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TITLE Outcomes of Tir Cynnal and Tir Gofal Monitoring and Evaluation Programme

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With Glastir now well established – some 2,000 new applications to join Glastir Entry have been received this year – it is appropriate to evaluate the success of two of the previous outgoing agri-environment schemes, Tir Cynnal and Tir Gofal. With the majority of contracts with farmers under these two schemes coming to an end this year, I would like to personally acknowledge and thank all land managers who participated in the schemes for their commitment to delivering public benefits through adopting a more sustainable approach to their business practices.

Positive actions by the industry and individual farmers for the environment - whether improving habitat quality, supporting biodiversity, protecting our precious natural landscapes and historic features, adopting improved resource management to minimise water pollution, need to be valued and recognised by farmers and the general public equally alongside farmers' role in the production of healthy and safe food.

I have recently published the final monitoring and evaluation reports on the Tir Cynnal and Tir Gofal schemes along with a summary of the findings. The reports can be accessed at:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/environmentcountryside/farmingandcountryside/farming/schemes/glastir/tircynnal-tirgofal-monitoring-evaluation/?lang=en>

The reports highlight that the entry level Tir Cynnal scheme, albeit with less ambitious goals, did indeed achieve most of what it set out to do in maintaining the quality and quantity of habitat already present on farmland. By contrast, given the significantly higher amount of public money invested in it, the overall impact of the higher level Tir Gofal scheme can at best be viewed as disappointing.

While I am sure many farmers who participated in Tir Gofal will have personally recorded a positive difference in the wildlife and environment on their farms, in overall terms the scheme has been shown to have had limited impact at improving the populations of priority species, a key objective at the outset. This failure has been borne out unfortunately in the on-going national crisis facing biodiversity so clearly communicated through the State of Nature report. On a more positive note, the schemes have shown some beneficial additional environmental outcomes including for climate change mitigation, despite not being specifically designed for this purpose. These benefits will be continued through funding of similar and additional measures within Glastir but it is important we raise our ambitions much higher if we are to ensure a more sustainable future.

Since the introduction of Glastir, lessons have continued to be learnt on how we should implement our schemes to get the best environmental outcomes for Wales. We now know from these results that to achieve the desired outcomes, there is a need to target the location of prescriptions more effectively, with emphasis on improving the quality of our interventions at defined landscape scales. An example is woodland strips which if planted in sufficient numbers within a river catchment failing on water quality and downstream flooding, can deliver so much more than those planted in isolation in a dispersed fashion across the landscape. Glastir Advanced already incorporates much greater focusing of activity than Tir Gofal and so the outlook for the scheme in terms of the delivery of important environmental outcomes looks promising.

Having said this, I believe it is essential to ensure that our approach to Glastir is flexible enough to respond to the environmental challenges we face and to emerging evidence from reports such as those recently issued on the two outgoing schemes. In the next few months I will be putting forward proposals outlining our direction of travel for Glastir under the next Rural Development Plan. The proposals will include ideas on how we might roll-out a more integrated scheme under the next plan – one that delivers not just for the environment but finds opportunities to drive economic growth and can tackle other key issues like resilience in the uplands and plant and animal welfare. There will be an opportunity for those with an interest in the scheme to provide their thoughts and ideas.

I welcome the evaluation reports despite their mixed findings. They provide us with a valuable steer and confirmation that the move to Glastir was sound. Their publication now could not be better timed to inform our forward thinking on Glastir.