers, again, will be integral to the monitoring, evaluation and literally digging up sods of earth to check for the earthworms, the length of the roots in relation to the grass, et cetera—those kinds of fairly basic but absolutely necessary evaluations of their land.

The public will also be enabled to be more informed and involved. That is the project that Natural England is undertaking to ensure that the complexities of the MAGIC map will not be necessary if you want to find out whether an SSSI is in good condition. I would hope that we will go into local primary schools in the future, as all MPs do, and the children will have a good understanding of the SSSI in their community and can get involved with improving its condition. That is not the case at the moment. It is really complex to identify the condition of an SSSI or other protected site. Anybody who has tried to grapple with the MAGIC map or the designated sites view that Natural England holds will understand that.

Those are my priorities, but Ed can probably talk about the technical aspects of how we monitor land and any shortcomings that we have identified about why those sites have not improved over the last decade.

Edward Barker: As you may be aware, Natural England has an SSSI improvement programme that has several facets to it. It is partly about making better use of remote monitoring—we will come on to that when we talk about the NCEA programme that is under way—remote sensing and partnerships, and increasingly trying to achieve strategic solutions for the problems that SSSIs have. They are all quite distinct, but often the difficulty on the site might be down to offsite pressures, so it is looking at ways of addressing those.

You mentioned funding. We have talked a little bit about environmental land management, which is the single largest way in which we are funding this work. As the Minister says, the funding for NE, including on this, has increased very significantly in recent years.

It is not only ELM. There is also the farming in protected landscapes programme, which has been pretty successful, specifically helping farmers in protected landscapes to improve their land and their businesses. That is having a benefit for SSSIs. There are other programmes. The nature for climate fund works at restoring peatlands. Again, there is a fair bit of overlap between peatland and SSSIs. That is another source of funding, as well as private investment. It is not only about ELM, although ELM is very important.

Lord Duncan of Springbank: Following that up, I am struggling a little with whether we are talking about the need for a step change because you have detected significant shortcomings, or is it just “steady as she goes”, gradual, incremental improvement on the basic system? Is it the same system polished up, or a step change to create a new system of monitoring and a holistic approach?

Edward Barker: We know at the moment that about 38% of our SSSIs are in favourable condition and the target for 2042 is 75%, which is a fairly significant increase, with an interim target along the way to improve the condition assessments and the number of actions that are in track to get to that favourable condition. That feels, to me, like a fairly significant step up. That is why there is a significant increase in resources for Natural England. Natural England has put in place this programme focused on what feels to me like a step change. It is more significant than just “steady as we go”. It is more than an incremental set of improvements.

Trudy Harrison: I was going to reflect on the EIP at large and the fact that we have that commitment to achieve net zero by 2050. The fundamentals in the EIP are about improving the quality of water, air and soil. We have to get those right, the fundamentals to life, through the decarbonisation of our transport and energy sector, the reduction in PM2.5, the reduction in nitrates and phosphorus in the water by ELMS, but also by the plan for water, the £56 billion that the water companies are investing over coming decades, the changes that we are making there on dividends being linked to environmental stewardship for water companies, which is new, and the monitoring. We will have 100% of monitoring in place on storm overflows.

All of that contributes. The climate sees no boundaries. There are no boundaries in the environment. Just focusing on an SSSI in isolation obviously is not going to cut it. It is the holistic approach that the *Environmental Improvement Plan* sets out, across those 262 pages and 10 goals, that is going to really be the fundamental change, drawing other government departments’ decarbonisation plans into place as well.

Lord Duncan of Springbank: I ought to mention that I am the chair of

the National Forest. Sorry, I forgot earlier.

Trudy Harrison: We have a commitment to 16.5% tree canopy cover, which will mean 250,000 hectares, 400 million trees and about 10,000 hectares a year being planted every year up to 2050. I am delighted that you have a sideline in tree-mendous work as well.

Q47 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** I am anxious that we keep monitoring and improvement separate from each other. Monitoring is necessary in order to know whether you are effecting improvement. Natural England has told us that a huge number, 80%, of SSSIs have not been monitored in the last six years and that it finds it quite difficult to put forward and agree improvement plans because it does not have the baseline information.

I am not sure that I am hearing yet how we are going to make sure that we actually have the monitoring information, as opposed to the improvement plans. You talked about a more holistic monitoring system, rather than the individual features of SSSIs. The reality is that the legal basis of an SSSI is its individual features. It is often quite seductive to say that the overall ecosystem is improving, when in fact the particular habitat requirements of a species for which a site is important are going down the drain. I should declare an interest as a former chair of Natural England's predecessor.

Trudy Harrison: Certainly, from the perspective of the KPIs that we are judging Natural England by, they will be increasingly related to the targets in the EIP, which include the favourable condition of SSSIs. We have that link there. You are right. When I checked this morning on the site closest to where I live, that site had not been assessed since 2014—nine years. That is a site that is protected for natterjack toads. Certainly, there is more work to do. I will turn to Ed to describe the new way of working for Natural England and how it will work with farmers in particular and other land managers.

Edward Barker: I am happy to say a word about that and just draw your attention to the interim targets we have set. They are not about favourable condition, but they are about having up-to-date condition assessments, which is, I think, the point you are alluding to. The target is 100% by the beginning of 2028. We are currently at about 18%, so that is quite a significant increase. That is why Natural England is focusing quite a lot of that increased resource in establishing those condition assessments between now and then. Broadly, we believe that it is on track to achieve that.

In the way that monitoring takes place, again, it can make better use of remote sensing and working with partners. There is also the opportunity, I suppose, through the work it does with farmers, to provide catchment-sensitive farming advice, to integrate its understanding of the sites with the advice it is giving.

Q48 **Lord Lucas:** Minister, what plans do the Government have to introduce other effective area-based conservation measures to count towards 30 by

30 targets?

Trudy Harrison: I have probably discussed most of them already. We are also looking at covenants and the part that they will play. That is something that was baked into the Environment Act. Ed, have I missed anything so far when I have been talking about any of the designations that we are bringing in?

Edward Barker: I do not think so. The less contentious area is, as we have discussed, our protected sites, SSSIs and related. We have not talked a lot about national nature reserves, but we would include those. We have talked a bit about protected landscapes, so national parks and AONBs, and the extent to which they might count.

As you say, OECMs go beyond that and might include some of the projects covered by landscape recovery and other ELM-supported work. It might include other privately undertaken work to improve land that might be subject to a covenant. There are a range of possibilities. In terms of absolute numbers, I think that it is relatively small, but there is certainly opportunity there.

Lord Lucas: I live at the eastern end of the South Downs National Park in an area that is slated, I am glad to say, for a King Charles III national nature reserve and has extensive SSSIs in Ofsted grade 4 condition, so I have a lot of local interest in how this all progresses. Looking at OECMs, I see great potential there for linking with the National Education Nature Park and, therefore, the generation of nationwide interest among schoolchildren, as you were saying, in connecting with nature recovery. It would allow local authorities to use neglected parts of towns and cities, such as the rivers in Manchester, which are just derelict at the moment and should be full of wildlife, and parks. It would allow farmers to take credit for the little bits they set aside for serious nature.

It would allow development of a voluntary monitoring system, which is already quite strong. The botanists and the birders are pretty good at knowing what is going on locally. If that could in some way be integrated into the assessment made of how SSSIs are doing, you would have a lot more data there than you can afford to get by sending inspectors round.

Trudy Harrison: I completely, wholeheartedly agree. You have reminded me to talk about the local nature recovery strategies that we are now rolling out, which will be a requirement for all of the upper-tier local authorities. I think that that is 48 across England. They will employ people in those upper-tier authorities, who will work with exactly those organisations, farmers, land managers and, I hope, the schools, to ensure that the strategy is in place, but the collaborations and relationships have been made.

Lord Lucas: Looking at how you are moving from environmental farming to the emphasis being on the environment, that applies to a lot of the public land around me, where the environment comes first in their mind but they need farming to do it. It still seems to be very unclear in

people's minds how that will be supported, where you are going beyond just farming in an environmental way to looking after the environment in a farming way. When will that become clear? When will we know enough about how the support structures are working to start making plans for how to manage that sort of public landscape?

Trudy Harrison: For many farmers it is already clear. The evidence with the schemes that are now being taken up is that that is certainly increasing rather than decreasing, which is a good thing. There is a Defra blog for people to find out more information. The farmer-to-farmer networks and the organisations I just mentioned are playing their part. The NFU, the CLA and the Nature Friendly Farming Network, to name just three, are also going to be key in this.

I am sure that, if the Secretary of State were here, she would say that the original friends of the earth are the farmers. It is not one or the other with climate change. Farming would not be able to continue in the same way that it has done for decades, but also the soil quality would not support food production if we continued the way we were going. The water quality needs to be improved to improve the fish stocks, and the air quality for nature.

I think that farmers would be the first people to recognise that looking after the land supports the food security of this country. What they have not perhaps had in the past are government policies that have incentivised the best environmental stewardship. We need to hold our hands up in government and say that some of the decisions that were made in pursuit of food security, 30, 40 or 50 years ago, were not conducive to the very best environmental outcomes.

Now, I hope, we have much more of a balance. I would say that it is an equal pairing of food security and environmental stewardship. I do not think that one should trump the other. The two need to work in balance.

Innovation will also play a key part in enabling farmers to be more efficient with the finite resource that our land in this country is. When we look at the land use framework and the excellent report that came from this place, we see the reality that the country is not big enough to do everything we want in the way that we have done. We need to change and farmers are absolutely at the forefront of that transition.

Lord Lucas: Looking at the national nature reserves, the formal definition of that seems to exclude farming. If we are having a lot more national nature reserves, which will necessarily, therefore, embrace areas that are farmed rather than looked after for nature, is that a change of concept that you are prepared to see happen?

Trudy Harrison: I think so, and I base this on my own experience, because I am the MP for an area of the Lake District called Ennerdale. Wild Ennerdale is increasingly trying to work with farmers. Some of the 49 farmers I referred to earlier farm in Ennerdale. I think that we have 229 nature reserves, over 939 square kilometres³, or thereabouts. One of

those national nature reserves is Wild Ennerdale. It has been designated fairly recently.

We are working with farmers where we can. This is what the land use framework will aim to improve upon, identifying where those conflicts can be mitigated by incentivising and working with policy, particularly planning policy, to avoid conflicts in the future.

Edward Barker: I may have misunderstood, but, to be clear, the criteria for national nature reserves do not exclude farming. There may be circumstances where it is hard for them to be compatible, but they are not excluded per se.

Lord Lucas: Looking locally, there is a 50 square-mile national nature reserve. There is inevitably a lot of farming in it, which is being done for farming first, rather than nature first.

The Chair: Minister, you rightly championed the potential of local nature recovery strategies, which is a very welcome introduction by this Government. You talked about how they are being created by the upper tier. There is a real risk though, as I am sure you are aware, that they will not form part of the evidence base of the lower-tier local plans for local areas. To go the point that you rightly made about local people and other stakeholders putting all this work in to identify these key local nature recovery areas, that will be lost.

You will be aware that there is an amendment in the House of Lords. The Minister said in the Chamber that he was in listening mode. The evidence we received in this committee is that people are convinced of the potential if there is that firm link between the upper-tier and local plans. We hope that you will continue to be in listening mode. After that small pitch, I will move on to Lord Whitty.

Q49 **Lord Whitty:** Can we briefly divert to offshore marine protection areas? How are they monitored? Who is responsible for the checking of their status? There is very substantial potential conflict between recovering nature in marine Protected Areas and the Government's priorities—for example, for energy in terms of offshore wind and, potentially, tidal, wave, carbon storage and so forth—all of which disturb Protected Areas and, indeed, conflict with fishing. We saw a bit of a spat the other week around Lindisfarne. Are the Protected Areas at marine level being monitored as carefully as those on land, and, if so, by whom? How do these conflicts get resolved?

Trudy Harrison: The three main organisations are the MMO, Natural England and the JNCC. This is not my portfolio in Defra. It falls to Lord Benyon, but I was speaking in Westminster Hall about this subject of marine Protected Areas. That is the umbrella term, I suppose, that we have for the different ways we designate and protect marine areas,

³ Ms Harrison's office later submitted a correction – the figure is 105,000 ha.

including the highly Protected Areas, of which we have identified three. Those are the three organisations.

Ed might want to talk to this in a bit more detail. You are correct in saying that there can be conflicts. While the land use framework will not take into account the marine areas, it is something that we are particularly mindful of, because we have that international commitment to protect 30% of our marine area, as well as 30% of our land area, by 2030.

Edward Barker: I could say a little more about the way in which that monitoring takes place in the marine environment, if that is helpful. Monitoring can include physical sediment grabs, coring, visual deployment of underwater towed cameras, and remote methods. It is difficult to estimate the split between those. Most of the data on habitats and species of MPAs is from direct sampling methods, whereas physical characteristics, which may explain environmental change, are mostly gathered remotely.

Trudy Harrison: There will be two surveys a year that take place in MPAs to identify that condition.⁴

Lord Whitty: Whereas Defra is responsible on land for farming and rural affairs generally, as well as for Protected Areas and the environment, at sea, as it were, you have responsibility for fishing, but a lot of the other activities are for different departments. Both the disturbance of the seabed through various industrial endeavours and the creation of whole swathes of wind-farm arrays affect the environment drastically even in highly Protected Areas, let alone the less Protected Areas.

Trudy Harrison: I was reading the transcript from a previous evidence session, where it was said that dredging of the seabed is akin to ploughing of a field in terms of its environmental harms. I understand that comparison and analogy. Defra absolutely is responsible for marine areas. I hope that I have been clear there. I was saying that it is not within my brief. That sits with Lord Benyon. He is responsible for both domestic and international marine.

Lord Whitty: Is he, incidentally, responsible for Protected Areas within our overseas territories, or is that the Foreign Office?

Trudy Harrison: That depends whether they are on land, in which case it is me, or at sea. That is the division of labour.

Lord Whitty: Your responsibilities are actually worldwide.

⁴ After the evidence session, Ms Harrison's office said: "Clarification on this statement must be made that Natural England and JNCC are each able to conduct 1-2 MPA surveys per year. These surveys are typically able to visit and monitor 1-2 MPA sites per survey (dependant on geographic distances and the size/extent of the MPAs). Therefore, in general, 2-4 surveys are conducted in SoS waters, able to visit 2-4 MPAs per year."

Trudy Harrison: They are, and of course Minister Spencer is responsible for the farming, food security and fisheries policy within Defra.

Q50 **Lord Bruce of Bennachie:** Lord Whitty mentioned Lindisfarne, and my understanding is that you have decided not to designate that. You will also have seen that there is a lot of consultation going on in Scotland, which has more or less turned into a civil war, with massive objections about HPMA 10% designation.

First, what is the difference in the approach of consultation? Is it that Scotland has got it wrong and you have got it right, or is there something still to come down the track in the English designation?

Secondly, it is devolved, but there is an implication that, given that it is an international designation, the UK Government would have the final say. Are there discussions taking place with the Scottish Government? Is there a process? Who has the final say? That is clearly a live debate right now north of the border.

Trudy Harrison: To my knowledge—and I am trying to recall the information that I had yesterday for the Westminster Hall debate—an organisation within the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero will be part of the assessment for the environmental impacts of those marine explorations, but it is a devolved matter. I know that Lord Benyon has an upcoming meeting with his Scottish counterpart, and there will, of course, be official-to-official liaisons occurring all the time. I am afraid that I would have to write to you with the specifics of where we are in order to compare and contrast.

Lord Bruce of Bennachie: I understand that the Scottish Affairs Committee either has taken evidence or is about to take evidence on it. There is clearly an implication that, at some point, it is going to be just another potential clash between the UK and the Scottish Government. From what you say, you are aware of that possibility, and discussions are at least initiating or in progress.

Trudy Harrison: Yes, absolutely. Much of Defra's responsibility is devolved, but much of the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero's responsibility covers the whole of the UK, so there is this difference. If I can write to you with the specifics of the situation in Scotland, or perhaps ask my good friend Lord Benyon to write to you with his discussions, that would be helpful.

Q51 **Baroness Jones of Whitchurch:** Would you say in retrospect that the concept of marine Protected Areas has been a bit of a disappointment? Not a lot is getting protected in those marine Protected Areas. As we have been discussing, we now have the highly Protected Areas, and it feels like we have had to do that. The original idea of just having marine Protected Areas should have been enough, but it proved not to be, and so we have now had to have a higher designation to deliver the changes that we want. Do you feel that those two structures—the marine protected and higher protected—are right, or did the first one just not deliver?

Trudy Harrison: What you reflected is the difficult balance between the fishing industry, the energy sector and the need to protect the seabed and the marine ecosystem. The fact that we have 178 marine Protected Areas—100 of them just from 2010—is a demonstration of the importance that we place on the marine environment. Where it is absolutely necessary, the highly Protected Areas will remove the ability for so much of industry to take place in those areas. It is a reflection on the balance that must be had to prevent the societal, economic and environmental conflicts that can occur on the seabed.

If you want to add any more on that, Ed, in terms of how the 178 marine Protected Areas have worked and the improvements that have been made, or rather the decline that has not endured because of those protections, that would be helpful to set out.

Edward Barker: I could add a little bit, although this is not my responsibility either. We looked at marine Protected Areas as part of thinking about terrestrial designations. There are some attractions to it as a framework in terms of the clarity of what the protection means: “good” for an MPA and “fully recovered” for an HPMA.

There is also quite good progress against the interim target, at least, which is for 48% of designated species and habitats in MPAs to be in favourable condition by 2028. It is currently at 44%, which is pretty good going compared with some of the other targets. I am afraid that I cannot add more than that right now.

Q52 **Baroness Boycott:** We have touched on this a bit in what Lord Lucas was asking you, but most of the monitoring at the moment is about very specific things, and this is really about how you are going to monitor the general area, in terms of, say, corridors and the effects of farming on an area, and how you are going to look at that. What plans do you have to extend the way you assess things to a general area rather than to a specific site that might already have one of your designations?

Trudy Harrison: It is incredibly complex. Measuring carbon sequestered is hard enough. Measuring biodiversity is definitely another level altogether, which is why we have focused in the environmental improvement plan on the fundamentals of water, air and soil, and on habitat creation. So many standards within ELMS are about the creation and protection of trees, hedgerows and wetlands. We also have the biodiversity net gain, which is where there needs to be a 10% improvement in biodiversity if an infrastructure or housing project has taken place.

In addition to that, we have programmes for nutrient neutrality, which Natural England is undertaking to create wetlands where necessary. If there cannot be onsite mitigations put in place, compensatory mitigations would be paid for by the developer offsite to create wetlands, for example. It is very holistic.

Ed, do you want to come in on where we have got to on the measurement of biodiversity and perhaps where Lord Benyon has got to with the monetisation, in effect, of biodiversity?

Baroness Boycott: One of my next questions is about the fact that you have to pay to get your soil checked at the moment.

Trudy Harrison: I was coming at this from the other perspective of how ecosystem services can be an income for landowners and land managers.

Edward Barker: Focusing on protected sites specifically, the shift from unit level to feature level monitoring by NE gives it a better ability to relate different areas to each other and to look at the relationship between protected sites and non-protected but still important habitats connected to those, so that should help.

The big thing that I would draw attention to is the natural capital and ecosystem assessment, which is a key tool for underpinning the environmental improvement plan as a whole. This is going to give us up-to-date environmental data drawn from earth observation, citizen science and existing datasets, interpreted to give a reliable baseline from which we can then measure trends. That is quite a key investment that has been made in this area.

Baroness Boycott: Specifically, at the moment, you can get your soil decided on, and the baseline from which you might go forward to talk about improvement, only by Cranfield, and you have to pay for it.

Edward Barker: I cannot speak to that particular example, but I would be happy to write.

Trudy Harrison: I am going to have to write to you, I am afraid, because I was not aware of that.

Q53 **Baroness Boycott:** My other question is about peat areas. They did a big thing on it in "Gardeners' World" on Friday, and they made it look like peat had been abolished in the UK. In fact, 42% of peat goes to professional gardeners, which is almost half. When are you going to restrict digging up peat altogether, given what we know about its amazing abilities?

Trudy Harrison: The target to restore both upland and lowland peatland is something like 237,000 hectares. I am sure that I will be corrected.

Baroness Boycott: It is not about restoring. It is about stopping. If you are a professional gardener, you can get peat.

Trudy Harrison: I just wanted to set out all the measures we are putting in place to protect peat and peatland, and to prevent peat-based compost.

We have that protection for upland and lowland peat as a target, and we are working with farmers and food growers in particular, investing in research in paludiculture, for example. In addition to that, there has been

a decision to phase out the use of peat-based compost in the retail sector, sometimes called the amateur sector, although my mum would say that that is slightly offensive, because she is a very experienced gardener. The date for that is 2024, and for the commercial sector 2026. That is going to be incredibly difficult, which is why we are looking at what exemptions will need to be in place, as well as any further support with research and development. It is only three growing seasons.

I would commend the industry for the steps that have been taken already in the transition away from peat-based compost. We know that there are some plants that are currently nigh on impossible to grow without peat; for example, carnivorous plants. Mushrooms have proven particularly difficult.

I know, from speaking often and in great detail with the industry, that it wants to change and is looking to us to facilitate the research and development and the support as it transitions. The fact that Monty Don on "Gardeners' World" will always prefix "compost" with "peat-free" really helps the public understand that gardening with peat-free compost is quite different from with peat-based compost. We do not want to turn this nation of green-fingered people away from gardening because they have had a bad season, so that is really important.

It is about working with the industry, but also encouraging public awareness of a different way of gardening, and protecting peatlands, both upland and lowland.

The Chair: This was a question principally about monitoring. We do not really have time to go into the marine monitoring side. Equally, it might be more sensible for us to write to the department afterwards to get some clarity around marine monitoring as well as the very clear indications that you have given us around terrestrial monitoring.

Q54 **The Lord Bishop of Oxford:** The environmental improvement plan is very rich in statistics, and your own presentation has been commendably rich in statistics, facts and figures, but all of that depends on having a good, accessible and accurate set of data across the board on a range of very complex questions.

We have had evidence that there is a paucity of good environmental datasets that are publicly available. I just wonder whether you could tell us something about what work you are doing on the standards and accessibility of data, and about how you are working with technology, big data and artificial intelligence to make the most of the presentation and manipulation of data, so that there can be continuous learning and that anybody in universities or the public can access the data going forward and build on it from there.

Trudy Harrison: The moment I came into Defra, I probably became known as a data diva, because I love using data in responses. There is far less fluff and waffle involved when we use figures and facts on our progress. It is also far more accessible.

I was also particularly keen in the EIP that, wherever possible, our actions were SMART—specific, measurable, achievable, resourced and timebound. That is because it holds me to account. It holds successive Ministers to account as well, but it sets a very clear expectation of what we want to do, what we want to achieve, when we are going to achieve it and how we are going to achieve it.

It is back to respecting the can-do people in our communities who care about the environment and who want to play their part, but feel that perhaps the waffly bureaucratic language we use in this place is inaccessible to them or difficult to understand and play a part in. Personally and professionally, that is a key priority for me. Any plan that I have been involved with or had a part in will be SMART wherever possible and will absolutely nail down the data.

Your wider point, though, is something that I have not considered. I am going to take that away, because you are absolutely right. In farming, for example, we have a budget of about £274 million for improving technology and innovation. I am assured that we have no shortage of data, because, when I came in and started to research the land use framework, I was blessed with a number of academics who provided me with different sources of data. We have the Met Office Hadley Centre, for example, which has a plethora of climate change data that we will be drawing upon, but it is not necessarily in a helpful format or an accessible place at the moment, and it needs to be.

I could be entirely wrong on that, as Ed will explain. If you are going to tell me that that MAGIC map is accessible or user-friendly, I will absolutely disagree.

Edward Barker: So I shall not add anything. I was not going to refer to the MAGIC map. Although we both agree that it is not the easiest tool to use first time, it is, as you learn to use it, quite a good way into an awful lot of data produced in a very visual way. There is definitely that initial hurdle that we have both experienced, so we should take that away. There is a good question there about making it more widely available.

One other reflection that I would add, though, is thinking about the work that we are doing around trees and woodlands. We made the choice to appoint some people on promotion and engagement who would work with farmers, landowners and people who are thinking about planting trees. We have seen quite a lot of value in that, partly because those people can, at the front end, help people to access the various tools that are out there, but I am sure that it is not as easy as it should be.

Q55 **The Duke of Wellington:** I should first declare my agricultural interests as in the register. Minister, I have been so encouraged to hear you make reference on a number of occasions to the need to develop food security alongside environmental improvements. That is a welcome statement and confirmation, which we do not always hear from Defra Ministers, so that is very encouraging.

One of the problems about ELMS—I do not think that it applies only in Protected Areas—is that, generally, the number of programmes and schemes available are relatively numerous, and some of them are quite complex. Therefore, the level of advice needed by farmers and landowners is considerable. Although Lord Benyon, who we all admire, repeatedly tells us that it is very simple, the fact is that not many farmers and landowners are convinced.

I wonder whether you could just comment on that. Of course, we are talking today particularly about Protected Areas and farming in Protected Areas, but it is a wider point. Specifically in relation to Protected Areas, I wonder whether you could comment on how we can improve the advice available to farmers and landowners.

Trudy Harrison: I know that Minister Spencer, the Minister for Farming and Food Security—it is in his title—would shout from the rooftops about the need to prioritise food security in addition to and in parallel with environmental stewardship, so we are speaking from the same place on that.

In terms of the complexity, one excellent addition has been FIPL—farming in protected landscapes—which is a relatively modest fund but one that is very easy to access in comparison to others and has been pretty universally acclaimed. When I am visiting and speaking with farmers, as I do most Thursdays, across the country, the one fund that they talk about being really successful is FIPL, and we can learn an awful lot from that.

The difference that I hear about from farmers is when they have had a particularly effective, active, personable Natural England or other adviser who has taken the time to go to the farm in order to understand the farm business. At the end of the day, this is a business that needs to make money. It needs to make a profit to be sustainable. That is really where Natural England or another organisation needs to get to.

I am from a farming family, and they talk about ADAS as being an organisation that was pretty excellent and highly respected back in the day when we had a food security priority in this country. Looking at what was so successful with ADAS, we have to ensure that there is that personal support on the farm, talking directly over the kitchen table with farmers, because that is what universally works for them. Expecting them to grapple with complex computer systems when they have a dodgy internet connection is never going to be a recipe for success.

The Duke of Wellington: I am very pleased, Minister, to hear you recognising the difficulties for farmers, and about anything that you can do to simplify it. I am afraid that you have just told me of a new acronym that I was not aware of. Did you say FIPL?

Trudy Harrison: FIPL is farming in protected landscapes.

The Duke of Wellington: I should have been aware of that and I was not. Anyway, that is interesting. As I say, I commend you for your

approach to these matters, but you might consider improving the advice available generally to farmers, in particular in Protected Areas.

Trudy Harrison: You are absolutely right. If we do not have 70% to 80% of farmers engaged in environmental stewardship, funded either through ELMS or through other means, such as private green investment, we will fail to achieve our apex target to halt the decline of nature by 2030 and to increase nature's abundance post 2030. We will also probably fail with our tree target, because agroforestry is going to be necessary as well.

Legal targets will not be met unless we make this easy and attractive for farmers. We recognise that, but it is fairly early days for ELMS. The standards are increasing and improving. With that comes some added complexity, but that is what Minister Spencer is working through and is what all Defra Ministers, regardless of their portfolio, including the Secretary of State, will be engaged with this summer. We have a summer of fun planned, visiting agricultural shows right across the country and talking to farmers. It is not just for the chat, but so that we continuously improve and enable farmers to join our programmes.

Q56 **Baroness Young of Old Scone:** I was really pleased to hear your support for an ADAS-type organisation, but that does not seem to be Minister Spencer's view of the way forward. Instead, there seems to be the belief that Natural England does a bit, and that commercial agronomists and various other people connected with other schemes will do a bit. Might you be willing to talk to Minister Spencer about the virtues of ADAS and a single solution for farming advice? The evidence that we are getting from other people is that that would be very much welcomed.

Trudy Harrison: Minister Spencer is a farmer, so he has more skin in the game than I do. I have already had the conversations. It is not that this is my recommendation to embark upon an ADAS II. It is that farmers are identifying what worked for them in the 1960s and 1970s as a means of gaining information and transitioning their farm practices. It is more of a conversation about what worked within that organisation, which seems to be the farmer to farmer and fairly personal tailored support for farm businesses, and the recognition that farms are businesses and need to be profitable. If there is one person in Defra who understands that more than anybody, it will be Minister Spencer. It is what puts food on his table.

Q57 **The Chair:** The Government are rightly committed to producing this map of what will constitute the 30 by 30, but you have rightly said that we are not going to get there unless we have that capacity building, and you have talked about that on several occasions in your evidence to us today. When the Government produce their map, will there be a plan for this capacity building that includes, alongside it, the advice to farmers and others on what Natural England and the other actors are going to do, so that we can identify where and how it will be delivered?

Trudy Harrison: Local nature recovery strategies will be key to that, because we will expect the teams involved with those 48 upper-tier authorities to work with farmers directly and with farm organisations representing farmers. Ed, do you want to speak about our emerging thinking on the map?

Edward Barker: All I would say for today is that it would make sense, alongside the map, to say something about our latest thinking on how we are proposing to achieve it. I will leave it at that for now.

The Chair: Thank you. That is probably as much as I could have hoped for. On that, I will thank the Minister and her director for the evidence that they have given to us today. There were a couple of issues on which you kindly offered to provide further written evidence. We look forward to that. We will write to the department asking a bit more about marine monitoring as well, which we fully appreciate is outwith your particular expertise, but we thank you very much for your contributions. We look forward to concluding our inquiry shortly and sending our recommendations across to the department.