

# Written evidence from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (PAE0027)



## Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

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Baroness Parminter  
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Dear Baroness Parminter,

I would like to offer my thanks to yourself and fellow Environment and Climate Change Committee members for inviting me to discuss Government's approach to achieving the 30by30 target, on land in England, on Wednesday 3 May. I am pleased to provide answers to the Committee's supplementary questions below.

- 1. What plans does the Government have to introduce 'Other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) as formal designations in England?**
  - a. Can the Department confirm whether primary legislation would be required to do so?**

Recognising OECMs will be key to meeting the 30% target, we are actively exploring next steps for identification and classification of potential OECMs in England, such as Local Wildlife Sites, and OGD and eNGO estates. As I expressed in the committee meeting, Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), will be key in supporting us to identify and prioritise where biodiversity action and investment is most needed, and thus identify potential OECMs.

It will not be necessary for OECMs to be designated as protected under relevant national legislation, but they will be recognised for having sustained governance and management in place to deliver the conservation of biodiversity.

- 2. What is Defra's view on the current availability of advice and support for farmers using ELMS who farm on land in protected areas?**
  - a. Does the Government have any plans to introduce a central, free advisory service for farmers on navigating ELMS, particularly in relation to (1) how the scheme intersects with protected areas, and (2) supporting landowners to identify potential options for nature recovery on their land?**

There is already a wide range of advice and support available to help farmers and land managers. We recognise the importance for farmers and land managers to receive expert technical advice and support for land in protected areas, especially where this is to help support favourable conditions for our most important sites.

Achieving our ambitious environmental targets requires a significant change in environmental delivery across England. To deliver this, we need to work closely with farmers and land managers to help them manage their land and businesses in a way that delivers both profitable food production and the recovery of nature, whilst continuing to contribute to our local economies and, cultural and natural heritage. The government are committed to listening to the feedback of farmers and working with them to understand how we can support them better.

For both Sustainable Farming Incentive and Countryside Stewardship, we want it to be possible for farmers or land managers to do many of the actions supported by high quality, accessible guidance. This is to make it as easy as possible to take part in the schemes so that Arms Length Body (ALB) advisers can focus where it has greatest impact, such as creating and restoring priority habitats.

As we continue to build the current Sustainable Farming Incentive offer and evolve Countryside Stewardship, we will pay for relevant advisory support for certain actions where that is needed. We will provide specialist advice through our delivery agencies where that is the most appropriate form of support. Under Countryside Stewardship, there are also capital grants available for farmers and land managers to help them identify potential options for nature recovery on their land.

Following successful outcomes and positive feedback, the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) programme will be extended until 2025 with an additional £10 million funding. FiPL enables Protected Landscapes (National Parks and AONBs in England) and farmers to work together to deliver projects across 4 themes: Climate, Nature, People and Place.

The Future Farming Resilience Fund has been developed to provide free business support to farmers and land managers during the agricultural transition. ALB advisers will also provide free support to encourage good engagement and ensure high quality agreements.

We are working with existing providers to support development of environmental skills and quality assurance in the commercial advice sector. The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management have developed a competency framework for environmental advisers and BASIS have set up an Environmental Adviser Register which requires a qualification to entry or demonstration of knowledge and experience, coupled with an ongoing continuous professional development requirement.

These various advice and information pathways provide support to farmers and land managers helping them taking better account for the environment in their business, leading to innovation and improvements in land use and management practices.

### **3. The Minister was clear as to the valuable role that Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSSs) could play in meeting ambitions for nature recovery. Does**

**Defra accept the case for a strong link in primary legislation between LNRSs and statutory development plans, with a positive requirement on local planning authorities to incorporate policies and proposals in their development plans to deliver the objectives of the LNRS?**

I am very pleased that you share my enthusiasm for LNRSs, which I know you have voiced repeatedly during passage of the Environment Act and, more recently, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. I would like to again reiterate that they will be key in our development of the 30by30 map that we have committed to publishing, as they will support capacity building of farmers and landowners whose land could contribute to meeting the 30% target.

Government has committed in the Environmental Improvement Plan to set out in guidance how LNRSs should be reflected in Local Plans so that opportunities for nature recovery can be properly integrated into the land use planning system. The LNRS regulations and statutory guidance we published last month establish the foundations for this relationship by:

- Giving all planning authorities a say in the LNRS for their area
- Encouraging LNRSs to map the same areas of existing importance as Local Plans to create a common baseline
- Setting high standards for collaboration and engagement to ensure proposed actions are robust and have been thoroughly scrutinised

During the debate of your amendment in Lords Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> March my colleague Lord Benyon committed to publishing the guidance on LNRSs and planning this Summer. As you are aware, he also said that we would reflect on the points made during the debate.

**4. The Government had pledged to provide UK farmers and rural communities with £3 billion funding per annum, matching the sums that had been available under the CAP when the UK was a member of the EU. However, in the Committee's evidence session Minister Harrison said that £2.2 billion per annum was now available to farmers in agricultural subsidies. What has caused the discrepancy between these figures?**

The 2019 conservative election manifesto committed to maintain funding for farmers in England at an average of £2.4bn a year. That commitment remains and that funding is continuing for farmers. This is a significant sum 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.

**5. What is currently being monitored in (1) Marine Protected Areas, and (2) Highly Protected Marine Areas?**

- a. Are these sites assessed against the named protected feature(s) or is a whole-site assessment also carried out?
- b. With what regularity are sites in both the inshore and offshore intended to be monitored by Natural England and the JNCC respectively, and is both monitoring and condition data made publicly available?
- c. What data about marine protected areas is included in the bi-annual collection

**referred to by the Minister in the evidence session?**

- d. Is there scope to increase monitoring to all marine protected areas, and if not, what is the strategy to account for the data-gap between sites which are monitored and sites which are not?**

Monitoring and assessment plans for the Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are being developed to meet reporting requirements of the statutory MPA target, one of the new targets set up under the Environment Act. This will focus on assessment against each MPA's conservation objectives, which are for designated features to be in a good, healthy state. The condition of the designated features is determined either by a condition assessment that evaluates monitoring and other scientific evidence, known as 'direct evidence', or, where direct evidence is not available, by a vulnerability assessment. Direct evidence is usually in the form of physical (sediment grabs, coring), visual (such as observers or deployment of underwater towed cameras), and remote (landers, oceanographic buoys, multibeam and acoustic surveys) methods. Vulnerability assessments use the occurrence and exposure of features to human activities to which they are known to be sensitive to predict the feature condition.

Both monitoring and condition data are made public, on the publication of the associated monitoring or condition reports. The vast majority of assessments will be done by Vulnerability Assessments due to limited data being available and the high cost of marine surveys. 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 English waters, able to visit 2-4 MPAs per year.

Over time we hope to increase in the proportion of assessments done on the basis of survey data, or for those MPAs where monitoring resources are not sufficient, the use of data collected for similar MPAs/features will be used to improve their vulnerability assessments.

For Highly Protected Marine Areas (HPMAs) there is technically no current monitoring, as these have not been formally designated, however, these will take a whole-site approach. The approach will monitor all elements described above for MPAs applied across the whole site, and additionally include methods to monitor the quality and extent of carbon stocks, plankton and pelagic ecosystems, fish and shellfish, birds, and marine mammals. The monitoring of HPMAs will also include elements of natural capital ecosystem assessment, to determine how full-site protection may provide service benefits in HPMAs.

I hope these answers provide are helpful and provide the relevant detail. Please get in touch if you have any additional questions, and I look forward to further discussions on this key policy area.

Yours sincerely



**TRUDY HARRISON MP**