

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Newid Hinsawdd, Amgylchedd a Materion Gwledig | Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

Ymchwiliad i ddyfodol Polisiâu Amaethyddol a Datblygu Gwledig yng Nghymru | Inquiry into the Future of Agricultural and Rural Development Policies in Wales

AAB 01

Ymateb gan Ramblers Cymru

Evidence from Ramblers Cymru

Introduction

1. The Ramblers helps the people of Wales and visitors to enjoy walking, and protects the places we all love to walk. We are the only charity dedicated to looking after paths and green spaces, opening up new places to explore and encouraging everyone to get outside and discover how walking boosts health and happiness. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Committee's inquiry.
2. Over the next ten years, Rambler Cymru's ambition is to make sure great places to walk are available, the right infrastructure is in place, and resources are provided so that everyone can enjoy the outdoors on foot. In addition to working to protect and improve the public rights of way network and increasing access to open countryside, we want to put walking at the heart of communities. We want people to understand and appreciate the path network and their right to access the landscape as a true community asset and an integral part of our heritage and culture.
3. Farming communities in particular help to shape our landscapes and we want to promote walking to support local economies, connect people with nature, and respond to the impact of climate change.

Cross compliance and Basic Farm Payments

4. Following on from the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy in 2003, agricultural production was decoupled from farm subsidies and there was a shift towards linking subsidy payments to cross compliance, a set of rules which farmers and land managers must follow on their holdings if they are claiming rural payments.
5. In England, cross-compliance for the Basic Farm payment includes recognition of rights of way as environmental features as part of the 'Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions' (GAEC). This reinforces the existing duty under rights of way legislation (Highways Act 1980) enforced by the local authorities. If farmers and land managers already comply with rights of way law they will also be compliant with the cross compliance rules. The rights of way GAEC is therefore an important tool in helping to keep rights of way open and available to useⁱ.
6. Unfortunately in Wales, cross-compliance has not been made a condition of the Basic Farm Payment. Welsh Government has taken the view that rights of way in Wales are not sufficiently mapped to meet the requirement of Section 2.4.2 of the European Commission Land Parcel identification system Guidance which requires

GAEC landscape features to be specifically identified and digitally mapped. Such mapping is not consistent in England either, but has not prevented cross compliance being implemented there.

Glastir and cross compliance

7. The Welsh Government's Environmental Stewardship scheme, Glastir, pays for the delivery of specific environmental goods and services aimed at combating climate change, improving water management, and maintaining and enhancing biodiversity. It is designed to deliver measurable outcomes at both a farm and landscape level in a cost effective way.
8. In contrast to the Basic Farm Payments, there is a cross-compliance requirement in Glastir agreements that all public rights of way should be well maintained. Although some of the opportunities offered by Glastir have been beneficial, the scheme has some fundamental flaws: the recreational opportunities it funds are only temporary; rules for publicising access opportunities are weak; the access provided did not have to link up to the wider, permanent access rights of way network (and therefore was often of little use to the public); and the quality of routes varied considerably.

The Future of Agriculture and Rural Development Policies in Wales

9. Ramblers Cymru advocates cross compliance for any future subsidy system which may be proposed for Wales, as we believe that farmers and landowners should not be in receipt of public subsidies if they are not complying with the law in respect of public rights of way.
10. Ramblers Cymru believe any new subsidy system must support and encourage farmers to deliver public access, ensuring the provision of both local economic benefits and population public health benefits. A major independent study concluded that spending farming subsidy funds on improving access to attractive countryside, protecting wildlife and cutting greenhouse gases could produce annual benefits of over £18billion, for a loss of less than £0.5billion in UK agricultural production.ⁱⁱ
11. Any redevelopment of the subsidy system must provide an opportunity to fund permanent improvements to Wales's recreational access infrastructure, boosting rural growth and development and improving public health. Financial support for landowners and managers to both complement existing public access on foot and fund the development of new access could ensure long lasting economic benefits from public subsidies through:
 - Directing funding towards areas where there is clear demand, e.g. areas for improvement as identified through Rights of Way Improvement Plans.
 - Investing in existing rights of way and open access network, which may potentially provide more public benefit than providing new routes particularly as local government budget cuts impact on access.
 - Favouring permanent access provision over temporary, thereby providing maximum benefit for public subsidies as spending on infrastructure is not wasted when the temporary agreement ends.

ⁱ Defra and the RPA 2016 [The guide to cross compliance in England Basic Payment Scheme](#)

ⁱⁱ Bateman et al., (2013) [Bringing Ecosystem Services into Economic Decision-Making: Land Use in the United Kingdom](#), *Science*, 341(6141), 45-50