

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Review of Environmental Advice, Incentives and Partnership
Approaches for the Farming Sector in England

Review of Partnership Approaches for Farming and the Environment Policy Delivery

March 2013

Conclusions from the Review

Partnership approaches provide an opportunity for government to achieve its priorities **working in partnership** with industry and environmental organisations rather than adding to regulatory burdens or additional budgetary demands for incentives. These approaches are more flexible, bringing partners together from a range of backgrounds, who can share expertise to produce workable solutions that benefit wildlife and the environment and contribute to the longer-term sustainability of the farm business. Partnership approaches will not replace essential legislation, but can work alongside regulation and incentives to add value and embed good practice.

The review of evidence suggests partnership approaches are suitable to:

- Provide lead in time for industry to adjust to future challenges and to provide an opportunity for joint government/industry development (co-design) of practical, effective and acceptable solutions.
- Add value to planned or existing regulatory or incentivised approaches, providing the opportunity to ask farmers to go further than the basic requirements on an informal basis where they can demonstrate best practice.

But there are specific circumstances for which they are not suitable:

- If 100% compliance is required to meet existing regulations or targets.
- If specific actions from participants are required with limited flexibility on how requirements may be met.

Five key principles need to be considered for future partnership approaches:

- **Flexibility:** of delivery methods and of choice for participants over how and to what degree they participate.
- **Realistic expectations:** a partnership approach will not get 100% of farmers to participate, and those who do participate will not do so 100% of the time or to any specified standard, meaning less impact and requiring a longer timescale to deliver than regulatory or incentivised approaches.
- **Shared goals, simple asks:** partnership approaches require a common set of objectives, clear identification of motivation and actions to undertake that are simple to understand and deliver.
- **Voluntary:** enforcement and punitive measures are out of scope for voluntary approaches, as they will be a barrier for uptake, although some element of baseline setting, targets, monitoring and evaluation are usually required.

- **Industry-led:** uptake and changing attitudes requires trusted organisations to deliver messages and take responsibility, but there is still a role for government as a partner.

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1. Introduction

This report supports conclusions within the Review of Advice, Incentives and Partnership Approaches. Drawing on existing evidence and the insights and experience of stakeholders, this review responds to the Natural Environment White Paper commitment 18:

We will use the review in 2012 of the Campaign for the Farmed Environment and the Greenhouse Gas Action Plan, as well as the evidence from elsewhere such as on pesticides or voluntary action under the Water Framework Directive, to assess more generally the effectiveness of this kind of voluntary industry-wide approach.

Rather than just a summary of evidence, this review has sought to develop outputs that should have a practical function in terms of strengthening the effectiveness of partnership working as well as discussing some of the implications for policy delivery (i.e. when partnership approaches should be considered and their role complementing other policy interventions). There is a separate annex setting out the key principles for both policy-makers and external organisations who may be considering how to initiate new, or strengthen existing, voluntary approaches through industry-led partnerships.

This summary review, drawing on a range of sources and published evidence, has sought to bring together high level conclusions rather than replicate detailed evidence collated or published elsewhere. The NEWP recommendation highlights that two high profile industry-led initiatives have had detailed reviews in 2012. The Campaign for the Farmed Environment, after three years of delivery, was subject to an assessment of progress towards meeting targets and also an external evaluation of the partnership. A formal review of the Greenhouse Gas Action Plan, towards meeting the key greenhouse gas reduction target, was also undertaken using a range of data sources.

In accordance with the recommendation, evidence was also reviewed covering other industry-led initiatives such as the Voluntary Initiative (covering pesticide stewardship) and Tried & Tested nutrient management. Additionally, partnership working is a key aspect of Catchment Sensitive Farming (one project to help meet the requirements under the Water Framework Directive) and the partnerships aspect was also included (drawing on the detailed monitoring and evaluation). Short case studies on each of these are included within this document. Whilst there is a wealth of evidence, there were limited clear conclusions on the effectiveness i.e. attributing the success of individual initiatives to actual environmental outcomes. A wider review of literature was also examined to place voluntary action within farming into a wider context and whilst many principles are common to different industry sectors, there were some elements that were more unique for farming. These issues of measuring effectiveness and the definitional aspects of voluntary action and partnership working are discussed in the next section.

This review is not a statement of policy but highlights key issues that have arisen in assessing partnership approaches and voluntary action. A fully referenced summary

of existing evidence sources will be published subsequently on Defra's evidence pages.

2. Scope of the review

Categorising initiatives as 'voluntary' reduces the emphasis that all are action-oriented, driven by targets and linked to a wider regulatory framework with visible sanctions. How these approaches are voluntary is through a consensual approach to working together in partnership. This review focuses primarily on partnership approaches i.e. industry bodies (often working with environmental organisations and frequently supported by government) working together towards common objectives with a positive environmental (as well as farm business) outcome.

As a general principle, most non legislative instruments operate on a voluntary basis i.e. accessing support payments or incentives for agri-environment schemes. A distinction is also made between voluntary agreements and voluntary approaches with the focus on industry-wide approaches rather than specific negotiated agreements.

Voluntary agreements

Voluntary agreements (often involving some incentive) operate at the individual business unit e.g. farm-level, and are a formal commitment to undertake some management action e.g. for any given land area. These can be negotiated on an individual basis at a farm level or operate at a national scheme level, where common standards (including payment rates) are applied.

An example could be catchment management schemes that work in partnership with water companies to address the issues which can influence water quality and quantity across entire catchments. The key objective of these schemes is to improve water quality in river catchments in order to reduce water treatment costs. Private water companies take the leadership, working in partnership with local farmers, landowners, catchment management consultants and environmental bodies, agencies and other stakeholders. The agreements work on the principle that it is more cost effective to reduce pollutants (frequently agricultural) and improve water quality at the source in 'at risk' catchments, compared to cost of water treatment. This has incentivised private water companies to financially contribute to the catchment management and influence changes in agricultural land use and practice to reduce the levels of nitrate and pesticide entering the ground and surface water environments. It can be a partnership approach, where water and farming industries can work together to achieve individual business objectives, and has been termed Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES). PES generally involves a voluntary transaction where an environmental service (or a land use change to secure that service) is 'bought' by a service buyer (e.g. water company) from a service provider (e.g. farmer) to deliver specific environmental outcomes. These 'markets' can be managed independently of the government but the potential for high transaction costs means there is often a role for intermediaries (such as government bodies and / or rivers trust). In England, some water companies have invested in agricultural projects.

Voluntary approaches

This review focuses on voluntary approaches that are negotiated and agreed at the organisational level (mainly between industry and with public bodies) but are dependent on individual industry members undertaking actions towards the environment (over and above existing regulatory requirements). These actions can be informal or incentivised in some way but those organisations negotiating or leading have variable levels of influence over uptake from individual members e.g. farmers. Categorising as voluntary recognises the willingness of organisations and their members to come together to address a common cause. However the word voluntary can hide some important issues around regulatory 'backstops' or that participation can often be expected rather than completely voluntary. Whilst the voluntary aspect is a factor in terms of range of options available, a key premise of this work is to recognise that most voluntary approaches are industry-led and operate at a partnership level. This review also includes a government-led national partnership (Catchment Sensitive Farming) that operates at different levels (national and local) and working closely, and on the basis of equal partners, with industry and led at local levels by other partners.

This review recognises the heterogeneity across approaches and initiatives and seeks to establish consistency in terminology that explores the key characteristics (and differences) of partnership approaches operating at national and local levels. Although there are important distinctions between the different operating arrangements, when discussed generically, partnership approaches will be used.

Voluntary approaches that are industry-led but supply chain focussed i.e. Red Tractor and other assurance schemes (e.g. LEAF), although contributing to environmental outcomes, are not part of this review (as these are primarily setting mandatory standards) but can be regarded as **voluntary codes**.

Industry-led partnerships

Industry-led partnerships constitute the majority of the initiatives reviewed. Industry includes both national farming organisations e.g. National Farmers Union and Country Land and Business Association and also advisor organisations e.g. Agricultural Industries Confederation and Crop Protection Association (for a full list of partners see the relevant websites in the case studies). Leadership includes outlining the proposition, establishing the partnership, making the commitment (e.g. targets), setting the direction and also some or all of the funding. This funding includes actual (e.g. national co-ordinators) and in-kind funding (e.g. farmer and advisor time). The partnership can be industry only but also include a wider set of interests. In some cases, within industry-led partnerships, the leadership responsibilities can be shared and encompasses a broad cross-section of partners including farming-focussed environmental groups (who drive delivery of some aspects) such as Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

3. Measuring effectiveness

The effectiveness of voluntary approaches can be evaluated on many levels, including achievement of agreed targets and desired outcomes. However, the use of the term in the NEWP recommendation “*to assess more generally the effectiveness of this kind of voluntary industry-wide approach*” implies a more holistic understanding as to the value of voluntary approaches. This can include, for example, developing partnerships and relationships across stakeholder groups, between different stakeholders (including with government) and in terms of the longer-term influences on farmer attitudes and behaviour.

Attributing success

A key conclusion from this review is that attributing the change or outcome delivered by voluntary approaches (which would not have occurred in their absence) is difficult. Across all the case studies, assessing the evidence for this review has been challenging in terms of linking practices or outcomes with specific actions resulting from partnership approaches. As a consequence, there is no comparative assessment of effectiveness either across initiatives or in comparison with other forms of government intervention i.e. regulations or incentives. All initiatives are linked to an existing set of regulations or incentives and isolating the impact specifically of the voluntary action is difficult. The Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE), for example, had formal targets explicitly linked to Environmental Stewardship (where payments are available) and the evidence is not conclusive as to how many of the target options achieved were as a direct result of the CFE, especially as a government-funded advice programme was linked to ES.

Rather than attempt to isolate the effect of the ‘voluntary action’, it is more appropriate to assess how the partnership approach complements and adds value to the existing set of advice, incentives and regulations. Consistently, from the case studies, and other published literature, it is noted that other factors can be more influential in determining outcomes. However this should not detract for the fact that partnership approaches are successful in strengthening existing interventions and creating the right conditions for improvement (both increasing speed of uptake and fostering norms of best practice).

Measuring success

In addition to the difficulty in attributing impact, any actual impacts are hard to measure and harder still to assign a monetary value. The ‘true’ measure of effectiveness is the impact on the actual environmental benefit i.e. improved water quality, more farmland birds, reduced emissions of greenhouse gases. However, all evidence highlighted the difficulty in measuring these outcomes as they can be influenced by a range of factors not under the control of the initiative i.e. seasonal variability in weather. A barrier to understanding actual environmental outcomes are the costs associated with the direct measurement of outcomes, which for the examples cited above, even if attribution of benefits was possible, would mean expensive monitoring or modelling.

Despite the acknowledged difficulties of measuring outcomes (within the detailed CSF evidence reports or from the independent scientific chairman of the CFE Evidence and Monitoring Group), all initiatives set some form of measurable performance measures or targets. These are generally what could be described as implementation performance or management targets, i.e. numbers of events, training provided, toolkits accessed, accredited advisors or users etc, and provide an indication of how voluntary action is being encouraged. These act primarily on awareness-raising and skills provision but are still important pre-cursors for outcomes i.e. a trained sprayer operator is more likely to know what is best practice for the environment so is more likely to apply without damage. More importantly, a number of initiatives also have intermediate action-based targets such as uptake of voluntary measures (e.g. area of land adopting a certain management practice) and this is more likely to directly link to environmental outcomes. However, where voluntary approaches differ is that there is no compulsion (e.g. absence of compliance checking) to adopt all the required management prescriptions to maximise benefits so quality of provision may vary.

Target-setting and therefore clarity on what are the key measures of effectiveness or success varies across the initiatives. These range from a single over-arching long-term target, through a more flexible set and to one where formal targets were not required for success. In this respect, initiatives were flexible in how they approached formal target-setting, but a common feature was that all utilised a range of evidence to indicate success whether this was existing published data, e.g. fertiliser use or nutrient management practices, or bespoke surveys on specific attitudes and practices. This suggests that whilst measurement and attribution of effectiveness is difficult, there was a recognition by partners that monitoring delivery was critical to the success of the partnership and provided a visible indication of progress and helped with continuous improvement.

The difficulty in monitoring, and as a consequence difficulty in judging successful progress, was compounded in a couple of examples by an ambiguity in establishing a baseline which can either be open to interpretation as to the level of reliability and the possibility of being contested as to the robustness by one or more partner.

For all initiatives, a measure of effectiveness, and also a key determinant of success, was the nature of the partnership. The elements contributing to a successful partnership approach are explored in later sections but it is also critical to formally recognise the benefits of good partnership working. These benefits undoubtedly contribute to environmental outcomes through establishing a focus, common purpose, consistency of messaging, sharing of resources, working through existing networks and through trusted intermediaries. Partnership approaches have more subtle costs and benefits where it is not the financial inputs to an approach that is most important but time and commitment and willingness to share in delivering outcomes that benefit multiple objectives e.g. more efficient farm practices that result in cost savings and with better environmental impacts. The basis of partnership working is jointly contributing to the initiative and the key inputs are industry leadership or commitment, joint working, responsibility-sharing and joined-up messaging. All the partnership approaches recognise the intangible value from partnership working including consensus-building and joint purpose at the national level to improved local engagement, co-ordination and participation. Some of the

influence on farm practices can be measured but shaping and embedding longer-term attitudinal and behavioural changes that are more readily sustained are seen as core aims. These outputs should not be under-valued but a mark of success has been that once established, good practice is more really embedded e.g. within assurance schemes and even with the removal of the original external driver i.e. threat of regulation, the partners see benefits in expanding beyond the original remit. A significant investment in time and actual resources by partner organisations highlights the benefits to them of working in partnership to address environmental issues.

Realistic expectations of success

When judging effectiveness, voluntary approaches need to be assessed in context with a recognition that change and impact is more long-term. It relies on a more complex set of interactions where there is a choice and so any success will be much more incremental. Evidence from partnerships over the relatively short-term suggests that change is happening but a measure of effectiveness is whether the pace of change is enough to meet the desired outcomes. This cannot necessarily be judged over the course of just two or three years, for example, especially with a consideration of those factors mentioned above such as year-to-year fluctuations due to external influences and also imprecise targets and baselines. With a longer-term target e.g. for the GHGAP, it is easier to conclude (as the 2012 Review suggested) that the industry-led partnership approach, together with existing regulations and incentives, is on track to deliver.

It is over-ambitious to assume that partnership approaches will be as effective as regulations in ensuring 100% adoption or compliance or have levels of uptake similar to existing incentives schemes e.g. Entry Level Stewardship had a 70% target of land coverage. A key deliverable of partnership approaches is in establishing a willingness to participate and fostering a sense of responsibility but for most (but not all) voluntary action, it is the representative bodies who more readily recognise the benefits on behalf of their members and it takes time for this to translate into motivators for individual farm businesses.

4. What drives voluntary participation

Economic principles suggest that a voluntary approach alone is unlikely to deliver a full level of participation (and uptake of actions) unless there are also benefits to the individual / business. A key role of partnership approaches is demonstrating these benefits (as well as being clear on the costs). Most partnership approaches advocate actions where benefits outweigh costs (either through more efficient use of inputs or through access to incentives) and also actions where the costs outweigh the benefits (for example managing an area of land for wildlife outside formal schemes). Economic theory suggests that (profit-maximising) businesses will only participate if there are private benefits they can realise from it and where these benefits outweigh any costs they might incur by participating. However, few farm businesses see short-term profit as the only driver. Although there are economic motivating factors that encourage participation (such as resource use efficiency), there are also other hidden benefits such as reputational (e.g. earned recognition), to pre-empt additional regulatory burdens (which may bring additional, and uncertain, costs) or reduce transition costs before regulations are brought in.

Across the full range of actions required, all partnership approaches try to stimulate positive motivators or address barriers by engaging farmers, providing guidance and advice and promoting best practice. A key objective is to demonstrate these additional benefits and reduce barriers such as the underestimation of the value of long-term benefits versus short-term costs (both time and money). All farm businesses should adopt measures where benefits to the business are at least equal to the costs of implementing any action i.e. actions that are good for the business (both short-term profitability as well as longer-term sustainability). However the diversity of individual situations (farm type, business model etc) means that provision of the desired outcome will not always have the same costs and benefits, for example an area of land left un-cropped for a tenant farmer will have a direct rental cost compared to an owner-occupier. The diversity of individual farmer motivations is also important where there is variation in the willingness and ability. A segmentation of farmer types suggests that some are more likely to be willing to engage and undertake actions that also benefit the environment. These factors help to explain varying levels of adoption of voluntary measures.

Applying an equal set of environmental targets to every farm is likely to have a range of costs from implementing any action. In comparison, having industry-wide targets can provide flexibility where farms can more readily match their uptake of options to their own business structure and costs. The added flexibility should mean that the total costs of uptake are less and individual preferences can be taken into account. This flexibility is a positive motivation for successful partnership approaches. However, with this flexibility comes risks, the magnitude of impact will vary depending on the nature of the targets or objectives. Where agreements on targets are negotiated at the organisational level and without explicit sanctions, each farm business has not committed on an individual basis and there is an incentive to 'free-ride' and let other farmers make efforts to meet targets and still obtain any benefits without undertaking any measures. Although, a voluntary measure will not deliver

the same amount of 'behaviour change' as regulations (especially where costs are carried by the business and benefits are primarily public i.e. environmental outcomes), the credible threat of regulation could result in a more ambitious targets and higher levels of participation than would otherwise have been the case.

Understanding the drivers of participation will increase the likely effectiveness through design of the delivery and implementation (as well as more stretching targets). For example, if there is no credible threat of regulation, limited financial incentives or opportunities for cost saving then the efficacy of a voluntary approach will be lessened. Without these drivers any partnership would be more reliant on influencing hearts and minds with the challenge of reaching those who are less likely to engage.

Voluntary approaches are likely to be more successful where a majority of potential costs (for not undertaking) and benefits (for undertaking a management action) result from actions undertaken within farm business. This is because partnership approaches can help address behavioural barriers, for example providing advice to enable low and no cost resource efficiency measures. Where the cost of voluntary uptake needs to be met from the farm business but most benefits (e.g. from environmental improvement) are public, there is limited motivation for businesses to adopt and other interventions are more suitable e.g. regulations or incentives). Where there is a significant risk of environmental damage from farm businesses not adopting, then regulations are more suitable. Most voluntary action through partnership approaches complement existing incentives and regulations and so are likely to be successful in adding value through promoting best practice advice to reduce barriers, enabling access to incentives to undertake where there are costs implied and key risks underpinned by a regulatory minimum.

5. Principles for designing partnership approaches

The review of evidence and discussions with stakeholders suggest some principles for designing successful partnership approaches. Despite some differences in the way partnerships operated and the specific governance, there was a common 'check-list' of considerations relevant for thinking about factors determining effectiveness. There was no 'one size fits all' and all the partnerships had some common, and some unique features. In this respect, a 'check-list' to consider or 'principles' to adhere to, rather than standard 'models', are more relevant when thinking about future initiative design.

Types of approaches

There are many different forms of partnership arrangements – no one 'model' fits every situation. Partnerships can be industry-led but can vary as to whether they are industry only or include a wider set of partners i.e. government and environmental organisations. Partnerships can operate at national and / or local scales. There are subtle differences within each approach that relates to levels of responsibility and ownership. Each involves a range of organisations who have come together to address a specific issue in response to pressures or opportunities but the common element is that there is a sense of voluntarily taking responsibility and common ownership of the issue. Participant partners see that there are benefits for their organisation and members and seek to encourage actions (usually from their members or those they seek to influence) to meet the common goal. Partnership approaches are different to industry level voluntary agreements (e.g. codes of conduct) which are often negotiated between two parties. For consistency the term 'partnership approach' is used.

Wider policy and delivery context

Partnership approaches are closely linked to a wider policy and delivery framework where incentives and regulations (or threats of regulation) can be stimuli for action. Partnership approaches are not alternatives to regulation or incentives and work best with those mechanisms and seen in a wider context. Government is committed to a smarter regulatory agenda and partnership approaches can provide a valuable mechanism as a 'bridge' between national policies and on the ground actions and can operate effectively at both national and local levels where they can serve as trusted intermediaries strengthening actions. The impetus towards this agenda is exemplified by the Farming Regulation Task Force in a report entitled: *Striking a balance: reducing burdens; increasing responsibility; earning recognition* that emphasises the need to engage with and trust the industry to deliver. A national partnership approach also enables a two-way discussion of the key priorities, strengthening co-design in policy-making where partners are actively involved in policy development and also help ensure all interventions are successful in meeting shared objectives.

Establishing the partnership

A common driver / shared objective is needed to bring partners together where agreement is needed from the outset as to the rationale (an opportunity or a threat), what they are trying to achieve, and that a partnership approach is the best, or most appropriate way to do it. A partnership approach can evolve over time e.g. could emerge from a collective interest in research about a new issue. A key constituent of the partnership needs to be a level of trust and elements of flexibility and reciprocity – it is unrealistic for each partner to expect to get exactly what they want. Striking the deal between partners needs to be understood i.e. was it a coming together of similar interests or across a broader agenda? Partnerships can bring together a wide range of partners with different and sometimes conflicting interests. This can cause some difficulties, especially around agreeing targets, measuring progress and evaluating success. However, it can also bring those partner organisations together in pursuit of a common goal and there is evidence that the opportunity for collaborative working provides a range of benefits.

Early agreement (and understanding) on the nature of issue the partnership is intended to address will help in setting targets, drawing in partners, planning delivery and assigning responsibilities. For less well understood issues, shared learning and scoping the problem can be built into the initial stages of the initiative. Clarity on the driver(s) for action is important i.e. a push factor (threat of regulation) may require a different approach to a pull factor (shared opportunity).

Clarity is needed on how the approach will work with the wider policy landscape including alternatives if they exist. For partnership approaches to work, instead of regulation, there is general agreement that a credible regulatory threat in the background is required. Voluntary approaches can also provide a transition period before regulations are brought in to help businesses prepare and to reduce transition costs. An approach drawing on existing incentives will be more attractive but neither is a pre-requisite for a partnership approach, providing that there is a strong shared objective. However, if there is no credible threat of regulation and few economic benefits or financial incentives then the efficacy of a voluntary approach will be lessened.

The range of partners should reflect the issue and willingness to take responsibility where there is a balance between inclusion (but decisions take more time) and a more focussed group that is easier for governance, development and decision making, but open to criticism if key interest groups are not represented. In principle, the inclusion of industry, the third sector (e.g. environmental organisations) and government can all add legitimacy. Different partners have different roles and working together creates greater confidence and credibility. Any approach should look to reach out beyond the partners drawing on local approaches and incorporating known interested parties, even local communities at the local level.

Different partners will have different roles and responsibilities, examples include industry – governance and delivery, third sector - technical advice / challenge, government – mediation / monitoring / evaluation. These must be clearly defined with commitments made by all partners and some consistency of those involved being important. A central resource (e.g. co-ordinator) can have a key role and in some circumstances government funding, or a linked existing incentive programme can be catalyst. The involvement of those able to influence action is critical. The inclusion of too many partners at the earliest stages could delay

agreement – some initiatives have started small and then grown with demonstrated success.

Partnership approaches are not an easy alternative and can be time-consuming to agree if done thoroughly and comprehensively (similar to regulatory and other approaches). Investment at the establishment stage is critical to make sure the initial design is right from the outset as poor decisions at this stage can risk major setbacks and loss of credibility later on. Different skills sets are needed e.g. negotiation and consensus-building and there needs to be commitments from all and continuity of staffing can be important.

Agreeing success criteria

It is important to be realistic about expectations about level of influence, impact and timeframes e.g. unlikely to reach 100%, unlikely to get 100% of those reached to participate, unlikely that those who do participate do so 100% of the time or to required standard (regulations and incentives also have varying rates of uptake and quality of delivery but not of the same magnitude especially where there is a backstop of penalties). Engagement and adoption will take longer than regulation or incentives (with the appropriate levels of penalties and rewards). Industry-wide approaches need to plan for an element of ‘free-riding’ as each farm business has not committed on an individual basis and there is an incentive to let others make efforts to meet targets and still obtain the benefits (e.g. reduced levels of regulation) without undertaking any measures.

Setting clear targets and indicators with a direction of travel at the outset helps establish what the partnership is trying to achieve and provides a focus for delivery as well as opportunities for measuring success. Monitoring and evaluation should also be agreed from the outset, together with baselines and counterfactuals (an understanding of what would have happened in the absence of the approach). Any targets should not be set in stone but significant changes can lead to credibility issues. Targets and indicators should be at different levels from farmer engagement (actions of the initiative), through awareness and attitudes (willingness to participate) to uptake of measures (actions of participants) and, where possible environmental outcomes (biodiversity, water quality etc.).

Recognise that a partnership approach cannot control all influences on delivery and there can be a range of external factors affecting outcomes (e.g. market prices, EU regulatory frameworks, unintended consequences).

Success is multi-faceted - the impact on environmental outcomes can be the primary rationale but partnership approaches may have had wider impacts, bringing partners together, improving local delivery infrastructure, raising awareness, stimulating genuine behaviour change based on understanding and acceptance of responsibility.

Delivery – making actions easy to understand and implement

Clarity of purpose and messaging is important to get action among busy recipients (in an often crowded information ‘marketplace’). There needs to be positive, recognisable branding of the initiative with a clear set of priorities and simple asks,

simple messages. Consistency of messaging both within scheme and with associated schemes is important as are simple, repeated and endorsed messages through a variety of channels. A complicated initiative, requiring investment of time to understand what is needed and how to apply on their farm, may be less successful (and perhaps more suited to an alternative intervention).

Flexibility to fit with individual and changing circumstances is needed, where national priorities / targets are clear but can be flexible to allow local tailoring provide choice and local relevance in what actions are undertaken and an ability to adapt to changing situations. Approaches should be periodically 'refreshed' to remain relevant and interesting (something novel appeals to both the farming media and individuals) where the adoption of a 'campaigning' approach with a focus on select key messages at a time can maintain interest. Targeting communication at the right time, in the right way and with the right individuals can promote uptake and approaches need to be flexible to suit the circumstances e.g. different farm types or sizes.

Working with and through others, such as through existing channels, including private sector, adds reach and influence with trusted deliverers and local relevance and helps promote closer working with other initiatives. Offering training and accreditation can engage sector specialists like agronomists and advisers. Using trusted influences e.g. 'farmer champions' to promote, improve and enthuse participants and inform interested non-participants and those hard to reach can deliver greater uptake.

Recognise diversity – generally (as economic theory suggests) voluntary measures will only deliver the desired outcome where private benefits are equal to private costs. The diversity of individual situations needs to be taken into account where some individuals can more readily match their uptake of options to their own business structure and costs. However, short-term profit is not the only driver and there are economic and non-economic motivating factors that encourage participation.

Understand what might motivate people to participate (and not participate) and tailor messages accordingly. Issues to highlight include the 'what's in it for me' in terms of added value, e.g. free advice, assistance with regulatory compliance, access to grants, efficiency savings etc. and also provide clarity on costs/benefits to environment and businesses – including time and opportunity cost/benefits as well as money. Recognise the range of internal motivations of farmers and land managers e.g. most see the environment as intrinsic to their values and farm business but any measure also needs to fit with the farm business and take account of sectoral differences e.g. busy periods vary between enterprises. It is important to recognise that motivations can be different for individuals compared to national organisations e.g. reputational risk is more important for sectors or organisations as a whole, rather than individual farm businesses. There will be some who are 'hard to reach' (and choose to be so) and some with a low willingness to participate e.g. do not believe they should take action. There are also those who may be less able to participate e.g. through access to capital investment or limited possibilities for the farm.

Actively address behavioural barriers - for example voluntary approaches need to be distinct from regulatory enforcement and punitive action. Where there is

uncertainty in terms of benefits, clear advice can be provided (helping to deal with 'status quo bias' e.g. where businesses underestimate the value of long-term benefits versus short-term costs and/or overestimate the risks associated). Repetition and multiple approaches are often required as translating advice into action can take time. Different delivery mechanisms should also be used that are tailored to the particular messages being communicated or farmer being targeted.

Targeting is needed to maximise the effectiveness of interventions either on an area basis (for limited resources) or on specific practices (through messages and engagement) or points of influence (e.g. events). Targeting is needed on those most likely to respond or most needed to respond either to improve uptake from any given engagement or where the benefits from those participating are greatest (either in reducing environmental damage or to deliver the largest environmental improvement).

Monitoring and Evaluation

Consistent monitoring, using a robust baseline, to establish trends and year on year comparisons is needed and where possible use existing methods and arrangements. Monitoring should consist of a range of monitoring data e.g. quantitative measures of impact and outcome as well as more qualitative measures capturing wider benefits of the partnership approach. Outcomes take a long time to have measurable impact and can be difficult to attribute solely to voluntary action (as can be subject to other variables), some combination of final and intermediate targets should be considered. Bespoke monitoring and evaluation can be costly and good practice suggest that up to 5% of time/cost of a scheme should be spent on monitoring. Participants can be involved in monitoring as this can help embed understanding of why the activities are needed and make any progress more 'real' but this should not be the only form of assessment. Monitoring should also be used to help with continuous improvement of delivery mechanisms.

Evaluation needs to involve all partners and be fully transparent and as well as commentary on achievement of targets, narrative should cover other aspects of what worked and why and form part of continuous learning and improvement.

i. Case study: Greenhouse Gas Action Plan

Background

In 2011, the industry partnership published the Greenhouse Gas Action Plan (GHGAP), a voluntary approach with an ambition to: *Reduce annual GHG emissions from English agricultural production by 3 MtCO₂e by the third carbon budget period (2018 – 2022), compared to a 2007 baseline* so meeting the Government's target. The GHGAP is an industry-led, industry-only initiative consisting of 14 organisations including advisor organisations, farming bodies and levy boards (Defra is not a partner but is actively supporting through science investment). The focus of the industry's delivery plan is to promote resource use efficiency and hence business efficiency to reduce GHG emissions without impacting on farmer's other environmental priorities. The Plan therefore complements existing incentives and regulations delivering protection of water resources, soils and biodiversity. The objectives set out by the industry partnership in the GHGAP seek to improve awareness of farm practices that will both reduce GHG emissions and improve business efficiency. As well as promoting wider uptake of resource efficient practices e.g. nutrient management, the product roadmaps that have been developed by the dairy, beef and sheep, pig and cereals and oilseeds sectors, set out the potential for farm businesses to reduce emissions.

Evidence of Effectiveness of the Partnership approach

The review published in November 2012 uses a range of statistical and modelled data to assess the range of policy interventions (including the GHGAP but also regulations and incentives) to ascertain progress to reach the target. Assessing the effectiveness of the GHGAP as a single intervention was not attempted and instead the analysis drew conclusions based on the package of measures in place. The Review also recognises that the choices made by farmers are influenced by a wide variety of internal and external factors and government policies are just one of many influences. The Review concluded that the industry was on track to meet the target and existing policies (including Cross-Compliance, Nitrate Vulnerable Zones etc) encourage farmers to adopt resource efficient practices (which also provide a range of public goods including GHG emission reductions). The GHGAP has effectively contributed towards these measures by identifying the barriers to uptake and developing approaches to accelerate the adoption of mitigation methods. The Review acknowledged the progress to date, including bringing together the partners to focus on the challenge of reducing GHG emissions from agriculture, but also highlighted a continued need for leadership, innovation and creativity in driving forward actions to meet the challenge provided by the GHGAP.

For more details, list of partners and resources for farmers and advisors see the GHGAP pages of the partner websites (e.g. NFU, AIC, AHDB).

The 2012 Review of Progress in Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions from English Agriculture, November 2012 (including a supplementary chapter on Industry Action) is published on the Defra webpages.

ii. Case study: Campaign for the Farmed Environment

Background

The first phase of Campaign for the Farmed Environment (CFE) was launched in November 2009 with targets assessed at the end of December 2012. It was established as an industry-led alternative to regulation with the aim to retain the environmental benefits provided by set-aside. The CFE had a number of targets to benefit farmland biodiversity and resource protection including retention of un-cropped land, improvement of management for biodiversity and enhanced Environmental Stewardship option uptake. The CFE is an industry-led partnership consisting of a range of organisations including farming bodies, advisor organisations and conservation groups (Defra is a funding partner).

Evidence of Effectiveness of the Partnership approach

Formal targets were set in order to assess the Campaign's environmental performance and a programme of monitoring and evaluation provided a wider assessment of the Campaign. All partners acknowledge there has been mixed success in meeting the land management targets but agree there is evidence of the positive impact of the Campaign. The key measure of the area of un-cropped land was not achieved (and decreased from the baseline) but this can be explained by other external factors such as higher commodity prices. The uptake of key Entry Level Stewardship options has increased but the target was not met, however the uptake of Higher Level Stewardship options significantly exceeded the target. Although the target relating to land managed voluntarily towards environmental objectives has been met, the field surveys suggested that a sizeable proportion of land with voluntary measures will not have maximised environmental benefits. There has been a high level of awareness of, and support for, the aims and approach of the Campaign but this has not translated into widespread uptake of the desired measures. Attributing success directly to the Campaign has been difficult and there was some ambiguity around the setting of targets, but the local delivery approach is seen by partners to be effective. Evidence suggests there was a significant difference between target and non-target counties in the uptake of both un-cropped land and managed voluntary measures. The partnership brought together a diverse set of interests and some success can be seen by all original partners agreeing to a second phase. An independent evaluation concluded that the most widely perceived benefits were demonstrated through the collaborative approach (bringing together partners towards shared objectives) local engagement, participation and delivery (local liaison groups, locally tailored messaging etc). Wider industry support (including through the media, agronomists and professional farm advisers) and behavioural change i.e. shaping social norms within the industry towards positive environmental management were also seen as important outcomes resulting from partnership working.

For more details, list of partners and resources for farmers and advisors see the CFE website: <http://www.cfeonline.org.uk/> .

An evidence summary for CFE is published on Defra farming statistics webpages.

iii. Case study: The Voluntary Initiative

Background

The Voluntary Initiative (VI) is an industry-led UK-wide programme promoting responsible pesticide use. It was introduced in 2001 by the farming and crop protection industry as an alternative to a pesticide tax, proposed by Government and it delivers a range of measures designed to reduce the impact of pesticides on the environment. Its main focus has been to improve biodiversity and water quality as well as improve practices of farmer and sprayer operators through participation in training and testing schemes supported by farm and assurance. Promotion of accreditation and best practice is considered a key factor for reducing environmental impact such as through Crop Protection Management Plans (CPMPs), the National Register of Sprayer Operators (NRoSO) and the National Sprayer Testing Scheme (NSTS). A commitment to biodiversity and resource protection is exemplified through the establishment of sub-groups, awareness raising and the promotion of good practice (or avoiding bad practice) and undertaking habitat management through the provision of training and advice to agronomists and others.

Evidence of Effectiveness of the Partnership approach

The VI has been delivering for more than 10 years. A measure of success, in meeting a range of objectives, is demonstrated by the numbers of interested partners. Although the proposal and funding comes from core sponsors in the agricultural industry, the Steering Group has always included government bodies and environmental groups. A further indication of effectiveness, as a proactive voluntary approach, is that a number of the recommended actions (e.g. NRoSO membership and NSTS testing) have been 'mainstreamed' within assurance schemes. Clear evidence is available on accreditation where the vast majority of the UK sprayed arable area is covered by the NSTS and NRoSO and around half of advisors hold the BASIS Biodiversity and Environmental Training for Advisors (BETA) Certificate. Scheme membership is an indicator of success, and goes some way to suggest an impact on practices. In general, the VI has met its key targets, practice has improved and actual environmental outcomes achieved (i.e. reductions of levels of indicator pesticides in pilot catchments promoting VI measures). However outcomes can be influenced by a range of factors (including Environmental Stewardship, Cross-compliance and assurance schemes) and it is difficult to attribute actual changed practice or outcome to VI (additionally complicated by the difficulty in monitoring, including variability between years and the timescales required before water quality and biodiversity outcomes are visible).. As the VI consistently meets or exceeds the vast majority of its targets, the partnership has matured into a more sustainable model where it successfully goes beyond the original remit and is actively supported by industry sponsors.

For more details, list of partners and resources for farmers and advisors see the Voluntary Initiative website: <http://www.voluntaryinitiative.org.uk/>

iv. Case study: Tried & Tested

Background

Launched in March 2009 by five farming and advisory bodies, and working in partnership with Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF), the aims are to improve nutrient management planning through a Tried & Tested toolkit. This was targeted primarily at farmers new to planning for nutrient management. The toolkit includes promoting a practical way to plan and record nutrient use, for example through the Tried & Tested paper-based nutrient management plan, web-based advice and case studies. The project has also enabled access to an on-line search for FACTS Qualified Advisers and establishment of a Proficiency Testing Scheme for UK soil laboratories, which produce soil analysis status reports annually. As well as helping farmers meet regulatory requirements (e.g. Water Framework Directive), through better nutrient management to reduce diffuse water pollution, there are also opportunities to optimise crop production and make cost savings. The partnership was created for the industry by the industry (farming bodies and advisers) and with the Catchment Sensitive Farming project. Important to the success of Tried & Tested is the working relationship between the partners (for example training to farmers on nutrient management is provided through CSF) and supporting organisations, such as the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, that has helped deliver the key messages developed by the initiative.

Evidence of Effectiveness of the Partnership approach

Tried & Tested was effective in meeting the project ambitions/targets set e.g. in terms of distribution of copies of the Tried & Tested Nutrient Management Plan which were distributed at events, workshops and sent out to farmers. However, measuring the effectiveness of delivering environmental outcomes is harder to judge. The Tried & Tested Plan is one of a number of nutrient management planning tools and complements other guidance, regulations and incentives. The Tried & Tested approach should however be assessed more specifically for its contribution to helping a section of farmers not previously adopting best practice to make improvements. In this respect, the 15% of farmers reporting to use the Tried & Tested Plan are likely to be using a nutrient management planning tool for the first time. Evidence suggests that overall nutrient management is improving, although changing established practices through communication and information provision takes time. It is acknowledged that most farmers and advisers recognise the need to make best use of nutrients (both as inputs and outputs e.g. livestock manures and slurries) but this is always not translated fully into practice. This gap between awareness and action is being addressed through working with advisers and trusted intermediaries. Providing tools and awareness-raising through industry support is important for influencing best practice amongst farmers and complements existing interventions to encourage high quality nutrient management e.g. Nitrate Vulnerable Zones regulations and incentives available through Catchment Sensitive Farming.

For more details, list of partners and resources for farmers and advisors see the Tried and Tested website: <http://www.nutrientmanagement.org/>

v. Case study: Partnership Working within Catchment Sensitive Farming

Background

National and local catchment partnerships, bringing together resources, expertise and influence, make advice on reducing diffuse water pollution from agriculture more widely available to farmers and provide consistent messaging at national and local levels. National strategic partnerships link with other specific initiatives involved with catchment management or a relevant land management area (such as soils) to jointly provide advice and events to farmers and advisors. These include the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board; Professional Nutrient Management Group ('Tried & Tested' discussed separately); the Rivers Trust and the Voluntary Initiative. Partnership working is key in priority catchments where Catchment Steering Groups (including CSF officers) bring together farmers and other stakeholders, such as farming organisations, advisor groups and conservation bodies to shape advice delivery. Catchment Partnerships have been established in a limited number of further catchments where local partners (already with presence and networks) lead delivery, stimulate farmer action, facilitate a sharing of resources and demonstrates a joint commitment to tackling water quality issues. Catchment partnerships are smaller-scale and include between one and three partners such as water companies, local authorities and local wildlife / landscape groups.

Evidence of Effectiveness of the Partnership approach

There is detailed monitoring and evaluation evidence on the CSF, including partnership approaches. Effective partnership working relies on all stakeholders being involved constructively, this includes committed farmers who help promote and engage effectively with other local farmers. Generally the role and contribution of partners within catchment partnerships has been positive and targets have been exceeded. Catchment partnerships have enabled a high level of engagement with farmers, compared with priority catchments, by using existing relationships to build trust and rapport. While there are differences in the delivery between the partnership models, working with stakeholders in partnership has enabled CSF to extend its reach beyond the priority catchments and is seen, by all, as important to strengthening CSF delivery and meeting shared objectives of partners (but there is risk of creating a broader agenda). The partnerships complement existing regulations and incentives so attributing outcome success is difficult and it is noted that partnerships are more successful through a direct link with capital grants and promotion of Environmental Stewardship. Voluntary action was not expected to independently deliver everything necessary to reduce diffuse water pollution from agriculture (and there are limitations e.g. engaging only those who are willing or able to engage), however the evidence suggests many positives of the CSF delivery model including building extensive partnerships at national and local levels. Voluntary action is demonstrated by business investment and uptake of

management actions that has accelerated changes that might be expected, over a longer period, through general trends towards improved farm practice.

For more details, lists of partners and resources (including evidence) see the Catchment Sensitive Farming pages on the Natural England webpages.