

**P-05-741 Natural Resources Wales (Cyfoeth Naturiol Cymru) Needs Tighter Restriction – Correspondence from the Petitioner to the Committee, 23.04.17**

Mike Hedges AM

Chair, National Assembly for Wales Petitions Committee

National Assembly for Wales

Cardiff Bay

Cardiff

CF99 1 NA

23<sup>rd</sup> April 2017

Dear Mr Hedges,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the new correspondence submitted by NRW for your Committee's consideration. I submit the following views:

1. The letter from the Chief Executive contains little or no detail as to how the body takes into account competing interests, including agricultural land usage when designating Sites of Special Scientific Interest. It merely outlines the process to be followed, without any mention as to protocol details, or exact process guidelines. In my view, it is merely a broad policy statement.
2. The process of making SSSI designations as set out, in the letter, is designed in the first instance to include all interested parties, statutory and non-statutory bodies and this after survey and reference to the published relevant criteria. No mention is made of either the landowner/tenant at this preliminary stage. Indeed from personal experience, there is little or no consultation with the party managing the land on a daily basis, and certainly no meaningful dialogue, which I would suggest, that in the majority of cases would lead to a better understanding of the needs of all parties. It could even in certain cases, do away with the need to instigate Section 28 processes, with all parties working together for the common good. Nature will always strive to redress any imbalance, and the majority of land utilisation in the agricultural sector, will always accommodate these natural processes.

3. With reference to the procedure as outlined by NRW, again from personal experience, the limited and minimal discussion that took place between local officials and myself as tenant farmer, did not once encompass my farm business plan for the new venture, and the significant financial and operational burden, that the Section 28 designation would incur. In my case, the local officer chose to enter into discussion with the land owner direct, despite the fact that he is elderly, and in poor health. I would suggest that this course of action was utterly deplorable. The same officer,, chose to involve the wildlife crime unit of North Wales Police, and I was subjected to formal interview, but subsequently no charges were even laid or brought before a court .I question the officer's integrity, and that of NRW in giving sanction to such a course of actions.
4. The Committee stage of the Section 28 process, although formal in nature, does not in my view allow for the views of all stake holders to be either presented or considered. Having witnessed the proceedings, I accept that the scientific and legal documentation submitted in general terms was impressive little was made of its significance in relation to the specific parcel of land, and the implication thereof. Whilst represented at the hearing, the committee was seemingly not concerned with the practicalities of day to day management and financial restraints imposed on the business. A wider focus of both interests and outcomes , could possibly have resulted in a fairer and certainly a much more practical solution to all concerned.
5. NRW emphasises its commitment to working with all owner and occupiers of SSSI controlled land, and I welcome that assertion. However, from the preliminary discussions that have recently taken place, it is clear that payments in return for any management agreements do not in any way compensate for the loss that the business as a whole will have to support. Again, I understand that 'purse strings' have been tightened in recent years, but the financial loss to the predicted business plan for the enterprise is seemingly to be sacrificed . In my particular case, I have lost nearly 44% of the available productive land to SSSI governance, with no or little prospect of any financial remuneration.
6. My petition relates primarily to the way the body, or more precisely its officers, act in their day to day operation, and would emphasise that my

views are based on personal experience, although I have also discussed and gained insight into the problems encountered in similar situations, with other land owners and tenants, over a much wider area. In my view decisions are made locally and nationally, with little or no regard to either the socio or local land management practices of the specific locality. Morfa Harlech has been managed in much the same manner for centuries past, and both agriculture and natural habitats have thrived consistently over the years. There was never any intention on my part or the part of others, to modify this eco system in any way. Nature has and will always provide a buffer, an outcome and solution to any pressures placed upon it. It cannot however respond positively to any 'artificial' pressures without unwelcome consequences.

Diolch yn fawr,

John Edward Thomas