

Chairman's Update August 2008

Global warming seems more like global wetting. Not good for holidays or for arable farmers. A lot of frustration in the lowlands amongst my farming colleagues as their combines lie idle. Fortunately no bluetongue at the moment but lots in France, so vigilance and vaccination is the only real policy to follow.

We had a RAF chairs meeting to compare notes. The eight RAFs are very different in their financing and method of working. It is interesting that those with secretariats provided by RDAs are not exercised about the Sub National Review reorganisation, whereas the others are.

We need to write a paper with the Rural Practitioners to present a strategy for Y&H to the Rural Board. I think we need some evidence of our effectiveness and whether members feel the RAF makes a difference. To that effect I shall be circulating a short questionnaire sometime in next few weeks to elicit your views. We do not I think have much of a profile or presence outside the membership, basically because we have not done any PR or Newspaper work. The Steering Group has not wished to create a wider image, mainly because we do not have the resources to service a lot of extra activity.

The first tranche of the Government reorganisation is complete. The Local Strategic Partnerships and the Local Area Agreements are up and running. Rural is mainstreamed (i.e. it is not considered to be a separate delivery sector anymore) in the indicators on which Local Authorities are delivering Government wishes, and working with other major direct deliverers like Health and Police. In order therefore to ensure equitable delivery of services to the smaller towns and even smaller village communities, both having miles of separation from major urban centres, we have to ensure these structures set targets for the very different service delivery problems that smaller brings with it. I think that our Rural Local Authorities are reasonably aware but still constrained by resource and lack of evidence, but our urban dominated authorities I believe will require extra inputs and reminders to remember outside their urban priorities. To this effect I am visiting the South Yorks LSPs with Bill Cross of the Rural Communities Council over next month, to see how the rural expertise that we have might help.

At the higher level the responses to the SNR have been made, including ours, and you can read them in the "consultation responses" section of the website. My grapevine suggests that Y&H are progressing as if their model will be accepted by Government. With this in mind, the paper we present to the Board mentioned above will need to anticipate these changes. I have had discussions with Regional Bodies and it is "suggested" that the RAF might fit into a RURAL body feeding into the major Sustainability Board (one of the five Boards responding to the two powerhouses, the RDA and the Local Government Group). Such a Rural Body would I think need to encompass all rural partnerships represented in the present Rural Framework as well as the Sustainable Farming and Forestry bodies. Again please send your views to me to help the thinking.