



Protecting
wildlife for
the future



Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Secretary of State for Food, Environment & Rural Affairs
Nobel House, 17 Smith Square
London
SW1P 3JR

13 December 2017

Dear Secretary of State,

Assurance for Countryside Stewardship Applicants

After the European Union (EU) referendum result the UK Government acted positively and promptly to provide confidence and certainty to farmers and land managers by guaranteeing that agri-environment agreements signed before the UK leaves the EU would be met in full.

The undersigned believe that it is essential for the Government to act again by providing assurance to those currently applying for Countryside Stewardship agreements starting in January. We ask you to ensure that those in England with an agri-environment agreement are not at a disadvantage when, post EU-exit, the Government launches a new and improved system of environmental land management payments.

Defra Ministers have highlighted improving the implementation of agricultural policy and agri-environment schemes as a priority when the UK leaves the EU. It has been suggested that post-EU exit, farmers and land managers will be able to access support for achieving environmental outcomes which will be simpler and more effective. There is an expectation amongst farmers and land managers that future schemes will be a more attractive proposition than current schemes.

We welcome this ambition, but it also presents a short-term risk. Namely, that farmers and land managers do not engage with Countryside Stewardship in its current term as they do not wish to commit themselves to five-year agreements which may limit their ability to access improved schemes in the future. Increasingly we are seeing potential applicants asking

whether they should apply for Countryside Stewardship or hold off until an improved offer is available.

This threatens to suppress engagement in the scheme. It also undermines the recent, welcome changes to Countryside Stewardship, which form part of the much-needed overhaul of the scheme. This would jeopardise many important environmental outcomes and increase the likelihood of Defra not fully allocating the funding available under the current Rural Development Programme.

In 2011, Defra promised that no farmer or land manager with an agri-environment scheme agreement would suffer as a result of the introduction of Greening into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). At the time, this provided the sector with the confidence to continue to engage in agri-environment schemes and deliver positive environmental outcomes under Environmental Stewardship.

In the same spirit, the undersigned stakeholders ask the Minister to provide a guarantee that those farmers and land managers in an agri-environment agreement or who enter into Countryside Stewardship agreements before EU-exit, as well as during any transitional period post EU-exit, are not disadvantaged within a future policy or during transition towards a future policy. This will allow us to more effectively promote the scheme to farmers, land managers and advisers and in doing so contribute to the Government's ambition of enhancing the environment.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,



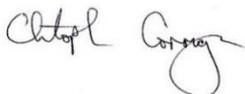
Tim Breitmeyer, President
Country Land and Business Association



Meurig Raymond, President
National Farmers Union



George Dunn, Chief Executive
Tenant Farmers Association



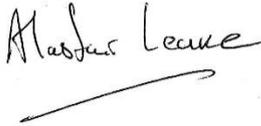
Chris Corrigan, Director
RSPB England



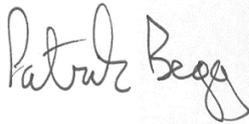
Steve Trotter, Director England and Living Landscapes
The Wildlife Trusts



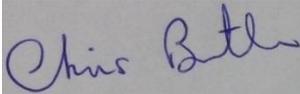
Jeremy Moody, Secretary and Adviser
Central Association of Agricultural Valuers



Dr Alastair Leake, Director of Policy and The Allerton Project
Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust



Patrick Begg, Outdoors and Natural Resources Director
National Trust



Chris Butler, Chair National
Farm Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) Association