

## **Written Statement – NVZ Consultation**

**Last updated 13 December 2017**

**Lesley Griffiths, Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs**

Last year the Welsh Government consulted on the Review of the Designated Areas and Action Programme to Tackle Nitrate Pollution in Wales. We asked for views on options for the future designation of Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) and Action Programme measures implemented within NVZs. We received 256 responses from individuals and organisations, reflecting the importance of water quality to Wales. Nearly 60% of responses supported whole territory designation. A summary of responses will be published in the New Year.

Safeguarding water quality is one of the key priorities in the Water Strategy for Wales. While nitrogen is a vital nutrient which helps plants and crops grow, high concentrations are harmful. The agricultural use of nitrates is a major source of water pollution. International obligations, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal, requires us to take action to improve water quality by 2030 by reducing pollution.

Poor nutrient management is a major problem across our country. Pollution of this kind is preventable and we should not be seeing significant stretches of rivers largely devoid of fish in the 21st Century. Most respondents to the consultation recognised the significant impact nitrate pollution is having and agreed with the need for further action.

I have taken into account the consultation responses alongside the views of stakeholders from my Brexit Ministerial Roundtable and its Land Management Sub-group and the Wales Land Management Forum Sub-group on Agricultural Pollution.

I want to ensure the people of Wales can continue to benefit from our natural resources. To achieve this, our waters need greater protection from agricultural pollution. I am minded to introduce a whole Wales approach to tackling nitrate pollution from agriculture. Over coming months I will work with stakeholders to get the right balance of regulatory measures, voluntary initiatives and investment. I intend to explore options to provide land managers with flexibility, where these would achieve the same or better outcomes than a regulatory approach. This includes further consideration of a proposal from the agriculture industry based on the First Milk off-set project.

I welcome the work being done by the Wales Land Management Forum sub group on agricultural pollution and the willingness of the industry to work with us to tackle this problem. We will continue to work collaboratively with this group and my Ministerial Roundtable Land Management Subgroup to ensure the regulatory regime is sufficiently robust to achieve the outcomes Wales requires, while offering flexibility.

We have some of the finest countryside and stretches of water in Europe which we have a duty to protect and enhance. This new approach will help deliver this.