

RSPB response to Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee Inquiry – Farming in the Uplands

The issues facing farmers in the uplands

1. Summary

- England's uplands provide society with a range of vital goods and services
- Stewardship of key upland goods and services is vested in the hands of a relatively small number of land managers who are often reliant on public support to sustain their businesses
- Future solutions must seek to secure the range of environmental goods and services delivered in the uplands and to adequately support land managers where the market fails to do so
- We identify a need for inspired leadership to help nurture change, to better target current support measures, to enable the development of new markets and to encourage/support place-based partnerships that seek to deliver agreed environmental and socio-economic outcomes

2. The English uplands are special

England's uplands are widely regarded for their wildlife, beauty and sense of place. Upland landscapes provide society with a range of vital goods and services including drinking water, climate regulation (e.g. carbon stored in deep peat soils), access & recreation, food, fibre and timber production. Today, the uplands comprise a significant proportion of the last remaining areas of semi-natural habitat (e.g. hay meadow, blanket bog, dwarf shrub heath, oak/ash woods) in England. The uplands contain 53% (by area) of England's network of SSSI's with over 70% protected as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. These same places support features of historic and cultural interest and an outstanding array of habitats and species. A number of upland birds are rare and/or are declining and are afforded special conservation measures as UK BAP species and/or under the EC Birds Directive (e.g. black grouse, curlew, ring ouzel and twite). In stark contrast to their designation as Less Favoured Area, our uplands must surely be considered in a more positive light.

3. Upland farming

Livestock farming contributes to the maintenance of the upland landscape and its mosaic of semi-natural habitats and species. Despite this, upland farmers are struggling to maintain appropriate livestock systems. Since de-coupling of support payments, there has been an 11% decline in the number of suckler cows in the uplands, potentially impacting on future land management. Recent studies confirm that upland farming is heavily dependent on support payments¹ and is still adjusting to the Single Payment Scheme. The rationalisation of payments into the Single Farm Payment has had a significant impact. In the SW uplands, where support payments are 40% less since the introduction of the Single Farm Payment, farmers are beginning to turn their backs on the moorland and are increasing production through shifting to crossbred systems on their in-by land potentially to the detriment of the numerous public benefits associated with the moorland. Here, as elsewhere, the provision of upland goods and services is vested in the hands of a few, comprising public and private landowners and others with a wide range of management rights, including common rights. Common land comprises almost 20% of the English uplands. Whilst some landowner/managers are responsible for providing important marketable services (e.g. provision of drinking water), others are largely privately financed (e.g. game managers) or, in the case of some hill farmers, overly reliant on public support to sustain their business. Concern for the future has triggered upland inquiries in Scotland², Wales³ and England⁴. Future solutions must seek to secure the range of environmental goods and services delivered in the uplands and to adequately support land managers where the market fails to do so.

4. RSPB in the uplands

The RSPB has a significant interest in the uplands, both as a land manager and through our involvement in a number of innovative projects that seek to develop a more sustainable approach to how we use the uplands (e.g. Sustainable Catchment and Management Programme). We work with a range of land managers, especially farmers, to achieve shared objectives on our estate and on land where we have a vested interest (e.g. through provision of advice).

5. Facilitating and supporting change in the uplands

The hill farming community are increasingly aware of their role as stewards of the upland landscape and the associated goods and services that their management helps secure. Resourcing issues are at the heart of doing more for biodiversity and the natural environment in the uplands. We believe

there is a more imaginative range of social and funding resources, including existing public spending like agri-environment schemes that can be unlocked and better used.

6. We identify a need for a package of measures and approaches to secure the full range of goods and services in the face of major change. We suggest three strands of activity could guide a useful response to the current situation:

- *Enhance delivery* – improve value for money through better targeting of current support
- *Signal and manage change* – drive the need/direction of change through positive incentives and through better public communications
- *Leadership* – provide inspired leadership across all relevant sectors to ensure that future land use and management secures economically viable outcomes that sustain and deliver key goods and services and better value for public money

7. Securing a better deal for upland land managers

- i. **What do we want from the uplands?** We need a clear statement from Government to describe the contemporary role of the English uplands. This needs to set out what the uplands are for, highlight the range of goods and services that the uplands deliver for society, and clarify the importance of securing a viable future for those parts of the upland community that provide the vast bulk of these public benefits.
- ii. **Towards a more sustainable upland future - public money for public goods.** We identify a need to secure a fairer deal for those land managers providing key goods and services in the uplands, through a partial re-distribution of Single Farm Payments (Pillar 1 support) to favour those delivering most in terms of goods and services. To explore the use of other opportunities (e.g. Article 68/69, High Nature Value Farming Systems) and develop new markets to further enhance the opportunity to support delivery of key goods and services with no current market value. We identify a need for further CAP reform to support sustainable land use and better value for public money through further redistribution of funds from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2 and to target this support more directly at delivery of environmental goods and services. The reform of the Hill Farm Allowance to an Upland Entry Level Scheme (UELS) is a positive step.

iii. **Developing a place-based and joined-up approach to delivery.** We identify a need to nurture innovative and place-based partnerships (e.g. Dartmoor Farming Futures, Lakes Partnership) to drive and enhance delivery of nationally agreed environmental and socio-economic outcomes. Stronger collaboration between Natural England, National Parks/AONBs and the land management community to develop experience and evidence-based approaches to delivery is also essential. Where appropriate, place-based delivery arrangements might include the public, private and third sectors.

8. References:

1. Defra Agricultural Change and Environment Observatory. 2010. Farming in the English Uplands
2. Royal Society of Edinburgh. 2008. Committee of Inquiry into the Future of Scotland's Hill and Islands
3. National Assembly for Wales Rural Development Sub-Committee. 2010. Future of the Uplands
4. Commission for Rural Communities. 2010. Gigh ground, high potential – a future for England's upland communities