

NRW Consultation on regulatory fees and charges for 2023/2024

Background/ My Interest/ Relevance

[Personal information redacted]

Overall Proposals

It is of considerable concern that NRW has chosen to consult on these proposals- which involve major increases in costs to those needing to make discharges/ disposals to the wider environment and with the intention of implementing, in many cases- major increases in costs within just 3 months of this consultation and which must directly threaten WGs Sheep Scab Eradication Programme.

It is disappointing that the proposals focus on “Full cost recovery”, but seem devoid of any suggestions to work with the sheep industry to streamline/improve efficiency and effectiveness of procedures.

Proposals affecting Sheep dipping and Which Directly Threaten WG's Sheep Scab Eradication Programme

I listened to the NRW views, as presented to the Wales Sheep Scab Industry Group in 2022 and seen the Group's response to the Consultation. **I fully endorse their comments and proposed way forward.**

It was evident from that NRW presentation that NRW “ Groundwater Policy” at least- is currently simply to erect as many financial and practical barriers as possible- to achieve cessation of disposal to land in Wales- just at the time that Welsh Government is taking forward its long- awaited and well- known Sheep Scab Eradication Programme, costing up to £8 million.

Indeed looking at the NRW website now- giving an overview of NRW charging proposals- on 19 Dec 2022- **ie the same day as Minister L Griffiths is announcing details of the £8m WG Sheep Scab Eradication Programme**, the NRW spokesperson is trying to justify the enormous increase in charges being levied at farmers needing to dip sheep - as almost irrelevant- as it effects only 1% of farmers in Wales! Clearly, such comments demonstrate profound lack of understanding of the sheep industry in Wales and the need for collaboration - by organisations and groups of farmers to effectively tackle sheep scab.

This insensitivity and NRW approach is so very disappointing, so far removed from the obvious need to work WITH the industry - to help manage, so at least substantially reduce the incidence of sheep scab in Wales. Surely working together to so reduce sheep scab also can bring longer -term benefits to NRW interests/ responsibilities- in that with less sheep scab in due course- three years- for the Programme?, then there can be less need to dip sheep , so less risks to the wider Wales' environment, a more

resilient sheep industry, with improved health welfare and likely economic status, plus closer to achieving NRW's apparent aim- for disposal of used sheep dip to cease in Wales?

It is irrefutable that plunge dipping of sheep is the most effective treatment for sheep with scab and which provides a good degree of protection over subsequent months. It is clear that in order to tackle scab locally and nationally, that the sheep industry must be able to react to tackle scab - within very short- ie. matter of days and not be hamstrung with long- some months delays to obtain permits to dispose of used dip.

It is essential therefore that as many sheep farmers as possible are encouraged to hold onto existing permits and more to apply for new permits to dispose of used dip, particularly during the life of the Eradication Programme.

The WSSI Group makes 7 Recommendations, all I believe, very helpful, with the 5th- to reinstate surrendered landspreading permits particularly relevant and I believe, quickly manageable here. Given the obligations placed on EA Wales and NRW under the Groundwater regulations- to conduct "Requisite surveillance", including reviews, assessments of disposal activities and sites, the NRW should be very well placed to immediately **and very economically** assess and very likely reinstate permits that were held for a sufficiently long period. I am thinking in particular of the estimated 1500 plus? permits surrendered during the tenure of NRW- where substantial information should be readily available to allow permits to be reinstated - at minimal cost.

As this could be viewed as a "sensitive issue", with a VERY short timescale to resolve, can I ask that I not go into detail now, but that this be explored VERY QUICKLY between ourselves?

Pollution risks linked to disposal of used sheep dip

The NRW approach here and in discussion with the WSSSI Group above- appears to be under-pinned by concern that **DISPOSAL** of used sheep dip is largely responsible for water pollution incidents/ detections of diazinon- the main chemical involved here. I questioned this at the time, as in my considerable experience here- water pollution incidents involving sheep dip chemicals are NOT linked to disposal in accordance with permit conditions (I can only recall one **incident involving disposal linked to permit conditions** (and then it was questionable if the "5m³ application rate condition" had been complied with) Rather, the main water pollution incidents have related to:-

- "dipping/ treatment" activities in or around farm yards - **involving mobile, rather than static dip facilities,**
- and also the management of freshly dipped sheep- where insufficient attention is given to ensuring "drips of sheep"- (which can be considerable), are not well managed, or sheep allowed to access water too soon. after dipping.

So the apparent NRW Policy position - to obtain cessation of disposal to land in Wales- is highly questionable. If it prevails the NRW position here will have the effect of stifling the planned reduction in sheep scab - that both WG and the sheep industry is striving to achieve. The net result could be the need for, treatment **continues indefinitely, probably to a greater extent** and that a major risk and so source of pollution- mobile equipment use, in our around farm yards increases. (The NRW position appears to include for increased use of contractors, with mobile treatment facilities, with the used dip then held for subsequent transport off- farm -to facilities largely, or even totally outside Wales).

It should be noted that static dip baths are a long- established facility to treat sheep and better manage treated sheep - to reduce drips etc- by appropriate- (in integrity and sufficient size to manage drips off sheep) drain down areas. They are also relatively easy to check, inspect and maintain.

The industry, notably NFU, NSA and FUW all have previously been extremely helpful in promoting good practice here. Indeed their “Stop Every Drop “ campaign included guidance that went beyond Codes of Practice and which EA/EAW then actively co-operated and promoted. Such collaborative working is essential here.

I note that NAAC led production of an excellent Code of Practice for Mobile dipping- in an attempt to better manage and reduce pollution risks linked to mobile units. But I have not seen any endorsement/ active support for this Code from NRW. **Please can you provide details of where/ when such public support may in fact have been provided by NRW?**

Annual Subsistence Charges

On the face of it and given current economic pressures, a simple “6% across-the board increase” may seem justifiable. But related to my plea above- for urgent dialogue wrt. reinstatement of surrendered permits, can I **please have some urgent discussion**, as from my , albeit limited recent experience, there may be a situation that existing charges wrt. sheep dip disposal are not fully justified, so **ANY** increase here may not be justifiable?

Other suggestions/ Conclusions/ Way Forward

The WSSIgroup also raises the potential to treat used dip, to render it less harmful which from my previous experience, is more urgent than ever- given the NRW move towards “store and transport”- largely out of Wales- which inevitably brings in increases pollution and H&S risks in handling, transport etc. - plus being very questionable from a Climate Change/ Sustainability viewpoint?

Very simple treatment of used dip, involving stirring lime into the used dip, is known to provide worthwhile reductions in toxicity (by at least an order of magnitude) of

used dip to the water environment. This was assessed and accepted by the EA/EAW over 20 years ago. Although the treatment was not accepted as sufficient to obviate controls under the Groundwater Regulations, it was encouraged. It is strongly suggested that this work be re-visited and promoted as appropriate, including the potential cost savings - to both NRW as the regulator- which should then be passed onto the permit- payee and possible transportation/handling costs of a lower- risk material.

Other potential treatment options- such as use on constructed wetlands and bio beds should be urgently considered - as more sustainable options than the “transport out of Wales approach” that NRW appears to be adopting here.

Given the expense, but crucial importance of the WG- funded Sheep Scab Eradication Programme- set to run for 3 years, any increased charges in respect of sheep dipping need to be put on hold, until the end of the Programme.

It is suggested that NRW then uses this time to work with the industry- to help reduce the incidence of sheep scab and look at its procedures and those of potential permit applicants to minimise costs linked to both permit applications and on- going “Requisite Surveillance” - as required under the Groundwater Regulations.

[Name redacted] 6 January 2023.