

## Written evidence submitted by the National Trust (AB50)

### Overview

- 1) **The National Trust believes that the current farm subsidy system does not deliver for farmers, society or the environment. Leaving the EU provides an unprecedented opportunity to revitalise our countryside in a way that meets the needs of people and the environment, for generations to come.**
- 2) **As the UK looks to urgently address climate change and biodiversity loss, the Agriculture Bill will be one of the most important tools to unlock and deliver practical solutions.**
- 3) At present, a large proportion of funding paid to farmers is tied to land area – the more land you have, the more money you receive. While there have been some benefits for the environment in recent years, on the whole these payments have failed to help our countryside. Declines of farmland birds and other species continue apace, alongside the degradation of assets like soil and water.
  - Soil degradation in England and Wales costs £1.2 billion per year to the economy
  - Between 2009 and 2014, the distribution of British bee species declined by 49%
  - Farmland birds have declined by 54% since 1970
- 4) Sustainable, productive and profitable farming is underpinned by a healthy environment, which is in turn dependent on a farming system that is sensitive to its needs. If action is not taken, not only will we see the continued degradation of our natural environment, but the long-term future of farming itself will be under threat. The biggest risk to food security is environmental degradation.
- 5) From improvements in soil health to low input systems, actions taken to improve the environment also help create more resilient, profitable farm businesses. Joint research published last year demonstrated this: an analysis of 56 upland farms found that a ‘less is more’ approach, reducing stocking densities, was both more sustainable and crucially more profitable.
- 6) Research commissioned by the National Trust, RSPB and The Wildlife Trusts showed that at least £2.9bn a year is needed to support farmers and land managers to play their part in meeting the UK’s existing commitments to restore nature and tackle climate change. This approach is supported by the public: 91% support the Government paying farmers to protect nature (WWF/Populus poll).
- 7) The National Trust supports the Agriculture Bill’s introduction of a new environmental land management system based on the principle of public money delivering public goods – those benefits, such as adaptation to climate change, improved water quality, soil quality, heritage conservation and public access, for which no functioning market exists.

## Amendments

- 8) In order for this new system to succeed, a number of amendments are however needed to the Bill.
- As presented, the Bill is silent on the **provision of advice for farmers to transition to the new system**. This could be provided under Clause 1; in order to ensure that public money is used efficiently, independent public advice is needed to ensure that farmers know how best to deliver those public goods the Bill wants to achieve.
  - The Bill is also silent on the issue of **regulation**, and how this will apply to farmers who choose to take part in the new system, and those who do not engage. It is essential that all farmers comply to the same set of basic standards, and that these are properly enforced, thereby not penalising those farmers who do the right thing and maintain high standards.
  - In order for delivery to match ambition, it is also essential that **adequate funding** is provided for the new system to deliver against any legal targets. The Environment Bill, currently progressing through Parliament will introduce a series of legal targets for environmental progress, for which the Agriculture Bill and the new Environmental Land Management Scheme will be a key delivery tool. A new clause should therefore assess the level of funding need to deliver on policy objectives for each purpose set out in Clause 1.
  - Finally, with the new system set to deliver sustainable farming in the UK, it is essential that this is not undermined via the import of products that don't meet the UK's high standards; as well as undermining UK agriculture, this would mean that environmental damage was displaced internationally, rather than avoided and enhanced. The Bill should therefore be amended to provide **safeguards against the import of low standard food**.

## The Agriculture Bill, climate change and nature

- 9) Agriculture has a significant role to play in reaching net zero emissions. The sector accounts for approximately 10% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions and farmers are also often worst hit by climate impacts, from prolonged droughts to devastating flooding.
- 10) Even more importantly however, sustainable land management has the potential to help tackle carbon emissions through adoption of natural climate solutions, for instance tree planting or restoring peat bogs. The public money for public goods model at the heart of the new system will allow the Government to fund farmers to implement these solutions. These approaches will also positively impact nature, with the restoration and creation of rare habitats important for reversing biodiversity decline.
- 11) Natural climate solutions form a key part of the Trust's work to tackle climate change, working directly with our farm tenants. By 2030, all of the National Trust's estate – including our in-hand and tenanted farmland - will achieve Net Zero. This includes the creation of 18,000 hectares of woodland, as well as the restoration of peatland and saltmarsh.

12) With urgent action needed on climate change and biodiversity and the potential for a public money for public goods approach to deliver this, **it is therefore vital that the list of purposes stipulated in Clause 1 is not broadened**. Widening this list would risk the dilution of purpose for the Bill, risking weakening the value for public money spent on future schemes.

### **The National Trust and farming**

13) **Farming is a fundamental part of the National Trust story, from Beatrix Potter’s donation of her Lake District farming estate to championing local produce in our cafés and restaurants. Farming now covers some 200,000 hectares of our estate.**

14) Our farmland spans upland beef and sheep to lowland arable and field vegetables; dairies to laying hens, vineyards and commercial orchards. The National Trust hosts over 1,350 individual farming tenants. We also farm over 4,000 hectares of in-hand farmland directly and manage a further 12,000 hectares of grazing licences.

15) Supporting sustainable farming is crucial in achieving our environmental ambitions. On our tenanted land, we achieve our aims by finding common cause and working in partnership with our tenants. We see this as an opportunity in itself – it means we benefit from our tenants’ wealth of knowledge and experience and it grounds our work in the practical realities faced by rural business.

#### **16) Case Study: Wimpole Farm, Cambridgeshire**

Wimpole is the National Trust’s only in-hand lowland arable farm. It recently undertook a carbon account for the whole farm and estate, which showed that thanks to good soil management, tree planting and the use of smart technology, the estate stores more carbon than it emits, whilst increasing biodiversity and running a profitable business.

17) It is also working with the Small Robot Company, trialling the use of agri-robots for precision farming: planting seeds, monitoring crop health and destroying pests. This reduces both the environmental impact and the cost of inputs.

### **Practical trials of new approaches to farm support**

18) The Trust is working with our farming tenants to investigate new, practical ways of delivering support for farmers that achieve greater environmental results and enable them to make a good living. We know from experience that new models can work for farm businesses and for nature, as long as they are delivered with the right support and advice.

### **Payments for outcomes**

19) In 2017, the Trust began a whole farm scale ‘payments for outcomes’ trial with farm tenants in the Yorkshire Dales. This trial rewards tenants for improving soil health, water quality and pollinator numbers, without stipulating explicitly how these outcomes should be achieved. Unlike existing agricultural schemes, this enables farmers to choose how they manage the land.

20) The trial, operating over 2,000 hectares, has led to new agreements with farmers, and is now part of Defra's tests and trials programme exploring how the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) system might run. The early indications are positive, both in terms of outcomes and tenant feedback.

### **Natural Infrastructure Schemes**

21) Alongside developing a new system for delivering public funding, we also believe new sources of private finance should be developed. Together with the Green Alliance, we have developed the concept of Natural Infrastructure Schemes, where individuals or collectives of farmers could sell the environmental benefits they provide, such as reduced flood risk or carbon sequestration, to private beneficiaries, such as councils or utilities or transport companies.

22) This concept is complementary to the aims of the Agriculture Bill's public investment in public goods and helps open farming to additional funding sources. One of our most recent reports suggests that the new ELM system could help support the development of these complementary markets, for example by match-funding private investment. We are now developing a pilot in Cumbria to explore this further as part of Defra's tests and trials programme.

### **About the National Trust**

23) *The National Trust is Europe's largest conservation charity, committed to looking after nature, beauty and history for everyone, for ever. We care for over 300 properties, 700 miles of coastline and 250,000 hectares of land.*

24) Farming is at the heart of our mission – the Trust is the UK's biggest private landowner and farmer: 80% of our land is farmed, either by ourselves or by over 1,350 agricultural tenants. By 2025, our ambition is that at least half of our farmland will be 'nature-friendly', with hedgerows, field margins, ponds, woodland and other habitats allowing plants and animals to thrive.

25) *We also plan to restore or create 25,000 hectares of important wildlife habitat by 2025 – the equivalent of more than 33,000 football pitches – including threatened habitats such as arable field margins. Working with our farming tenants is a key part of delivering this target.*

26) *We are a member of both the Greener UK and Wildlife and Countryside Link coalitions and support their evidence submitted to the Public Bill Committee.*

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