

Your ref:
Our ref:
Email: Louise.stratton@nfu.org.uk
Direct line: 07811160958
Date: 2019

Dear

Important: Poole Harbour catchment update

You are receiving this letter as we believe you farm in the Poole harbour catchment, a map of which is enclosed with this letter.

Back in May 2017 the NFU emailed all members within the Poole harbour¹ catchment for you to understand the regulatory pressure of farming with regard to water quality and diffuse pollution from agriculture. The email also **warned about the potential of a Water Protection Zone (WPZ)** being brought in in specific areas to tackle this issue.

A grouping of environmental organisations have put in a Judicial Review against DEFRA, which required DEFRA to show why they hadn't used a WPZ as a delivery tool to improve the environmental status of Poole harbour and effectively to force farming and water companies to reduce their contribution of N to the harbour. This has **increased the pressure significantly on DEFRA and consequently on farming, to dramatically reduce the level of N making its way into the harbour** and using regulation to achieve this.

Over the past few years, the NFU has been working in conjunction with a number of farmers and other stakeholders discussing the main issue of nitrogen levels in the harbour. The two key sources of the nitrogen are from sewage and from agriculture. Consequently the agricultural sector has taken voluntary steps and has worked with successful initiatives to reduce N entering the harbour from within the catchment.

But despite this, the threat of a WPZ would seem to be very likely but there is hope for an alternative as is laid out later in this letter. Last summer the EA and NE released a draft report looking at the options for reducing nitrates (and phosphates) from farming. Their main method to achieve this is a WPZ.

¹ *As you will be aware, Poole harbour is an area of international importance for wildlife conservation, highlighted by its number of high level environmental designations. Four rivers drain into Poole harbour: the Rivers Frome, Piddle, Sherford and Corfe. The harbour's unique landscape has been created by farmers and landowners and is firmly agricultural. We want it to remain this way, whilst seeing an improvement in both farm profitability and the quality of the environment.*

What are the consequences of a WPZ²? They are HUGE! Primarily this approach creates a lack of flexibility for farmers and a **loss of control of, and more restrictions on your business**. There will be extra regulation whereby **ALL** farmers, no matter how large or small, will have to manage their nutrients at an individual farm level: all with no funding to achieve this and likely more Environment Agency inspections. Farms would have to meet a nutrient threshold through compulsory accounting and failure to do so would lead to enforcement for a criminal offence.

The NFU has been, and still is, fighting strongly against a new regulation. We have provided scientific evidence and analysis to back up our position. The NFU believe there are four options for agriculture within the Poole harbour catchment:

1. No change;
2. Introduce a WPZ and all farmers to comply with its new regulation;
3. Delay a WPZ and farmers to take no action (effectively delaying a WPZ being introduced);
4. **Delay a WPZ and farmers to take an alternative approach to reducing agricultural N levels.**

The first option will not be acceptable to Defra. The second option is not acceptable to the NFU and farmers. The third option just delays option 2 and is thus unacceptable (please note that there is NO indication of there being less environmental regulation post Brexit). After initial consultation, farmers and the NFU support the fourth option.

In the autumn of 2018, the NFU started putting together an alternative, non-regulatory approach to a WPZ and over the last few months, the NFU has been working with a small group of farmers, CSF and Wessex Water pulling this alternative approach into a viable option. This is an opportunity for the industry to take ownership of this issue, the farmers in the Poole harbour catchment have a good track record of working with CSF and Wessex Water and nutrient levels are falling in the harbour – but fundamentally not fast enough. Although this shows farmers can make the necessary changes, we now need to up our game. Importantly, the NFU's initial talks with DEFRA show that they are strongly in favour of this new farmer-led approach.

We are now at a stage where the EA and NE will be sending in their final report; this will include our alternative to a WPZ. Whilst there is still a long way to go and the detail is still to be created, we at least have a better solution for farming that is controlled by farming. We will continue to update you via letter and email with regular updates going online. If you want to know more then please get in touch.

Yours sincerely,



Wakely Cox
Dorset NFU Vice Chairman
Poole Harbour Catchment Initiative Agricultural
& Land Management Group Chairman
07971 660721



Louise Stratton
Dorset NFU County Adviser
07811 160958

²There is an NFU briefing produced by the NFU legal team which we are making available online for members; in the meantime, if you contact Louise Stratton we can give you the further details.