

## Briefing for MPs for day 1 of committee stage of the Agriculture Bill

October 2018

### Greener UK priorities

Greener UK has identified some priority amendments that it will be supporting for day 1 of committee stage

#### Establishing a strong regulatory baseline (84)

As it stands, the Agriculture Bill does not provide a requirement, or even the powers necessary, to secure strong regulatory protection for farming and the environment. Although the policy statement that sits alongside the bill recognised such regulation as crucially important, this is not recognised in the legislation. Greener UK is concerned that a lack of a strong regulatory baseline, that is properly enforced, jeopardises the environment, animal welfare and food safety, and causes uncertainty for farmers and land managers. It also means that any public investment in our countryside will inevitably be undermined.

#### Avoiding the undermining of public goods (53, 73, 75)

The Agriculture Bill should reflect the government's welcome commitment that future policies will be "underpinned by payment of public money for the provision of public goods". The list in Clause 1(1) does a good job of setting out these goods but there is no indication that these goods are a government funding priority or that any payments, including those for productivity, should contribute to their delivery. At the very least, the bill should ensure that the delivery of the identified goods are not undermined by other payments, including those for productivity.

#### Giving ministers duties, not just powers (44, 45, 47)

Greener UK believes the Agriculture Bill should not just grant powers to Ministers but should include duties on them. Although the bill includes a wide range of powers, there are few duties or requirements on ministers with regards to how these are to be used. This is a major flaw that fails to reflect the policy ambition set out by the government, or the urgent need for progress in developing future policies.

In particular, Greener UK would like to see duties for ministers to have environmental land management schemes by a set date. Although amendments 44, 45 and 47 do not tackle this issue fully, they do go some way to addressing the gap.

## Greener UK concerns

Greener UK welcomes the list of goods set out in Clause 1(1) of the bill and believes it adequately recognises the Government's commitment to payments for public goods. However, there are amendments that have been tabled that we believe would undermine the bill's objectives.

### Purposes for public payments (52, 88)

Greener UK believes that amendments 52 and 88 provide current and future ministers with such broad powers as to undermine the entire purpose of the bill. Greener UK therefore views these as wrecking amendments. Powers to provide payments for any purpose to those in rural areas moves the bill away from the central premise of this reform, and reflects more closely the shape, objectives and payment methods of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). It would also remove any certainty for farmers as to the direction of future policy as the purposes for payments would be so broad.

Amendments 52 and 88 take text regarding these additional powers from the Welsh schedule in the Bill and apply them to English farmers in a way that would completely ignore the outcome of the Health and Harmony consultation.

52 argues that the amendment brings the English and Welsh powers into line. However, we understand that the Welsh schedule is transitional and likely to be repealed within a couple of years. As such, the two should not be viewed as analogous within the Bill. Based on statements by the Welsh Cabinet Secretary and Welsh Government, it is likely that the purposes for which financial support can be provided in Wales in the future will be different to how they currently stand in the Agriculture Bill.

### Narrowing of recipients (89)

This amendment would severely limit the potential of the Bill in achieving its central aims. By limiting payments to agricultural businesses and agricultural land only it would have several consequences. This amendment would:

- Make it impossible to support non-commercial woodland owners, such as community woodlands, to plant more trees.
- Prevent local communities as a whole from engaging with any future scheme, such as using habitat creation or natural solutions to protect themselves from flooding.
- Limit the restoration of non-agricultural habitats, such as blanket bogs, which will play a vital role in the future for climate change mitigation.

Greener UK believes some restrictions on recipients may be necessary, such as for public bodies or to avoid local councils using payments for local park upkeep. But amendment 89 tightens the definition far too much and could lead to many perverse outcomes, including those identified above.

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Greener UK is a coalition of 13 major environmental organisations united in the belief that leaving the EU is a pivotal moment to restore and enhance the UK's environment.

Greener UK is working in partnership with Wildlife and Countryside Link.

Together, Greener UK and Wildlife and Countryside Link members have the support of over eight million people.



## GREENER UK

