

1. CLA Cymru: Our Lobbying Mission

1.1 *We create and sustain understanding between politicians and our membership community.* As a representative organisation, we care about the rural economy and rural communities, providing information, advice and services for about 3,200 members.¹ The demographics of our membership are broad: we represent landowners, farmers and rural businesses of every-size and type from large agricultural and land-based enterprises to small businesses and sole-traders. A significant community of our members run rural businesses or provide professional services to the rural community.

1.2 In that work we *increase* and maintain participation in politics from our broad and significant community. Equally importantly, as a non-partisan representative body, we provide a necessary counterpoint to political parties' potential dominance in our areas of concern.

1.3 An important aspect of our work is to engage with government and political representatives on behalf of our members . We have succeeded in bringing about change in policy, strategy and delivery in a range of areas. Today we “lobby” on economic, agricultural, environmental and natural resource management issues, and rural affairs matters including topics such as infrastructure (for example: mobile-phone and broadband connectivity), housing and rural services.

1.4 On some issues we raise awareness of political arguments to our members without taking-sides. On the EU Referendum in 2016 we believed

¹ The CLA represents over 30,000 members in England and Wales.

that this approach was most helpful for our membership and facilitated continued engagement with political stakeholders during and after the referendum campaign. This shows how our political engagement work is a two-way process which facilitates open and informed debate and good government. The capacity to stand-back and focus on practical issues affecting our membership has served our lobbying-activity well and we have been unique in this in our sector on this matter.

1.5 Political engagement is important to us because sometimes the breadth and complexity of the rural community is under-represented or misunderstood in the political process. The role of Regional AMs may help here, but even these tend to be more urban-focused. We do believe that the rural voice needs to be heard. As much as one-third of the Welsh population lives in rural areas and our rural economy supports some 459,000 people engaged in the broadest possible range of economic activity. In Wales rural business totals nearly 105,000 enterprises. That this community can seem to be “invisible” is illustrated by CLA research which showed that over £1 billion is invested into the rural economy every year – making this one of the most dynamic sectors of the Welsh economy. Consequently our lobbying mission is to raise awareness of facts like this and ensure that our sector is proportionately represented in government decision-making.

2. Is There a Need for Change?

2.1 “Lobbying” has long been seen as a normal part of the policy making process. Nevertheless there have been instances of bad practice elsewhere, and the term itself does grave disservice to those who work to represent members or organisations. The Senedd itself has not been visibly affected by such issues and there appears to be a strong positive working culture among representatives, government and politically-engaged bodies. However all parties are vulnerable and it may be timely to capture this embedded culture into a positive way-of-working as our devolved constitution continues to

develop. Equally we should encourage more competent representative bodies to engage with the political community. We have the luxury now of creating the right political environment in the absence of issues. “Repair-jobs” can be rushed, botched and unsightly.

2.3 In Westminster the more adversarial nature of party politics is supported by parliamentary privilege in free-speech. This, itself, encourages concerted opposition and challenge of how politicians gain their information and whom they represent. Parliamentary privilege exists in the National Assembly too, but an informed, subjective view is that debate is less challenging in this respect.

2.4 Those who challenge the efficacy and process of political influence question transparency, equality of access, integrity of motive and potential for conflict of interest. Consideration might be given to the introduction of an independently managed register of bodies seeking to influence government.

2.5 Critically, we believe that the term “lobbying” is misunderstood by the general public. It is often seen as a sinister and possibly unethical. Capturing what is good about lobbying – and creating a transparent working machine to evolve as part of Welsh democracy – will provide channels for involvement and valid expertise and also ensure that political representatives are accessible and accountable to the electorate.

3. What do you Understand by the Term Lobbying?

3.1 To members of CLA Cymru staff, lobbying is one of the fundamental services we provide for our members.² We:–

² We have 5 key areas of services: lobbying, information, advice, membership-engagement and services (insurance, foreign exchange, utilities and healthcare).

- Proactively communicating our point of view directly to the political community –raising issues – offering solutions, strategies, ideas and information supporting our message
- Engage with the political process by volunteering our expertise and opinion in Assembly inquiries or government strategic groups and consultation exercises – and following–up this work appropriately
- Providing opportunities for our members to take part in the above as “live–examples” supporting our message

These are conventional forms of engagement which benefit all parties.

3.3 Recent research within the CLA membership in England and Wales confirms that our membership values our achievements from engagement with the political community. However, interestingly, the same exercise suggested that some members looked negatively at “*lobbying*” as something different from the conventional activity above – covert, possibly sinister – and for which the results can be ambiguous. We believe that the introduction of some oversight which encapsulates the positive contribution that can be made by parties engaging with the political process, improves transparency about the source of influence – and its message – will assist the wider public in understanding the value of this work. As members of the public are more likely to be members of representative organisations than political parties (and even trades unions) suggests that there is much to be gained from this positive engagement.

4. How is Lobbying Regulated at the Moment?

4.1 The Register of Interests founded in the 1970s for the House of Commons was probably the first step towards regulation of this type. Many have since commented that a forward–looking “Register of Aspirations”

might have been even more effective. The result of more recent Nolan Report established The Seven Principles of Public Life and a Ministerial Code. The “Nolan Rules” have hitherto tackled conflict of interest in public appointments. The recent Westminster Expenses Scandal has understandably focused minds on possible abuse within the political establishment everywhere and brought issues of propriety within the political process into reality.

4.2 Through a mix of adoption of standards and procedures and cultural osmosis, the best parts of this appear to be at work in Welsh politics. A National Assembly for Wales report was produced on Lobbying and Cross-Party Groups in 2013 in which the Commissioner’s assessment was that the then arrangements are “sufficiently robust” and “fit for purpose.” Nevertheless this report did make a series of recommendations with relation to Cross-Party Groups. Proposals with regard to “lobbying” were discussed but withheld owing to difficulties with the definition of the term and those who carry it out. In the meantime lessons may be learned from the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. Wales shares many of the challenges and opportunities as its devolved counterpart in Scotland.

5. How Do We Regulate Lobbying within our Organisation?

For lobbying – and all activity in Wales – we are accountable to our membership. At a Wales-level our public affairs strategy is endorsed directly via a “Polisi Cymru” senior membership committee and four regional committees in Wales. These meet regularly and are formally managed. Information about our work in political engagement is communicated to members directly via a regular online newsletter, a printed monthly magazine and through themed events. Spontaneous information is provided via social media. That the CLA abides by well-established, clear standards of government demonstrates that we meet high standards of representation

based on clear principles. We have a similar structure and approach to UK political activity – to which CLA Cymru contributes on an equal basis with the English regions.

6. Have You Encountered any Problems with the Current Arrangements?

We have not witnessed or become indirectly aware of abuse in the Welsh lobbying community. However it is important to point out that we “earn” our right to engage with the political community through our ability to provide well-informed recommendations, contribute constructively to emerging strategies or influence representatives through building on our credibility as an effective organisation. It is impossible to assess to what degree we may not have been excluded from appropriate influence – (*“You don’t miss what you never had”*) – but there may be occasions when we felt our informed and representative view should have been considered.

7. Are There Areas you Consider to be Unregulated...Which Pose a Risk to the Accountability & Reputation of Governance in Wales?

7.1 A greater risk of abuse exists where there is less transparency and fewer clear standards than where clarity and clear-rules are in-place and managed. As the Welsh political system becomes more distinct and devolution delivers more responsibilities to Wales, we need to ensure proportionate safeguards are established. In addition we need to make more protective provision for our political process from external influences – be they other governments or organisations. It is important to add that fiscal devolution may provide new hazards in defining fiscal thresholds and managing a process which will have a major affect on commercial enterprise.

7.2 The Senedd is yet to see evidence of the more extreme examples of lobbying. This may be a consequence of more placid times – or it may reflect

the new-found power of social media. We do not support political attention-seeking by violence or illegality – or creating obstacles for function – but this inquiry should address how legal demonstration can be seen to be part of a healthy democracy and not a sign that it is failing. If Welsh farmers, landowners and those dependent on the rural economy feel they must campaign to protect their livelihood when the UK replaces the Common Agricultural Policy, this should be possible within a caring and effective democracy.