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To: Sir Amyas Morse
Comptroller & Auditor General
National Audit Office

Your ref: GF/1639/16
4 August 2017

Dear Sir Amyas

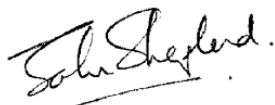
Review of New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme: Wetland Restoration

Thank you for sending a copy of your letter of 31 July 2017 to Sir Desmond Swayne about this issue. I fear however that I find your response quite extraordinarily feeble. I would like to make three further comments:

- 1) If you were “unable to form a view... due to the complex legislation associated with the ownership of the New Forest” why on Earth didn’t you seek a formal legal opinion on the matter, which is of the essence of the complaint ?
- 2) You conclude that “the scheme has lacked detailed evaluation evidence to inform its effectiveness” (exactly as we have always said...). Yet you do not censure the HLS partners in any way, and simply accept an assurance that they will try harder to do proper monitoring in future. Is this really supposed to be a sufficient response ?
- 3) Finally you apparently accept a statement by the Forestry Commission (FC) that they have no statutory duty to undertake these restoration works, while the FC repeatedly and publicly claim that they do have such a statutory duty. Which of these is the truth ? Please consider how the FC may be prevented from misrepresenting this matter in future.

Please consider these comments and take the further action needed to complete your investigation properly.

Yours sincerely



Professor John Shepherd CBE FRS

Cc Sir Desmond Swayne TD MP
Professor Ian Boyd, CSA, DEFRA
Mr James Cross, CEO, Natural England
Mr Bruce Rothnie, Deputy Surveyor, Forestry Commission
Mr Steve Avery, New Forest National Park Authority