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| Name: | Policy Board | Meeting Date: | 16 March 2021 |
| Location: | Remote | Time: | 09:00 – 12.30 |
| Room: | Remote | Chair: | Minette Batters |
| Circulation: | Policy Board | Secretary: | Alison Taylor |
| | | Tel: | 024 7685 8852 |
| | | Ref: | PB1133 |

Present: Minette Batters (Chair), Tom Bradshaw, Ali Capper, Andrew Clark, Matt Culley, John Davies, Richard Findlay, Terry Jones, Richard Lister, John Mercer, Michael Oakes, Stuart Roberts, Michael Sly, and Tom Wornham

By Invitation: Fran Barnes, Andrew Burgess, Chris Cardell, Andrea Graham, Phil Hambling, Nick Hamer, Martin Haworth, Phil Jarvis, Robin Manning, Kevin Pearce, Dave Ractliffe, Olivia Seccombe, Alison Taylor and Nick von Westenholz

In Attendance: Spencer Collins, Helen Ferrier, Andrew Francis, Eleanor Griggs, Chris Hartfield, Diane Mitchell, Tom Rabbetts, Ashley Simms, Louise Staples, Kate Tandy, Alex Watton, Jack Watts and Jo Woodhams

Apologies: Thomas Binns

Policy Board Minutes – 16 March 2021

1. 13 January minutes & actions [PB1117]

The Board found the minutes from 13 January to be a true and accurate reflection of the meeting and the document was therefore approved. The Chair declared that all the actions from the last meeting were either complete or ongoing.

FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION:

2. Opening remarks from the President [Verbal] (*Minette Batters*)

The President discussed the latest release of detail from Defra on the SFI and an upcoming consultation on lump sum payments and the new entrant scheme expected in April. The President also discussed the current Government desire to remain globally competitive alongside the call from NGOs for regulation to align or surpass EU regulation in the context of Parliamentary Bills and consultations such as the Environment Bill and the livestock transportation consultation.

The President highlighted the importance of appreciating the current circumstance where British sourcing is strong due to increased sale of food through retail.

3. Political update [Verbal] (*Olivia Seccombe*)

The Board were given an update on the work of the External Affairs team. The Board heard of the progress of the team's Project Reset, starting to reset relationships with supporter MPs and ensuring full support within Parliament. An MP Champions list has been categorised into 3 groups; Build, comprised of new 2019 intake MPs, Strengthen, comprised of MPs previously positively engaged with NFU and Supportive Ministers, comprised of MPs unable to speak out against Cabinet, but able to provide support.

The External Affairs team has been working with regional colleagues to ensure members are at the fore of lobbying work, with research showing that representation by British farmers is the main driver of advocacy for the NFU by MPs. A refresher for some members has been conducted on appropriate engagement with MPs, with a session for members with former MPs and Peers on effective lobbying in development. Further member resources have also been provided at NFUOnline.

A recent roundtable event hosted by President Minette Batters and Director General Terry Jones was attended by 18 new intake MPs which was followed up by 10 Parliamentary questions put down by those MPs. An internal staff training event on MP engagement saw 65 staff attend.

In the last year, 11 MP briefings have been held with a further 11 regional briefings held focussing on the Trade and Agriculture Commission, 8 Peer briefings, weekly written briefings for MPs and 134 meetings with MPs of which 47 have been with Cabinet Ministers and 18 with Labour Front Bench. The Board heard that the Levelling Up Rural Britain report launched at NFU Conference has been used as a positive engagement tool with MPs.

The Board questioned whether the NFU had the ability to effectively target urban MPs and heard that work in this area has been increasingly successful recently, particularly with work on the Trade and Standards campaign and support from urban Labour MPs is almost equivalent to support from rural Tory MPs. The Board heard that a Cabinet reshuffle may be expected for May.

The Board raised seasonal labour as a policy priority and was reassured that although it was not captured in the Levelling Up Rural Britain report, it remains a campaign priority for the NFU. The Board suggested that the Kickstart Scheme promoted by Government to aid employment is not an effective tool for agriculture and horticulture businesses.

The Board discussed the local elections that will be held on 6th May, with Board Chairs asked to consider lobbying priorities for a potential early General Election.

4. Electronic Communications Code consultation [PB1119] (*Eleanor Griggs and Louise Staples*)

The paper presented to the Board gives an overview of the current Government consultation on proposed changes to the Electronic Communications Code (ECC) and access to land. The consultation is seemingly aimed at extending rights of telecoms operators and does not consider site valuations. The paper highlights areas of the consultation that are potentially the most detrimental to NFU members, including the ability for operators to upgrade contracts after an initial signing, with the right for Courts to impose more extensive rights and the impacts of site sharing with multiple providers. The paper recognises the benefit of increased telecommunications rollout, but that must not be at the extent of unfairly undermining landowners who are host to apparatus.

The Board heard that rural and urban areas were impacted differently, but not disproportionately by this policy and questioned whether there was a role for Defra with regards to rural proofing or the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

The Board agreed that a response to this policy must be a balanced approach, advocating a fair deal for site providers whilst supporting improvements to connectivity. It was suggested that member meetings would be beneficial as new measures are rolled out, as well as assistance in negotiating contracts.

The Board asked about the commitments made by providers to improve connectivity and the Shared Rural Network. The Board heard of ongoing cases supported by the LAS against the ECC and suggested NFU should look into where further legal approaches could be taken.

ACTION: Eleanor Griggs and Louise Staples to incorporate Board feedback into the consultation response.

5. NFU TB strategy [PB1120] (*Tom Rabbetts*)

The Board heard an update of NFU work on bTB strategy to date and policy plans for the future. There are currently 54 active licences across 27,164 km² with 12,716 trained contractors. There is an aim within the next year to cover 80% of HRA through culling alongside participation in the Farmer Delivered vaccination project in East Sussex and a post-cull vaccination trial in Wiltshire. The Board heard that Defra are currently consulting on reducing the Supplementary Badger Cull period from 5 years down to 2, with a hope to have cattle vaccinations by 2025.

There have been 140 members respond through the NFU's consultation tool. Defra will use the new bTB Partnership as the policy development forum, with an NFU ask for wider surveillance of badgers to build greater understanding of the spread of bTB. The NFU bTB Strategy underpins the priorities of informed trading, surveillance/testing, wildlife control and governance.

The Board drew comparisons of bTB strategy with the use of rodenticides, advising that parallels could be highlighted in conversations with policy makers. The Board questioned the situation with AFUs and grazing, hearing that they remain in areas where culling is not taking place. The bTB team are putting together information on how the move can be made to AFUs with enhanced grazing, focusing on maintaining grazing as far as possible.

The Board discussed engagement with the Wildlife Trusts and expressed appreciation for the work of the bTB team.

ACTION: The bTB team to consider updating Council on bTB strategy.

6. Productivity ambitions [PB1121] (*Andrew Francis and Jack Watts*)

The paper presented to the Board outlines the NFU's understanding of productivity and the cross cutting work in this area. The paper reviews how productivity can be measured and the lack of practical data that can be used to provide industry or business insight. The paper discusses barriers to and opportunities for productivity growth, such as connectivity and infrastructure development and introduces the pilot NFU Nutrient Use Efficiency (NUE) project, which sought to explore the practicalities of lifting existing farm level data into a collective analysis as proxy for Resource Use Efficiency (RUE) across the sectors. The paper also discusses how productivity may sit within future farming support schemes and its dependency on improving skills within the industry. It also discussed farm diversification and potential funding streams in that area, such as the Shared Prosperity Fund. It also highlighted the changes to the HM Treasury Green book which evaluates the spending of public money and how environmental impact and improvement will be a parameter for assessment going forward and how this may influence future grant funding.



The Board highlighted the varying productivity base line seen across the membership and that the whole industry must have the opportunity for growth. The Board stressed the importance of demonstrating value for RUE and the increase of waste being viewed as a resource as part of a circular economy. The Board suggested the NFU continue to push for a less prescriptive Small Grant Scheme, with a lower entry grant level.

The Board questioned how NFU thinking on productivity aligns with AHDB. The board suggested the use of case studies to demonstrate approaches to productivity across the industry and that the value of farmers and growers working together should be promoted.

The Board suggested moving away from single crop NUE and towards NUE and RUE across the whole rotation and raised the issue of land tenures being a barrier to productivity growth. The Board questioned how the metrics for measuring RUE and environmental sustainability could be compared and stated the importance of grants being available to contractors and collaborative working.

ACTION: Andrew Francis and Jack Watts to build the Board's feedback into NFU productivity ambitions and strategy

7. NFU position on neonicotinoids [PB1122] (*Chris Hartfield*)

The paper presented to the Board provides an overview of the existing NFU position on neonicotinoids, giving a brief overview of new evidence and consideration of ongoing uses of neonicotinoids, their alternatives and the political reality and public perceptions around the issue. The paper poses two options for a reviewed NFU approach to neonicotinoids. The first approach was, having reviewed the evidence base, to continue to take an evidence-based position on neonicotinoid use. This option takes into account progressive and evolving NFU work to promote IPM uptake and transparency (under the NFU Plant Health Strategy); to advocate that if pesticides are used as part of an IPM approach, that use is justified and limited to only using as much as necessary; to promote the need to develop and enable more effective, lower risk PPPs and alternative control technologies; and to lead Test and Trial studies investigating how the future Sustainable Farming Incentive could support and reward IPM uptake. The alternative policy approach, option 2, suggested is to move toward a more precautionary-based position which is more in-line with the perceptions of the section of the public who are concerned about these issues.

The Board questioned how public perception could be measured and how the NFU could better inform opinion influencers on the data behind plant protection products and use. It was suggested that NFU language-use around the use of plant protection products could be considered as well as the transparency of NFU policy on plant health.

The Board discussed how the NFU could work to keep authorisations for longer, for example through more targeted research and that the results of the NFU IPM E.L.M Test and Trial presents clear options for Defra to consider in future farm payments. The Board also raised the importance of highlighting business risk alongside environmental risk

The Board expressed strong agreement to support option 1 as set out in the Policy Board paper and hence continue to take an evidence-based policy approach.

ACTION: Chris Hartfield to incorporate the Board's feedback into NFU policy thinking on neonicotinoids.

8. NFU response to The Regulation of Genetic Technologies: A Public Consultation [PB1123] (*Helen Ferrier*)

The paper presented to the Board outlines the NFU response to the Defra consultation on the regulation of genetic technologies. The response calls for a robust fit-for-purpose legislative framework for GE, enabling diverse and accessible innovation, with choice to supply future market demand, both within the EU and beyond. The response encourages the government to take a lead both in policy and in creating constructive dialogue with both industry and the public. The response also supports the government's position that organisms produced through technologies such as genome editing should not be regulated as GMOs if they could have been produced through conventional breeding. The response highlights concern among some of the NFU membership over consumer perception of gene editing and the importance of government analysing market access implications of the proposed changes as a matter of urgency.

There was broad support for the consultation response from the Board.

ACTION: Helen Ferrier to submit the approved consultation response.

9. Environmental Principles [PB1124] (*Diane Mitchell and Jo Woodhams*)

The Board heard that the Environment Bill has been given a Crossover Motion and will be moved over to the next Parliamentary Session with a commitment to have the Bill passed onto the Statute Books by COP26.

The paper presented to the Board provides initial thoughts on how the NFU could seek to influence the interpretation of the Environmental Principles set out in the Policy Statement required under the Environment Bill. The paper considers how the Principles have been used to date and how opportunities for change could be incorporated into the NFU's response to the anticipated consultation on the Policy Statement. The Board heard what the Environment Bill states in relation to the Environmental Principles and government plans for the interpretation and application of the Principles.

The Board raised concerns about the application of the 'polluter pays' principle and discussed the benefits of Dame Glenys Stacey acting as environmental watchdog. The Board considered the value of minimising future regulation through the SFI and the importance of ensuring that the 'polluter pays' principle extends beyond just the primary producer so that farm businesses can remain competitive in future.

The Board highlighted the importance of ensuring that the Environmental Principles works across all the devolved nations and regions.

ACTION: Diane Mitchell and Jo Woodhams to incorporate the Board's feedback into the consultation response and bring a draft response back before the Board in May

FOR INFORMATION ONLY:

10. ATP update [PB1125] (*Richard Wordsworth*)
11. ELMs update [PB1126] (*Claire Robinson*)
12. NFU Response: BEIS Subsidy Control Consultation [PB1127] (*Rohit Kaushish*)
13. NFU asks for the Slurry Investment Scheme [PB1128] (*Diane Mitchell*)

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14. **Northern Ireland Protocol: issues arising [PB1129] (*Nick von Westenholz*)**
 15. **BPS and support schemes update [PB1130] (*Richard Wordsworth*)**
 16. **Agri-environment update [PB1131] (*Alisha Anstee*)**
 17. **Legal update [PB1132] (*Kate Tandy*)**

It was noted that there has been widespread disappointment within the horticulture sector following recent announcements on the SFI lacking inclusivity for the horticulture sectors. It is felt that the paper presented to the Board [PB1126] does not adequately reflect this.

ACTION: The NFU E.L.M.s team and the Horticulture E.L.M.s team will work together to ensure the views of the horticulture sector are reflected in future E.L.M.s work

ACTION: Ali Capper to discuss feedback with Janet Hughes

AOB:

The Board heard that the NFU has been approached by a small number of members regarding market access, the AIC contract and whether it is more restrictive for UK farmers to be able to access the UK market than imports. The Board heard that the NFU needs to collect more evidence on this issue and understand the challenge that the AIC is imposing more restrictive terms on UK-sourced products.

The Board heard that the National Crops Board are currently undertaking work into fairness in the supply chain, working closely with AIC and caution must be taken with the NFU's approach to this issue.

The Board heard about a Protein Strategy being developed in the EU and the UK.