

Agricultural Waste Stakeholder Forum – Role of the Group 2008

Scope

To identify the achievements of the group and ascertain its' future role.

Background

- The forum as it currently exists was formed in 2006, largely to foster engagement between Regional Partners, the NFU and the EA with regards to changes in legislation relating to agricultural waste (which were previously largely unregulated). Ways in which the group could assist rural communities in meeting, understanding and complying with such changes provided a focal point.
- The Regional Waste Strategy (RWS) published in 2006 also covered a “Regional Waste Management Stakeholders Forum” with a remit to “ensure that the opportunities that the strategy presents are delivered into rural areas effectively and to develop a delivery programme”
- The group sits as part of the wider Land Management Group (LMG) which is primarily controlled by GOEM. The LMG, also chaired by Andy Guy covers a broader range of rural issues to cover wider environmental concerns and biodiversity.

Key achievement

- The key achievement of the group has been to organise and host the Farm Waste Event at Newark Showground in 2006. The event had the huge draw of EA expertise available on the day to help farmer's complete Waste Management Licence exemption forms, a key part of the compliance process with respect to changes in legislation as mentioned.

Issues for consideration

The changing Regional landscape

- In July 2007 the newly formed Gordon Brown administration published the Sub-National Review of Regional Governance (SNR). The main aspects of the document include:

1. Regional Assemblies in current form and function will not continue
 2. Regional Development Agencies to be responsible for integrated regional strategy setting out economic, environmental & social objectives
 3. Regional Development Agencies to be the Regional Planning Body
 4. Enhanced parliamentary scrutiny of regional institutions
 5. New duty on local authorities to assess economic challenges facing their areas and greater role for local authorities in economic development
 6. Local authority leaders to be given stronger scrutiny role over RDAs
- As a consequence of SNR the Regional Assembly has a reduced budget in which to carry out its' functions until final winding up in 2010.

The Agricultural Waste Agenda moving forward

- The Assembly has to manage budgetary reductions whilst maintaining its core business throughout the transitional SNR period; this is a tricky balance to strike. As part of the review of functions the Assembly feels it can no longer actively support the Agricultural Waste Group beyond its current commitment in February 2008.

Apart from the challenges placed on EMRA through SNR, the Assembly believes that the Regional Agricultural Waste agenda would be better served through the larger land management group which can draw on a broader level of expertise to tackle difficult rural issues. It is true that whilst there are still issues and will almost certainly continue to be concerns in terms of rural communities and waste, not least matters relating to fly tipping and disused tyres it is felt that such topics do not currently warrant a separate group in which to coordinate Regional intervention measures. It maybe the case in the future as with the introduction of the Agricultural Waste Regulations that a specific issue may require a designated waste group on a "task and finish" basis. The Assembly would take advice through the LMG if this became necessary.

In terms of the outstanding issues for the group the Assembly believes that there are two fundamental areas as alluded to above:

Disused Tyres on Farms

Emda, working with Groundwork Leicester and Leicestershire produced a report in 2006 looking at this issue within the region. Emda also commissioned work into an agricultural innovations study. Both of these initiatives their dissemination and implementation are within the hands of emda and it is felt that the RDA should lead on how best to move these projects forward. There has been discussion and broad agreement within the group to support the farm based “hub” approach to tackle the issue of disused tyres on farms. The intervention of emda in turning this theory in reality and the financial support required is a matter for the RDA. The Assembly within its’ remit will provide what support the RDA believes necessary to make this happen. Coordination of this could be through the LMG but this is a matter for emda.

Fly Tipping in rural areas

The illegal dumping of waste in rural areas is becoming an increasing problem. Recent research supports the view that more and more fly tipping cases relate to domestic (household) refuse, possibly related to the continuing drive from Local Authorities to divert waste from landfill thus avoiding government/EU fines. Many Authorities as part of this have moved to different recycling schemes and/or fortnightly residual waste collections. There is therefore a key behavioural change element relating to fly tippers – ENCAMS within the region work closely with Local Authorities and the EA on many aspects of fly tipping to include leafleting campaigns aimed at changing behaviour to CCTV and surveillance techniques. The Assembly believes that rural areas deserve their “fair share” in terms of support and campaigns and that the concentration shouldn’t be solely on the possibly higher profile urban nuisance. Fly Tipping as an issue goes far deeper than simply the waste that is dumped. This material can lead to pollution incidents or even fire and infestation. The material left is a costly eyesore and nuisance for those who are a victim of this type of environmental crime. With this in mind the LMG is better placed to be able to draw upon a range of expertise to ensure that illegal dumping in rural areas is tackled effectively.

Conclusion

The Assembly believes in the success stories of the group, not least the hugely important Farm Waste Event of 2006. Moving forward it is believed the on going issues can be streamlined into the environmental agenda of the LMG.

The Assembly is currently looking at the management systems needed to carry out a formal review of the RWS and so will be looking to engage with the LMG as necessary on key areas of the action plan.

Bryn Walters

Policy Advisor (Waste and Minerals)
East Midlands Regional Assembly
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