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Dear Dave

I wrote to you and others above, last September regarding practical steps to strengthen the working relationships between upland graziers, Natural England and other environmental organisations. I specifically asked for your views on having a national Upland Grazing Forum. Following various conversations around the country, with Defra, and through the launch of the Government's upland policy, I am writing to update you on progress.

Many thanks for kindly replying and giving me your views. Two main and universal messages stand out from a range of really helpful and insightful responses. First, the focus of effort to engage and improve joint working should be at an appropriate local level. Secondly that a particular focus for local liaison needs to be on how we agree approaches to grazing in agri-environment agreements, particularly in terms of setting stocking levels. I will say a bit more about your comments and about progress with both points since I received your views.

Improving local engagement, to help foster better joint working and find joint solutions to issues, was seen as being more important than having a national forum. Many of you pointed out that the variation in grazing practices and hill farming businesses around the country is significant, and so issues of how upland grazing fits with delivering specific environmental objectives, also varies around the country. Therefore each upland area will need to work out local ways of tailoring upland grazing businesses to achieve environmental outcomes through Environmental Stewardship schemes.

There are already established hill farming partnership groups, and we would like to utilise these where possible to determine the significant local issues to address and to focus on these. This has already begun: for example, I am aware that we have been involved with the South West Upland Federation meetings in this way, and in November 2010 the first meeting of the Cumbria Grazing Forum was held.

Your comments suggest that committing scarce resources to a national forum should be a lower priority, and so I am proposing to park that idea for now, as

we focus on engagement with local groups. We can of course re-consider this approach in the future.

More generally on grazing levels and agri-environment schemes, since last September I have met with groups in Cumbria, the Peak District, and in the South West, that included some of you. There have also been discussions with Defra on this issue, in response to concerns raised by the sector on specific HLS and UELS cases.

In late 2010 we worked with Will Cockbain (NFU) and others to address concerns over UELS on SSSI land and the possibility of needing stocking limits on some UELS agreements where there was a potential risk to the condition of the SSSI. The result was clearer guidance to Natural England's local advisers for the rare cases when such a condition is needed, including the need to fully discuss this with the farmer(s) affected first.

For HLS, the recent dialogue over stocking levels, commoners concerns, ESAs coming to an end, and the impacts of all these on hill farming businesses, means that we now have a much clearer idea of the concerns and risks. So we have been considering what the priorities are for future work and our discussions with you and others suggest that in 2011-12 we should focus on:

- Improving local joint working over grazing and agri-environment agreements in Cumbria and the South West through existing groups
- Improving joint working in at least 2 other local upland areas, through existing groups or setting up new groups in partnership as appropriate to the area
- Sharing and developing knowledge, via the local groups above -
  - being more transparent about how we calculate stocking levels in HLS agreements – for example, David Martin, our Upland Grazing Senior Specialist, will be at the next Cumbria Grazing Forum for a discussion on this
  - understanding the impacts of AE agreements and stocking changes on hill farming businesses and on day-to-day sheep farming practice – for example, the Foundation for Common Land has proposed 2 awareness events to help our advisers better understand local farming practice and how that interacts with delivering the environmental outcomes of HLS agreements
- Developing joint locally tailored approaches to grazing within agri-environment schemes, again via the local groups. For example, a shared 'working arrangements' protocol is being developed in Cumbria following discussions during my visit in early February.

I hope you agree this is a realistic way forward for the coming year.

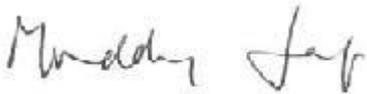
You will be aware that from April 2011 Natural England will be re-organised into a national structure. I am determined to ensure that the momentum of the last six months on upland grazing does not falter, and that our new structure will help us to work jointly with you.

I am very pleased to say that as part of my new role, as Landscape and Biodiversity Director, I will continue to lead on upland work across Natural England. To help us work together Dan Hunt will continue to co-ordinate our work with you on upland grazing nationally, linking with our staff in other national and local delivery teams as necessary.

I would welcome your comments on our proposed priorities above and whether from your perspective we have captured the key actions? Please can you send any reply to both Dan and I.

Many thanks for your help and input over the past few months, and I look forward to working with you in 2011.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maddy Jago". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Maddy Jago  
Director, Landscape, Biodiversity and the Uplands