
Name:	Policy Board	Meeting Date:	8 May 2019
Location:	NFU HQ	Time:	09:00 – 12:30
Room:	Knightsbridge	Chair:	Minette Batters
Circulation:	Policy Board	Secretary:	Ian Ludgate
		Tel:	024 7685 8839
		Ref:	PB972

Present: Minette Batters (Chair), Tom Bradshaw, Ali Capper (ACa), Andrew Clark (ACI), Richard Findlay, Terry Jones, Stuart Roberts, Michael Sly, Guy Smith and Tom Wornham

By Invitation: Fran Barnes, Thomas Binns, Chris Cardell, Trevor Foss, Simon Gadd, Andrea Graham, Phil Hambling, Martin Haworth, Phil Jarvis, Richard Lister, Ian Ludgate, John Pawsey and Olivia Seccombe

In Attendance: Sam Durham, Andrew Francis, Emma Hamer, Hannah Harrison, Chris Hartfield, Rohit Kaushish, Catherine McLaughlin and Nina Winter

Apologies: John Davies, John Mercer, Michael Oakes and Kevin Pearce

Policy Board Minutes – 8 May 2019

1. 12 March minutes & actions [PB962]

The Board found the 12 March minutes to be a true and accurate reflection of the meeting and the document was therefore approved. The Chair declared that all of the actions from the meeting had been completed. The Chair also read out the apologies for today's meeting and welcomed PJ to his first Policy Board meeting as the new Environment Forum Chair.

In light of recent feedback from some members of the Board, the Chair opened a discussion on the current membership and format of Policy Board meetings and whether any changes should be made going forward. Specifically, the Chair mentioned the number of people in attendance and suggested this could be reduced by no longer inviting Forum Chairs to the meetings. Although Forum Chairs were originally invited for the duration of the Brexit process and the date of departure still lies ahead, the Board heard the substantive work around no-deal planning had now been completed. It was suggested that all Forum Chairs could be invited back as and when the agenda includes Brexit as a substantial item and Forum Chairs could return individually if the agenda includes any other item relevant to them. The Chair also suggested the meetings could be moved back to at the Boardroom, where they were originally held before the number of attendees was opened up to address Brexit.

The Director General said he had received similar feedback on the size and structure of Policy Board meetings but added that any reduction in member attendance should be mirrored by a reduction in staff attendance. The Director General also highlighted the recent positive move towards creating subgroups to develop policy that is then tabled at Policy Board meetings and the important role Forum Chairs have in such subgroups.

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Several Board Chairs voiced their concerns that the size of the Board was slowing effective discussion. While it had been useful to expand attendance during the Brexit process, it was said, this had begun to take attention away from other important issues. The Board was also reminded that the NFU Constitution sets out the formal members of Policy Board, of which Forum Chairs are not part. However, there was broad support among Board Chairs for getting Forum Chairs more actively involved in developing policy outside of Policy Board and improving the links between Commodity Boards and Forums more generally.

In response, some Forum Chairs agreed that the links between Commodity Boards and Forums need to be strengthened and called for better lines of communication. It was suggested, for instance, that the availability of Board minutes could be improved, perhaps by creating a hub on the NFU website. However, there was opposition from several Forum Chairs over the prospect of no longer being invited to every Policy Board meeting. It was felt by some that this could side-line Forum issues. They also felt that it remained important to have Forum input while work on Brexit and the Agriculture Bill continues; and it would be a challenge to find agenda items that are not of interest to Forums.

In conclusion, the Chair acknowledged that opinion in the room remained divided on whether the number of attendees at Policy Board meetings needs to be decreased and, more specifically, whether all Forum Chairs should attend all meetings. The Chair also noted the important role of Forums in our representation, expertise and democracy but, ultimately there needed to be a compromise found to address the general dissatisfaction with the current meeting format and functioning.

ACTION: It was agreed that Officeholders would take the issue offline and come back to Policy Board with a proposal

FOR DISCUSSION AND ACTION:

2. General licences [PB964] (*Hannah Harrison & Sam Durham*)

The Board was provided with an update on key developments since the supporting paper had been written. As of 8 May 2019, Natural England (NE) had issued three general licences to control carrion crow, woodpigeon and Canada geese. The last to be issued – the general licence to kill or take woodpigeon to prevent serious damage to crops – followed a letter from the NFU to NE on 3 May 2019 demanding the licence be issued the same day. On 4 May 2019, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs assumed licencing powers from NE and has since launched a call for evidence on the prior withdrawal of general licences, which closes on 13 May 2019. On 1 May 2019, the NFU met with NE, Defra and other stakeholders to discuss general licences and was told NE would continue to deal with individual licences while Defra would retain oversight.

The Board was told that the NFU is raising issues with NE on a daily basis and positive changes have been secured as a result – an approach that will now be taken with Defra as the new authority with oversight. The NFU has also been updating the question and answer member briefing on a daily basis and is seeking members' views to inform a response to the aforementioned call for evidence via the NFU website. The NFU has already begun work on the response, criticising the new general licences for being overly lengthy, containing inconsistent drafting and gold-plating the process.

The Board questioned how any damage to crops in the absence of general licences could be proved by farmers. The Board heard this is a widely-held concern and the NFU is pushing the authorities for clarity on this matter. It is thought NE considers the presence of woodpigeon as an indicator of damage, but it has not set this out in writing.

The Board expressed a number of other concerns around bird control licences, including the administrative burden on farmers, disclosing the location on an application form and the competency of the Secretary of State and his appointed authorities. It was suggested that the latter may be best addressed through direct engagement with the parties involved rather than more public channels.

The Board suggested the NFU could rewrite the general licences as it would like to see them written and use this work to influence NE. The idea was welcomed and there may be an opportunity to use it as the NE launches a full review of general licences later this year. The Board heard the NFU is currently working on a comparison of old and new general licences and looking to engage NE on it.

ACTION: HH and SD to incorporate the views of Policy Board and the wider membership into the call for evidence response

3. Activism/extremism [Verbal] (*Nina Winter, Hannah Harrison & Cat McLaughlin*)

The Board had a wide-ranging discussion on activism and its impact on NFU members. The discussion covered different types of activism, the relative legality of each type and the various means of redress available to NFU members. The Board provided a clear steer on which issues the NFU should focus on going forward to make the best use of its resources and best serve its membership.

The Board also heard that the NFU responded to a call for evidence on extremism last year and has continued to engage with Government on the issue since.

4. Skills training update [PB965] (*Simon Gadd & Oli Lee*)

The Board was briefed on the agri-skills vision under development by the Skills Senior Leadership Group (SSLG) and NFU efforts to influence it, which can be summarised under three main headings:

- Careers - by sector e.g. dairy, livestock, horticulture, and by level e.g. operator, supervisor, manager
- Employment - employee (know your rights, employee charter) and employer (contracts, onboarding)
- Learning & training - job role, competencies, training (formal, informal non-formal)

The NFU is striving to make the work relevant to farming, particularly small farm businesses, and will soon be launching a survey to gather members' views on skills and training. The results of this survey will be presented to the Board at a future meeting.

The Board gave its full support for the NFU to continue its work to develop an agri-skills vision under the SSLG umbrella. There was also a desire from Board Chairs to become more involved with the work. The Board also discussed the potential for a mobile app to collect data on skills and for the NFU to act as an intermediary between farming colleges and the industry.

ACTION: IL to circulate draft skills survey questions to Policy Board when available

ACTION: All Board Chairs to engage with the NFU's work on skills



5. Update on productivity [PB966] (*Andrew Francis*)

The Board was reminded of the NFU vision for productivity - a progressive, resilient and highly investable industry producing world class sustainable food and goods for life which are fairly valued and demanded in the marketplace.

The Board was presented with a timeline that set out short- (1-3 years), medium- (3-5 years) and long-term (5 years plus) actions for the industry to improve productivity. It was noted that as part of this ambition, 25% of the NFU's net zero ambition by 2040 could be met through productivity improvements.

Future funding for productivity is likely to come from Defra and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). There is provision in the Agriculture Bill for Defra to fund productivity and farm resilience measures but the budget and what exactly will be funded is unclear. MHCLG, we believe, will be responsible for the Shared Prosperity Fund, which will replace EU structural funds and be consulted on towards the end of 2019. The HM Treasury's Green Book rules will be used to assess where productivity gains are most likely and funding will be allocated accordingly.

The NFU has recently attended the Defra Productivity Roundtable, and will be attending a Spending Review meeting with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, The Rt. Hon. Elizabeth Truss MP on May 15th. The NFU also has a separate meeting with HM Treasury to discuss future productivity funding in June.

- **Productivity and Environment Measures Master Sheet (*Rohit Kaushish*)**

The Board was shown a spreadsheet that listed 300 improvement measures, 172 of which were productivity-focused and the rest environment-focused or included green infrastructure or invested in improved access or improved the cultural heritage of the farmed landscape. When broken-down by sector, there were 80 measures for livestock/dairy, 95 for crops, 70 for sugar, 34 for poultry and 79 for horticulture. When broken-down by policy stream, there were 77 measures for net zero, 58 for IPM and 18 for the clean air strategy. The Board heard that the measures could also be arranged into seven key themes:

- Genetics & breeding
- Precision technology
- Collaboration
- Farm buildings
- Information services
- Skills & training
- Natural resource management

The Board considered the need for further work on the key themes, ensuring the correct language is used and contextualising them with the food strategy when speaking to Government. The Board also considered the need to rural proof the work on productivity, the need for a broad range of measures to allow flexibility and the need to withhold the Master Sheet from external organisations for the time being. The Board heard that the NFU is currently working on rural proofing the Industrial Strategy and developing a broader rural proofing paper to bring to Policy Board in the future once completed.

The Board underlined the need to establish a solid evidence base of instances where past investment in productivity measures has provided an acceptable return, especially around job creation, which can then be taken to Government to argue for future funding. A template has already been prepared for



this. However, it would also be important for the industry to accept its fair share of responsibility when it comes to improving productivity.

ACTION: RK to share the Productivity and Environment Measures Master Sheet with the Horticulture and Potatoes Board Chair

6. Policy priorities [PB967] (*Andrew Clark*)

The Board was presented with a revised list of policy issues that will be the principal focus for the NFU across 2019/20. The list still needs to be tweaked slightly, including the addition of activism following the earlier agenda item, and the final version will very much be a living document.

Alongside the staff allocated to each issue, a member has also been nominated to champion it. A two-page document has also been produced for each policy issue, outlining the personnel involved, outcomes, activity plan including outputs and stakeholder engagement plan.

The Director of Policy acknowledged that there has been limited engagement with the Forums during the development of the policy priorities list, but said he would be more than happy to meet and improve engagement going forward.

The Tenants' Forum Chair suggested a formal structure is needed to better engage Forums in the policy priorities work. The Chair proposed a further paper be written for the next Policy Board meeting to set out how the work will be taken forward and what role the Forums will play.

7. The Sustainable Plant Health Solutions Roadmap proposal [PB968] (*Chris Hartfield*)

The Board heard that the Sustainable Plant Health Solutions Roadmap proposal is a product of several months' work, including internal discussions with Board Chairs and staff as well as external discussions with other organisations and the Defra Chief Scientist.

The vision of the proposed roadmap is to develop sustainable plant health solutions that enable UK farmers and growers to produce crops that meet the needs of consumers, the environment and profitable farming businesses. The scope of the roadmap covers crop protection & pesticides, plant health issues e.g. quarantine pests and diseases (Xylella), crop nutrition, biotechnology & new breeding techniques (CRISPR) and new and emerging issues.

The roadmap has five key aims or action areas:

- Availability of solutions: a resilient and effective choice of control solutions to be available for all key crop pests, weeds and diseases
- IPM: all pest, weed and disease control decisions to be made as part of an IPM approach
- Agronomic advice: agronomic advice based on IPM, monitoring and evaluation to be the norm throughout the industry
- Transparency: be open and transparent about PPP use to improve Government and public trust
- Regulation: a regulatory and policy framework that enables the development of sustainable plant health solutions

The NFU is hoping to develop and agree the roadmap internally and produce a communications plan by the end of June 2019. It will then start to identify and engage key stakeholders by the end of August, to form taskforce groups to deliver the separate strands of work.

It was suggested that for greater transparency and better IPM to be successful in demonstrating industry responsibility and improving trust, a common approach to pesticide use will be needed across all sectors of agriculture and horticulture. There was debate about the need for proportionate application of the approach, appropriate to different levels of use across different sectors. It was agreed to undertake further discussion with all sectors about the proportionality of the approach across different sectors, but beyond that the Board expressed its broad support for the proposed roadmap.

ACTION: CH/EH to further engage sectors regarding proportionate application of the roadmap

FOR INFORMATION ONLY:

8. **BPS update [PB969] (*Richard Wordsworth*)**
9. **CS update [PB970] (*Alisha Anstee*)**
10. **Legal update [PB971] (*Nina Winter*)**

No comment was made on these papers.

AOB:

The Crops Board Chair flagged the forthcoming march in London on the withdrawal of general licenses and asked whether the NFU is planning to get involved. The Board heard there are no current plans for the NFU to join the march.