

Enterprise and Business Committee

SF-01

Inquiry into the draft legislative proposals for EU Structural Funds for 2014 – 2020

Response from British Waterways

November 2011



Introduction

British Waterways is a not-for-profit public corporation which cares for the network of canals, rivers, docks and reservoirs across Britain. It owns and manages 2,615 km of navigable inland waterways in the UK of which 75% are canals. It is currently accountable to the Department of the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs in England and Wales and to the Scottish Government (Transport, Infrastructure and Climate Change) in Scotland.

British Waterways in Wales has a Wales Advisory Group, chaired by its Wales Board Member and Vice Chair John Bridgeman CBE TD, to assist it in responding to the needs and priorities of Wales. British Waterways also sponsors the Assembly Government All Party Waterways Group, which Nick Ramsay AM chairs, and contributes to the National Access Forum for Wales, the Heritage Environment Group and the Access to Inland Waters Round Table among other groups.

Subject to the passage of the Public Bodies Bill, the canals and rivers in the care of British Waterways in England and Wales will transfer to a new charity in 2012. That charity will be Glandwr Cymru (The Canal and River Trust in Wales). The grant currently received from Defra will then become a contract. Canals in Scotland were devolved to the Scottish Government in 1999 and will remain in the public sector.

Entrusting the waterways of Wales into the new waterways charity offers the opportunity for a new and even stronger relationship with the Welsh Government.

The charity's All Wales Partnership will take the place of the BW Wales Advisory Group. Positions within that body will be around the turn of the year so that the body is in place by March 2012.

Glandwr Cymru will continue to work with a broad range of public, private and voluntary sector partners, as British Waterways does at present, to protect and find new uses for this nation's historic waterways.

Response

The last decade has seen a widely acknowledged waterway 'renaissance' with canals being reinvented as agents of rural, town and inner city regeneration whilst offering some of the greenest and most accessible recreational and tourism facilities available in the U.K. In Wales the canals include internationally recognised built heritage and habitats. Over the years British Waterways has received support through various European Union funding regimes to support the development of this resource.

British Waterways wishes to make a number of comments on the draft legislative proposals, which we hope will be useful in considering the implications of the proposals for Wales.

While we feel it is appropriate that future arrangements focus on delivering Europe 2020 objectives, we feel that there should be flexibility at implementation level to take account of territorial priorities. In a Welsh context, this means prioritising actions that help deliver WAG's Programme for Government, as well as contributing to Europe 2020. To do this, there is a need to bring together Europe 2020 with the national priorities, with the aim of stimulating actions that contribute to delivering economic growth, while furthering environmental sustainability and social equity. In the selection of actions to be funded, this means that the delivery of multiple outcomes needs to be taken into account.

The implementation of the proposals also needs to take into account the pressures on public sector funding caused by the financial crisis, which shows no sign of abating. This may well pose problems for finding co-finance for projects. At the same time it could be possible to deliver measures through the Structural Funds that could help alleviate these pressures, such as through developing more cost-effective ways of delivering public services (via new technology if appropriate); or through the creation of new forms of delivery eg. by social enterprises.

Finally there is a need for greater coordination between the Structural Funds and the rural development funds under CAP. These could be combined to deliver a more strategic and coordinated approach to both the economic development and environmental management of rural areas, through taking a landscape-wide

approach to rural development in the context of the Living Wales agenda. Such an approach can further ecological connectivity, creating a critical mass of environmental assets that can make a real positive difference to biodiversity. It can also stimulate networking and joint working between economic actors, thus furthering innovation.

We hope you find our comments useful.