Natural England Research Report NERR048

Agreement holder participation in the self-assessment of Higher Level Stewardship agreements

www.naturalengland.org.uk

Natural England Research Report NERR048

Agreement holder participation in the self-assessment of Higher Level Stewardship agreements

Ewan Nugent

Natural England

Published on 06 August 2013

ISBN 978-1-78354-019-8

Project details

This report results from research carried out by Natural England in order to produce evidence for consideration during the development of agri-environment schemes for the next Rural Development Programme. The work was undertaken by Ewan Nugent with contributions from; Lesley Blainey, Stephen Herbert, Stephen Duncan, Stephanie Payne, Kevin Ryland, Vicky Robinson, Jenny Grange, Graham Walsh, Jennifer Thorp, Mary Dimambro and Carol Abbotts.

This report should be cited as:

NUGENT, E. 2013. Agreement holder participation in the self-assessment of Higher Level Stewardship agreements. *Natural England Research Reports, NERR048*.

Project manager

Ewan Nugent
Map Hub Block B
Whittington Road
Worcester
WR5 2LQ
Tel: 01228 577484
ewan.nugent@naturalengland.org.uk

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the 43 farmers who participated and gave their time voluntarily, and the following members of the steering group who helped get the project off the ground: Tom Lancaster (RSPB), Claire Robinson (NFU), Brin Hughes (Conservation Grade), and Claire Collyer (CLA).

Summary

The need to trial self-assessment was identified during the joint DEFRA/Natural England "Making Environmental Stewardship More Effective" (MESME) work of 2010/2011 and was given ministerial approval to proceed in October 2011. The aim of trialling self-assessment is to produce evidence for consideration during the development of agri-environment schemes for the next Rural Development Programme. The hypothesis is that participation in self-assessment will encourage better understanding of intended agreement outcomes by agreements holders, resulting in improved outcome delivery.

Expressions of interest in participating in the trial were sought across Natural England and stakeholders. This resulted in 8 local trials, running over summer and autumn of 2012. These were largely facilitated by Natural England staff with partners providing varying degrees of support, while agreement holders took part on a voluntary basis. The local trials were provided with templates to use in logging time and costs and carrying out surveys and interviews. Each local trial was left to decide which HLS options they would assess and the field methodologies to employ. The local trial facilitators reported back at the end of the trials using a standard template.

Participation in self-assessment resulted in increased agreement holder understanding of their agreements' objectives and the importance they placed on achieving them. It also led to a statistically significant higher level of understanding of the management prescriptions. This improved knowledge and ownership was not translated into improved outcomes within the trial's timeframe, however, due to the trial's short duration.

The potential for self-assessment to stimulate agreement development, refinement and improved outcome delivery was demonstrated during the trial. Ten of 43 participants reported an intention to request changes to their agreements and in five of the eight trials, self-assessment stimulated the facilitators to make improvements to the indicators of success and/or management prescriptions in the HLS agreements.

At the end of the trials there was strong support from agreement holders and facilitators. Twenty-six of 35 agreement holder respondents were either likely or very likely to continue with self-assessment in the future. In some cases this was irrespective of funding availability.

Provision of adequate training and support for agreement holders is identified as a priority prerequisite for implementation of self-assessment by both facilitators and participants.

The trial has not been able to arrive at reliable standard costs and resourcing needs at individual agreement or option level due to the low number of replicates in the trials. Despite this, the averages have been used to give indicative figures for the level of Rural Development funding required and the resource demand to Natural England.

Successful implementation of self-assessment will require recognition of the need for adequate payment levels. The average annual cost, to agreement holders, of undertaking self-assessment on one HLS option is estimated at between £125 and £185. These figures will however show wide variation across individual options and agreements in practice. Variables affecting this include the area covered by individual options, the recurrence of single options within an agreement, the differing intensity of effort required by different options and the choice of field methodologies.

Using the averages and assuming an uptake of two options per agreement, the cost would equate to between 2% and 3% of the average annual revenue cost of the HLS element of agreements. Applied to current population of live HLS agreements, this would equate to between £1.4 M & £2 M of Rural Development funding annually.

Based on Natural England providing all facilitation, training and support the average annual resource demand is estimated at 2.5 hours for each HLS option in an agreement which is subject to self-assessment. As with costs to agreement holders, this was derived from averaging across all the trial sites and cannot be seen as reliable at individual agreement or option level. The figures can however be extrapolated to give an indicative figure for the overall resource demand that would be placed upon Natural England.

If self-assessment was carried out on two land management options in each agreement, for an agreement population equivalent to the number of current live HLS agreements, the annual staffing requirement from Natural England is estimated at 37 FTE. On the basis of current structures, the figure above equates to approximately 1 FTE from each local Land Management Team.

In addition it is estimated that there would be other annual costs, nationally, of approximately £165,000. To covers staff Travel and Subsistence and other incidentals. In total, the annual administrative cost under this scenario is estimated at around 1% of the annual revenue value of the current population of live HLS agreements.

Participation in self-assessment has gained strong support and has had an undoubted positive impact on the understanding and ownership of agreements by agreement holders. Whilst there is no quantified cost/benefit analysis, the presumed enhancement of outcome delivery resulting from increased ownership and understanding does warrant progressive implementation and further development. A series of recommendations on next steps are contained in this report.

Contents

Appendices

List of tables

List of figures

1 Introduction

1.1 In early 2010, the Making Environmental Stewardship More Effective (MESME) project was tasked with identifying areas where Environmental Stewardship delivery could be enhanced with a firm focus on improving environmental outcomes. The project ran over 2010/11 and resulted in a ministerial submission in September 2011. This contained a series of recommendations for trialling new approaches to ES delivery to inform scheme design for the next Rural Development Programme. Self-assessment by HLS agreement holders was one of these recommendations.

1.2 The ministerial response of late October 2011 agreed to the proposal for trialling self-assessment in HLS.

1.3 After agreeing the fundamental aims with DEFRA, a steering group of key internal and external stakeholders was formed to agree the design principals under which the trial would operate. This included representatives from RSPB, NFU, CLA, GWCT, and DEFRA in addition to staff from Natural England's Systems, Knowledge & Information, Land Management, Evidence and External Affairs teams.

Key aims of trialling self-assessment, as agreed with DEFRA

- Test the hypothesis that involvement in self-assessment will result in improved understanding of the environmental aims of HLS agreements, by agreement holders, leading to improved outcome delivery.
- Provide an evidence base that can be used to support any future proposals, to the EU, that includes self-assessment as a paid activity within agri-environment schemes.
- Assess resource implications for Natural England if self-assessment is rolled out under agri-environment in the future.

Principles agreed by the steering group

- The methodology used and the data collected must be compatible with the ability of agreement holders to undertake the work themselves (even where it is 3rd parties who are doing the field work).
- Methodologies must be suited to the period over which the trialling is to take place (July – October 2012).
- Agreement holders should be fully involved in selecting the HLS land management options to be assessed and in developing the methodology employed in field data collection.

1.4 Seven of eight stakeholders who included comments on self-assessment, within their MESME feedback in August 2011, gave broad support to self-assessment within HLS within the constraints of key criteria. Only one was unconvinced of the benefits, stating that they did not believe that self-monitoring works as a concept. Full extracts of the stakeholder feedback is contained in Appendix 1, page 31.

Three key criteria from stakeholders

- Self-assessment needs to be done in a way that avoids it being seen as an additional regulatory burden.
- NGO volunteers should be encouraged to participate, where this is accepted by individual agreement holders.
- It needs to be simple and voluntary for agreement holders.

1.5 It was recognised that the data gathered by agreement holders was unlikely to produce a robust scientific environmental monitoring data set. The key focus however, was not on the data but how its collection engages agreement holders and thus assists achievement of better outcomes. Further it is not the intention that self-assessment replaces agreement monitoring by Natural England, nor agreement inspection by RPA, although it was considered to have potential to supplement and bolster the former.

1.6 Various potential funding mechanisms to deliver the project were explored, including use of HLS to recompense agreement holders and use of the RDPE Monitoring & Evaluation budget to fund project delivery by contractors. These did not succeed, with the result that agreement holder participation was on an entirely voluntary basis. Given this voluntary participation those involved were self selecting in the main and cannot be termed a fully randomised sample. Project management and delivery was carried out in-house by Natural England staff.

1.7 On completion of the development stage, and with the aim of securing eight trial locations, expressions of interest in participating were sought from Natural England teams and external partners.

2 National project methodology

2.1 Delivery of the Project involved staff from several Natural England teams. Project delivery was overseen by Systems, Knowledge & Information with key support provided by the Land Management Development Unit and statistical analysis provided by Science and Evidence. Implementation at local level was largely delivered by staff from Natural England's local Land Management Teams with partner organisations contributing various levels of support.

2.2 The report "England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery Initiative (ECSFDI) ~ Farmer Self-monitoring", (Fredenham *et al*, May 2009), provided considerable direction for the HLS Self-assessment trial. This report provided clear lessons on the value of fully engaging farmers in the design of self-assessment regimes.

Key lessons from the ECSFDI report

- Engage participants in all stages of the project including objective setting and data interpretation.
- Choose determinants that are measurable on-site.
- Design simplified monitoring regimes.
- Organise local forums and workshops for communications between neighbouring farmers and advisers.

2.3 Building on the key aims agreed with DEFRA, the key principals agreed in the steering group and the key criteria stated by stakeholders, the project set out to take these ECSFDI lessons on board from inception. Following the request to Natural England teams and partners for expressions of interest, proposers were asked to complete a proforma to allow the final selection of local trial sites. Twelve proformas were returned and scored against set criteria with an aim of including 23 different factors in the trial. The full criteria list is attached at Appendix 2, page 33. The end result was selection of eight local trials, involving 43 agreement holders, widely-spread across England, which covered 20 of the 23 selection factors. Natural England land management teams led on seven and the RSPB on one.

2.4 An inception meeting for local delivery leads was held in London in late April 2012. At this meeting the local leads were briefed on the key aims and principles of the trials and took part in workshop sessions to help inform further implementation stages. After the inception meeting the local delivery leads were each tasked with identifying a suitable group of agreement holders to work with, to facilitate the delivery of these local trials and to report on implementation. With some exceptions the local facilitators adopted the following agreed approach.

Project resources supplied to local facilitators

- Pro-formas for pre- / post-trial survey and interview of agreement holders.
- Introductory presentation for use at workshops and meetings.
- Participant and facilitator time and cost logs.
- Facilitators' final report template.
- Budget of £250 for venue hire, transport and incidentals.

2.5 After securing voluntary participation from agreement holders the next task was agreeing which HLS management options would be assessed. In a minority of cases this aspect was predetermined by facilitators. A pre-trial interview and pre-trial survey was then used to gather information on agreement holders' understanding of their HLS agreements. These surveys and interviews also collected a suite of attitudinal information. The facilitators then met with

agreement holders to develop and agree the field assessment methodology that would be used. Again, in a minority of cases this was also predetermined by the facilitator.

2.6 Provision of training and support materials was then organised for agreement holders prior to the field assessment work. Logs were provided to agreement holders to keep track of time and costs.

2.7 Subsequent to the field work the agreement holders were asked to complete post-trial interviews and surveys and to submit field assessment records and time/cost logs.

2.8 This information was compiled by the local facilitators and returned to the national project management group along with a final facilitator's report.

Key activities devolved to local trials

- Identification of HLS agreement holder participants.
- Group work facilitation and one-to-one meetings.
- Choice of HLS options.
- Development of field assessment methodologies and recording forms.
- Provision of technical training and support materials for participants.
- Reporting and data collection.

2.9 While there was no universal method of arriving at option selection, the following methods were suggested by facilitators:

- The options that the agreement holders are most interested in.
- High Risk / Difficult options where the agreement holder needs to build confidence in their management.
- Options capable of contributing to wider survey and sampling initiatives such as bird monitoring schemes.
- With intent to vary the options over years on individual agreements to encourage a broader understanding of agreements.
- In multi-objective agreements with a high number of options it is unlikely that agreement holders will be able to carry out self-assessment on more than two single outcome oriented option sets due to time constraints.

The HLS options covered by the trial

- **HE10**: Floristically Enhanced Grass Margins. (2 trials)
- **HF4**: Nectar Flower Mixture. (2 trials)
- **HF12**: Enhanced Wild Bird Seed Mix Plots. (3 trials)
- **HF13**: Fallow Plots for Ground Nesting Birds. (3 trials)
- **HK6 /7**: Maintenance & Restoration of Species Rich Grassland. (1 trial)
- **HK9/11**: Maintenance & Restoration of Wet Grassland for Waders. (2 trials)
- **HK16**: Restoration of Grassland for Target Features. (1 trial)
- **HL8**: Restoration of Rough Grazing for Birds. (1 trial)
- **HL9/10**: Maintenance & Restoration of Moorland. (1 trial)
- **HD7**: Arable reversion by Natural Regeneration. (1 trial)
- **HE3**: 6m Buffer Strips on Cultivated Land. (1 trial)
- **HJ5**: In-field Grass Areas to prevent Erosion or Runoff. (1 trial)

3 Local trial commentaries

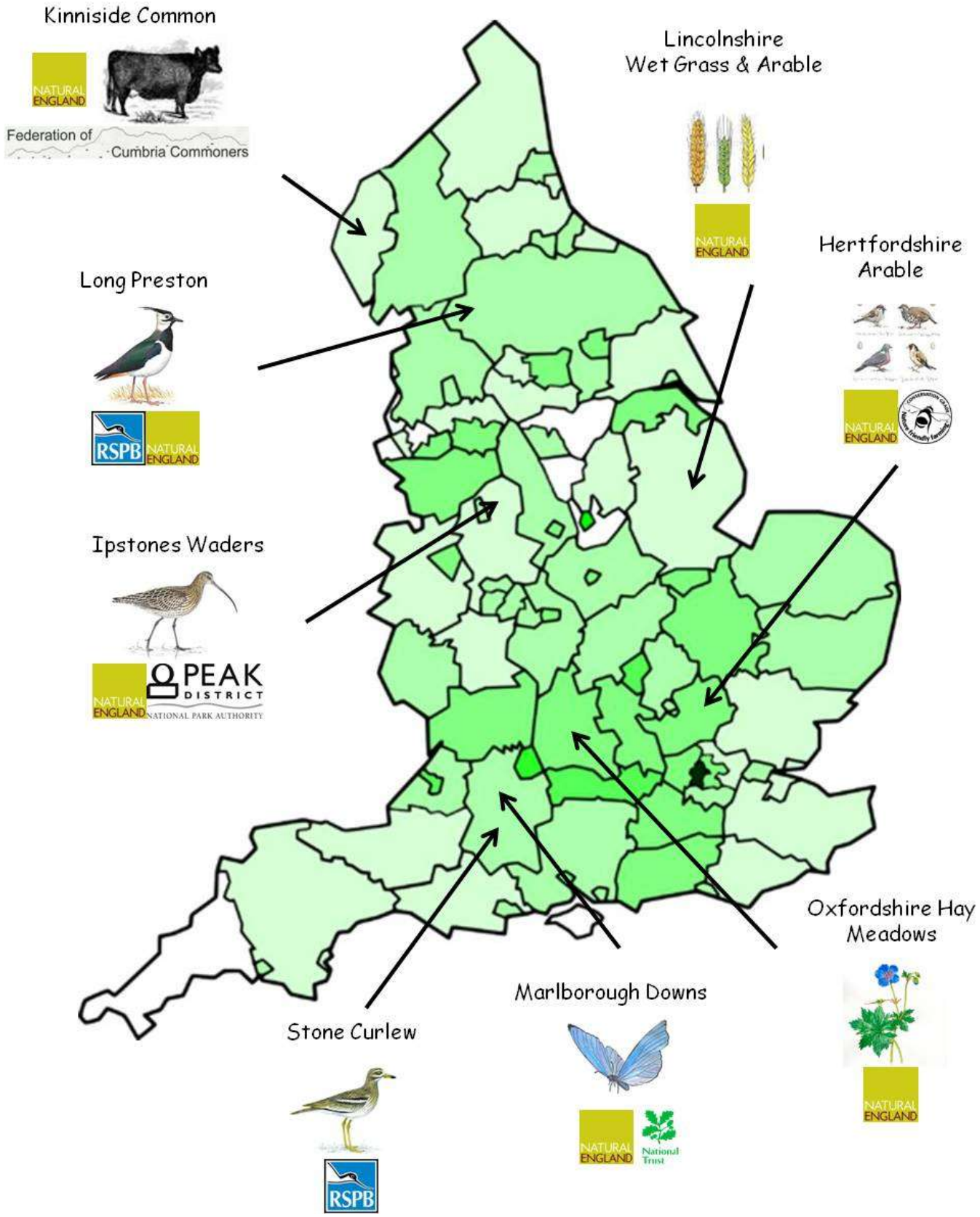


Figure 1 The trial plots

3.1 The following commentaries were compiled using the final reports supplied by the local facilitators. A copy of the template used for the reports is attached at Appendix 8.

Kinniside Common, Cumbria

3.2 This trial was focused on a large common land HLS agreement that started on 1st May 2012. The inclusion of this site was partly driven by the Cumbria Commoners Federation. The Federation are keen to better understand the outcomes that Natural England are seeking to achieve on common land and in particular to better understand the interaction between livestock grazing and environmental condition indicators.

3.3 Jenny Grange from Natural England's local Land Management Team led the trial with significant inputs from Simon Webb, of the same team, who provided specialist advice on the field monitoring methodology.

3.4 The main management options in the agreement are "restoration / maintenance of moorland," (HL9/10) along with a supplement for cattle grazing (HR1). Field assessment was based on fixed monitoring quadrats, placed so that they could be visited by graziers while undertaking normal common management activities. These were used to collect data based on modified SSSI Commons Standards Monitoring and HLS Indicator of Success (IoS) attributes such as percentage of heather in flower and grazing evidence on heather shoots. The field work took place over September and October. An example of the recording form is attached at Appendix 7.

3.5 Given that this was a new HLS agreement, considerable time was spent getting the graziers up to speed with the requirements and expectations of the agreement. One difficulty here was getting all the graziers together for initial meetings due to the timing coinciding with lambing activities.

3.6 Natural England staff worked closely with the grazier's group to develop the field assessment methodology, provided bespoke training on species identification and upland habitat evaluation and joined the graziers on their field monitoring visits. Supporting materials provided by Natural England included species identification guides and a bespoke booklet with photos of relevant habitats in good condition. A GPS was provided to help in locating quadrats. The graziers met relatively often, coming together on three occasions in addition to attending events organised by Natural England staff. Three monitoring visits were made, each to a discrete part of the common, which took around 3 hours. The resulting forms were retained by the Federation Secretary and also stored on Genesis. There were no major issues with the legibility or completeness of the forms, there was no need to alter the agreement as a result of self-assessment activities at this stage and the indicators of success were considered appropriate. Comments were made, however, on the relative impenetrability of the agreement documentation.

3.7 The lead facilitator feels that self-assessment will make a positive contribution to the achievement of the agreement's objectives. There is a high level of certainty that self-assessment gives the graziers a far higher degree of engagement with and understanding of their HLS agreement and how to monitor its progress. In terms of a wider roll out of self-assessment, the facilitator would support this, but with several caveats. They have concerns over the ability of Natural England staff to find the time to give adequate support and training to agreement holders. Concerns were also expressed around verification and compliance if agreement holders were paid to undertake self-assessment.

3.8 The commoners intend to carry on with their self-assessment activities irrespective of future support and funding availability from Natural England.

Long Preston wet grassland, Yorkshire

3.9 This trial was based on an existing Natural England/RSPB project. Graham Walsh from Natural England's local Land Management Team led the trial and there was significant interest from all the agreement holders involved at the start of the trial. The HLS management options considered

were “maintenance and restoration of wet grassland for breeding waders” (HK 9 / 11) and field work took place over the period July to September.

3.10 The assessments were carried out using a bespoke monitoring form, designed by Natural England staff in the absence of input from agreement holders. The aim was to collect data on sward variables, rush cover and soil wetness while recording any wading birds present. The field visits were carried out during normal farm routine with participants making one visit and taking an average of one hour to complete the assessment. There were no issues with the legibility of completed forms, only minor issues with completeness and the forms were stored on Genesis. No amendments were made to HLS agreements as a result of the trial.

3.11 Identifying bird species in flight was difficult for agreement holders, as was assessment of some of the sward variables. The Indicators of Success (IoS) used in the HLS agreements were not much help to agreement holders and there was also little understanding of the link between IoS and prescriptions. In particular water level management, which is a key part of the management and assessment, was not fully understood. In part this may be due to the historical reliance on the RSPB to manage water levels and make sure the Indicators were being met. Some participants were reluctant to do the assessments as they felt that it was best left to the RSPB, but it is likely that the RSPB will be reducing support in the future. Despite the huge benefits the partnership has brought, there is a danger that when partnership funding runs out agreement holders will be left with little ownership and understanding of their agreements.

3.12 The water level management regime is complex and the farmers will need to develop greater understanding if they are to manage the water control structures appropriately. Participation in the self-assessment trial did make agreement holders more aware of Indicators of Success, how these were measured and they did gain better understanding of their agreements’ objectives.

3.13 With hindsight, the facilitator felt that more training and support should have been given to agreement holders and that the assessment methodology should have been simplified, perhaps through use of photography. Although a farm walk was organised, not all participants were able to attend. Support materials provided included bird identification guides and Natural England’s illustrated guides to habitat management.

3.14 The timing of the trial was sub-optimal for the breeding wader objective and the area flooded soon after the launch of the trial, remaining so for much of the summer. Later broods of wading birds were lost and it was extremely difficult to make field visits. In combination, the difficulties in recording the field variables, the flooding and the perception that it was RSPB’s job led many to abandon the trial either because they were disheartened or were nervous of saying that the Indicators were not being met.

3.15 The facilitator does not feel that self-assessment should be rolled out wider, at least for the wet grassland options involved. The wet grassland options are considered too complex and technical for most agreement holders to be able to assess effectively. Other concerns raised included the difficulty in agreement holders finding the time to carry out self-assessment to an acceptable standard, the degree of support they would need and the potential for misreporting due to worries about the ramifications of poor results.

Ipstones upland waders, Staffordshire

3.16 This trial focussed on a group of agreements with "maintenance and/or restoration of rough grazing for birds" options (HL 7/8). The trial was facilitated by Jennifer Thorp of Natural England’s local land management team. The field methodology was developed using an existing method, adapted in association with the group of agreement holders and field work took place over the period 1st June – 15th July. Agreement holders were asked to record observations of waders, sward variables and ground softness. Completed forms were stored on Genesis and an example is included in Appendix 7. Eight agreement holders took part.

3.17 Supporting materials provided included CD's of bird song and pictures of the wading birds. There were no significant requests for help during the field assessments, which agreement holders got on with by themselves.

3.18 On holdings where livestock were owned, assessments were carried out during normal farming routines while others made special trips. On average participants made 3 visits of 1 hour duration at fortnightly intervals. There were no issues with legibility of the completed forms but significant issues with lack of completeness. Like the Long Preston project, participants had difficulty in assessing the sward variables.

3.19 Around half a day was spent amending agreements as a result of the trials, this included adding in capital works for "scrapes" and amending indicators of success (IoS). In general it was felt that the IoS in the agreements were not readily understood by agreement holders. This was attributed to standard wording constraints, the lack of relevance of some inclusions to the farmers, the inability to tailor to specific field parcels and the complexity of agreement documentation. It was also suggested that overarching and simplified agreement level IoS would be of value.

3.20 Pre-trial interviews appeared to highlight a lack of awareness of agreement objectives and prescriptions. When this was brought up at the final meeting, participants felt that they did know what they were supposed to be doing and why, but could not verbalise this when put on the spot. Participant confidence in the value of self-assessment seemed to fall during the trial, when asked for their views on this they felt that the poor weather had put the waders off and in turn this had made the participants disillusioned.

3.21 At wash-up sessions with participants, it was suggested that the data should be sent to the county bird recorder but some participants were wary of sharing locations of breeding birds, and there is the inevitable question of whether the records would be seen as reliable. The inclusion of data on predation and predator numbers was suggested as an improvement to the data collected. The need to simplify recording forms, especially the sward variables was identified and photographs were mentioned as an alternative. When monitoring mobile species such as birds, there would be an increased risk of double-counting as more agreement holders sign up, which would affect the real or perceived usefulness of the exercise.

3.22 The facilitator felt that self-assessment will be of value in delivering the objectives of HLS agreements but pointed out that, for most farmers, it's difficult to draw direct correlations between management activities and visiting bird numbers. Participating agreement holders enjoyed being part of the trials and felt better informed about the requirements of waders in the uplands. The facilitator is of the view that self-assessment should be given a wider roll out, although there was concern about any move to mandatory inclusion of self-assessment as a standard requirement of HLS options.

Marlborough Downs, Wiltshire

3.23 The trial was facilitated by Steph Payne of Natural England's local land management team and in consultation with agreement holders, focused on the "grassland for target species" (HK16) and "wild bird seed mix" (HF12) HLS options. The selection of options to include was subject to much debate with several selection methods being put forward. These ranged from "options farmer is interested in", through "risky or difficult options" to "year-on-year change in options to encourage ownership across wider aspects of an agreement".

3.24 The agreed methodology used recording forms similar to Natural England's integrated site assessment methods and no major issues were raised about the ability of agreement holders to carry out the field assessments. An example of the forms used is included in Appendix 7. While field assessments were originally planned to take place over July to November, it mostly took place over a restricted timescale of October to November due to inclement weather. Of the six original participants, a combination of personal factors and the awful weather meant that only three managed to complete the field assessments and the associated forms. Despite this,

agreement holders were generally very keen to take part and several participants aimed to continue after the trial period ended.

3.25 Support materials provided included a range of identification guides, a bird song CD and links to useful websites and phone apps. The participants and facilitator viewed training as an essential prerequisite. A plant identification and field method workshop was run and a workshop on surveying and identifying key bird species was made available. Group meetings were used to enable exchange of ideas and feedback on option management. Key concerns raised around self-assessment were:

a) the ability of farmers to identify key species, although the potential to use volunteers was suggested;
b) the need for the method to be standardised and suitable for non-expert farmers to use;
c) getting the balance right in terms of the numbers of instances of individual options that are assessed; and,
d) the potential for intentional misreporting of results and how penalties for this could be applied.

3.26 In general the arable options were assessed while undertaking everyday activity while the grassland options required a separate visit. On average three visits were made to arable options and a single visit to grassland options, spending on average half an hour per visit. In one case the National Trust warden helped with the field visits and it was felt that the potential for use of volunteers could be explored further.

3.27 Around half a day was spent amending the IoS and prescriptions in agreements as a result of the trial. In general it was felt that the arable IoS were fine, but that the grassland ones needed to be better tailored to individual fields. The provision of overarching agreement level IoS would be seen as a positive change and the IT lead constraints in prescription and IoS setting were seen as a barrier to providing clarity for agreement holders.

3.28 The facilitator felt that self-assessment helped increase ownership and understanding of HLS agreements, in agreement objectives being met and in giving agreement holders a sense of achievement. In summary the facilitator supports the wider roll out of self-assessment subject to voluntary agreement holder participation and provision of adequate Natural England staff resources to provide training, guidance and support to agreementholders and for liaison with partners / volunteers.

Stone curlew, Wiltshire

3.29 This trial was based on a long term monitoring project that has been in operation for over 15 years. Kevin Rylands of RSPB led the trial, supported by Nick Tomalin, also of RSPB, who undertook the field work and agreement holder interviews. Out of the 130 agreement holders involved in the RSPB's long term project, ten were asked and five volunteered to take part in the self-assessment trial. The trial used the same field methodology as the longer term project and had a predetermined HLS option focus, of "fallow plots for ground nesting birds" (HF13). It was not felt appropriate for farmers to do the fieldwork as it involved handling stone curlew eggs and ringing chicks, for which a licence is required. As such, this trial did not involve agreement holders in development and implementation to any meaningful degree, unlike the other local trials. This fact was an issue in itself as it did not allow this trial to follow the guiding principles of the national self-assessment trial. However, as no other partner lead proposals were brought forward it was agreed that the proposal be included in the trial.

3.30 The methodology recorded the presence and breeding productivity of stone curlew and a licensed RSPB fieldworker visited the fallow plots 10-12 times over April to August. Stone curlew pairs and nests were located, eggs measured and if possible chicks were ringed. Data collected was stored in a bespoke database maintained by the RSPB.

3.31 The financial costs to RSPB, of continuing to annually monitor the 280 CSS/HLS fallow plots that are included in their long term project are increasing year on year. As with the Long Preston trial there are questions over the ability of the RSPB to continue this work. While the ability of agreement holders to replicate the RSPB's activities at the Long Preston trial was raised as a potential issue. In the Wiltshire stone curlew trial's case this is seen as completely untenable due to the licensing requirements that underpins the methodology. No alternative solution has yet been proposed. The RSPB are, however, looking to increase interaction with stone curlew farmers with farm events and workshops.

3.32 The trial identified the need to add and amend HLS management prescriptions in some cases to bring consistency, while the IoS were considered to be appropriate and easily understood by agreement holders. The facilitator is confident that the assessment work helps to improve delivery of agreement objectives as it identifies management issues for agreement holders and can highlight the need for them to adjust working practices. The long term nature of the wider project is also considered to be of help in improving understanding of HLS agreement's objectives by agreement holders and farmers are always pleased to know their efforts have been rewarded by the presence of stone curlew.

3.33 Several concerns were raised about any wider roll out of self-assessment:

- How farmers would be trained and licensed to do their own monitoring, the quality of the data collected and the amount of time Natural England advisers would have to dedicate.
- Verification.
- Funding.
- What will happen to those whose assessments show failings in outcome delivery? (This in a context that those farmers undertaking the same option without monitoring may have the same issues but will not have any penalties).
- Farmers may not want to be faced with having to do all their own monitoring.

Arable and wet grassland, Lincolnshire

3.34 This trial looked at a mix of arable and wet grassland options including "maintenance of wet grassland for breeding waders" (HK 9), "arable reversion by natural regeneration" (HD7), "6m buffer strips on cultivated land" (HE3) and "in-field grass areas to prevent erosion or runoff" (HJ5). It was led by Stephen Duncan of Natural England's local land management team. Agreement holders were engaged through a series of one to one visits, during which option selection and methodology for self-assessment was agreed with each participant. They were asked to focus on the IoS & prescription detail of options they chose and to log the activities undertaken to achieve these. They were also asked to add any additional comments on management of these options. Save for this broad instruction they were left to devise their own recording system. This approach resulted in a variety of approaches including keeping personal records in note form or just by memory. In the latter case, the information was recorded by the facilitator during wash-up interviews. One agreement holder used a bird hide recording log that was populated by visitors to the hide, while another participates in a regional GWCT grey partridge group and collates personal records for that purpose. Field assessments took place over the period May to November.

3.35 Key issues prior to commencing the fieldwork included the fact that some agreements were new and thus had not yet established some of the options. The extremely wet summer of 2012 also caused a delay in the establishment of some arable options on other agreements. Another factor was that the timing of the trial was not wholly suitable for recording the IoS attributes of some options, such as the utilisation of wild bird seed plots in winter.

3.36 One to one meetings with agreement holders also raised the following:

a) expectations about the time needed to record information;
b) the fact that most of agreement holders considered themselves to be visual in recording information, ie making observations and acting on those without making written records; and
c) all participants thought a paid self-assessment activity would be open to abuse.

3.37 No *ad hoc* requests for support were made by agreement holders once the field assessments were under way and assessment visits were generally carried out during participants' normal routine. Comments were made that the trial made them repeatedly review the detail of specific trial option IoS and prescriptions. This provides evidence that self-assessment assisted agreement understanding. There were no significant issues with legibility of returns, but there were significant issues with completeness and indeed paucity of information.

3.38 The facilitator reports that severe weather conditions impacted upon the ability of agreement holders to devote time to recording. It is felt that the use of volunteers such as bird recorders may help alleviate the time demand issue.

3.39 In the main the IoS were felt to appropriate and readily understood by agreement holders. Some changes to IoS were made, but these largely related to mitigating against the impact of the wet weather. Some option prescriptions required alteration to make them less generic in areas such as the bird species targeted and appropriate seed varieties to use. One option was deleted from an agreement due to its inappropriate placement and thus inability to achieve its objectives.

3.40 The facilitator gave unconditional support to a wider roll out of self-assessment and was of the opinion that it had good potential to improve agreement holder understanding of their agreements and delivery of outcomes.

Conservation Grade arable, Hertfordshire

3.41 This trial was led by Mary Dimambro and Carol Abbotts of Natural England's local land management team in association with Conservation Grade. The five volunteer participants were all Conservation Grade arable farmers. In agreement with the participants, four HLS arable options were selected for the trial: "nectar flower mixture" (HF4), "floristically enhanced grass margins" (HE10), "enhanced wild bird seed mix plots" (HF12) and "fallow plots for ground nesting birds" (HF13). The assessment methodology was jointly developed by participating farmers, Conservation Grade staff and Natural England staff.

3.42 Records were collected on option establishment methods, achievement of IoS attributes, presence / flowering and seed availability of sown plants and insect / bird presence and numbers. Allowance was given for recording any further observations such as whether specific actions were necessary to achieve the IoS.

3.43 Prior to the field work some concerns were raised regarding bird and insect identification. This was addressed by allowing the farmers to describe species characteristics as opposed to naming individual species. Difficulty with identifying sown plant species was also expected for some participants. Support materials provided included bird identification guides and laminated photos of commonly sown seed supply and nectar source plant species. No training was provided, but several farmers did say they thought training would be useful, especially for plant and bird identification.

3.44 Four options, with two replicates, were monitored at set points during the trial period. All agreed this was enough for any agreement holder to measure, any more and it was thought that there would be a higher risk of the forms being completed in cursory fashion. The farmers also felt that it would not be possible to assess every block in an option, only a representative number. Having to assess every block may lead to agreement holders going for fewer, larger blocks at the start of

the agreement which could reduce the overall environmental outcome of the agreement. The group was divided as to whether just the vegetation should be monitored or also the species using the option.

3.45 Field assessments took place over the period July to November and there were no requests for help in completing these. Monitoring visits, of 10 minutes per block, were partly made during normal farming operations and partly as special visits. On average each participant made between 16 and 24 assessment visits in total. Forms were returned to Natural England after several reminders and one farmer did not return any forms. An example of the forms used is included in Appendix 7. It was felt that the forms should be sent to Natural England for storage in Genesis and that a database should be developed to hold the data should self-assessment be rolled out further. This could allow analysis for PR, scheme improvement and agreement holder engagement purposes. Some minor issues with legibility and completeness of forms was reported.

3.46 There were no changes to agreement prescriptions or IoS as result of the trial and the IoS were felt to be appropriate and understood by agreement holders. All farmers agreed that doing the assessments made them more aware of the requirements and objectives of their agreements. They recorded how they managed the option, so it will be easier for them to look back and see what did and didn't work. They all said that self-assessment helps them to really check whether things are working and all participants are reported to have enjoyed taking part. The facilitators were ambivalent about the value of rolling out self-assessment on a wider scale, citing the lack of affinity for record keeping by agreement holders. Concerns were also expressed about verification of results and the potential for misreporting of suboptimal option performance. Two of the farmers felt self-assessment was a really good proposition and would encourage farmers to learn more about the wildlife on their farm.

Oxfordshire, species rich grasslands

3.47 Vicky Robinson of Natural England's local land management team led this trial, focusing on a group of agreements with the species rich grassland options HK6 and HK7. The assessment methodology was based on walking a "W" across each field recording sward variables at 10 random stops. Findings were recorded on a simplified version of Natural England's Integrated Site Assessment form as attached at Appendix 7 and assessment visits took place over June to October. Completed forms were stored on Genesis.

3.48 The main issue for the facilitator, prior to commencement of fieldwork, was the time required to visit all participants to ensure they were happy with the methodology. For the agreement holders it was lack of confidence in species identification and recording results in a format Natural England were happy with and that would meet RPA inspection needs if self-assessment is introduced more widely. Despite the initial lack of confidence all the agreement holders got on fine with their field assessments.

3.49 A plant identification guide was provided to all participants. On reflection, the facilitator felt that it would have been good to get everyone together for a training day and to have joined each participant on their first field assessment visit.

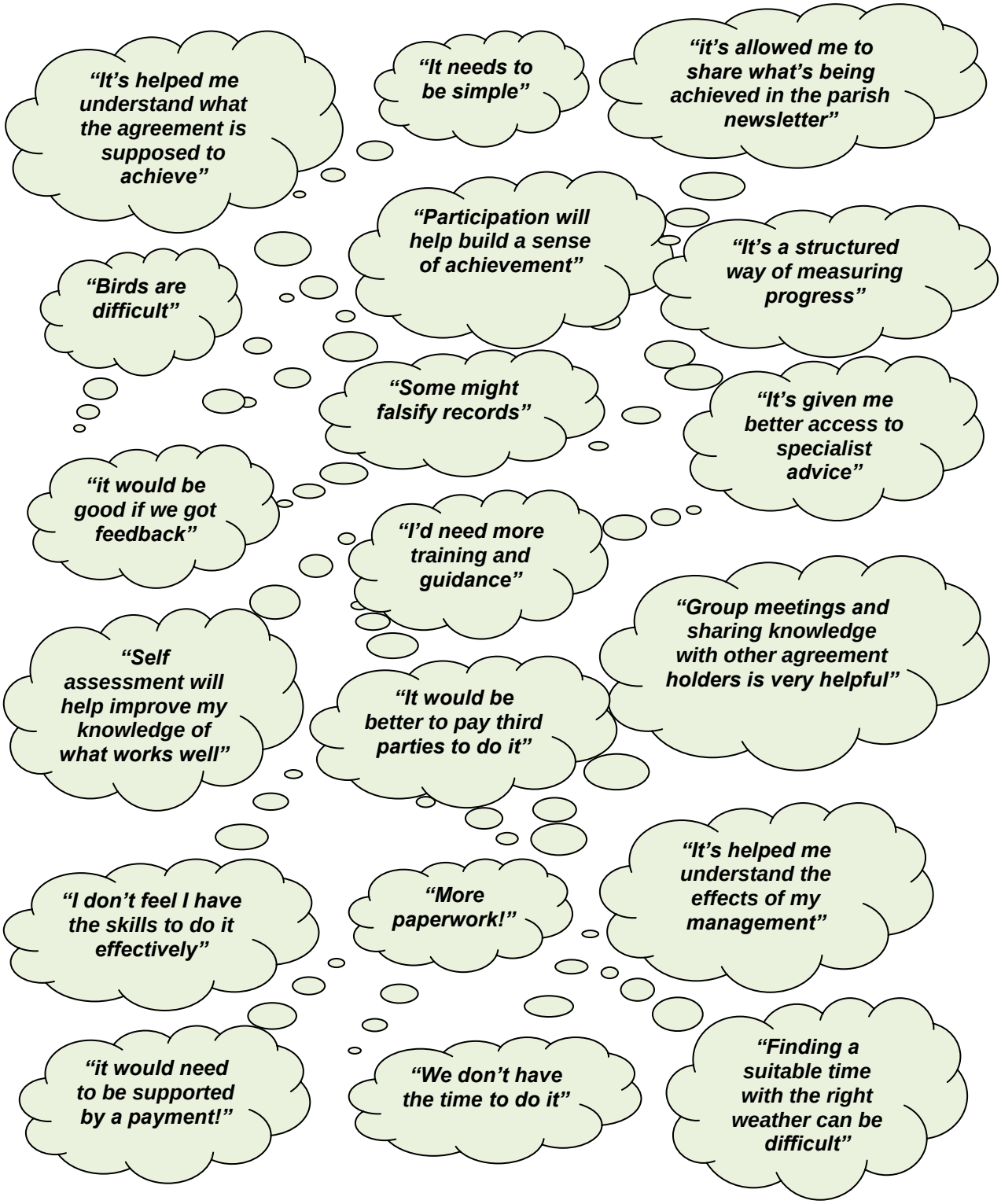
3.50 Visits were not done as part of normal farm work as, in the main, the fields were shut up for hay. On average each visit took one and a half hours and each participant undertook two visits over the trial period. There were no shortfalls in the legibility or completeness of the recording forms.

3.51 Minimal time was spent amending agreement prescriptions as a result of the trial, however the IoS were not considered to be of much assistance to agreement holder understanding. It was felt that while the IOS may be worded appropriately for Natural England staff, they are not for agreement holders. IT control constraints were not felt to help in this respect.

3.52 One potential key benefit for Natural England was identified as the provision of comparable results which could be used to justify changes to prescriptions. The facilitator reports that involvement in self-assessment raised awareness of agreement requirements and if carried out year on year it was felt that participants would start to pick up on changes and have the evidence to support tweaks in management if required. This should mean that maximum environmental gain is constantly being worked towards.

3.53 The biggest reported benefit of this trial was the sense of achievement and enjoyment of the farm environment features that participants got. The trial meant they found time to visit fields when they are shut up for hay, when the flowers are at their best but when participants wouldn't normally feel it is a priority to walk through them.

3.54 The facilitator feels that self-assessment does have a future role, but raises the fact that it would need to be carefully managed. Issues around time implications for Natural England staff in terms of training and supporting agreement holders and handling data storage were raised. The facilitator suggests that, if introduced, it should be a voluntary supplement. As with other trials the facilitator and the participants raised the potential issue of intentional misreporting and offered photography as a potential solution. Feeding into national survey work was also picked up as something that could make self-assessment more worthwhile and a question was asked about the potential for partner organisations to be contracted to handle data storage and interpretation.


"It's helped me understand what the agreement is supposed to achieve"
"It needs to be simple"
"it's allowed me to share what's being achieved in the parish newsletter"
"Participation will help build a sense of achievement"
"It's a structured way of measuring progress"
"Birds are difficult"
"Some might falsify records"
"It's given me better access to specialist advice"
"it would be good if we got feedback"
"I'd need more training and guidance"
"Group meetings and sharing knowledge with other agreement holders is very helpful"
"Self assessment will help improve my knowledge of what works well"
"It would be better to pay third parties to do it"
"It's helped me understand the effects of my management"
"I don't feel I have the skills to do it effectively"
"More paperwork!"
"it would need to be supported by a payment!"
"We don't have the time to do it"
"Finding a suitable time with the right weather can be difficult"

4 Results

4.1 This section amalgamates the feedback from the facilitators and participants involved in the eight local trials. It draws on the following sources:

- Individual local trial commentaries at Section 3.
- The pre-trial survey results, attached at Appendix 3.
- The pre-trial interview results, attached at Appendix 4.
- The post-trial survey results, attached at Appendix 5.
- The post-trial interview results, attached at Appendix 6.

Initial meetings and workshops

4.2 The approach to engaging agreement holders varied among the trials, the default was the organisation of communal workshops and several of the trials did take this approach. In other cases, due to the geographic dispersal of participants and difficulty in arranging a time to suit all at a busy period of the farming year, individual one to one visits were made.

4.3 Before commencement of the field work, participants were asked to complete a pre-trial survey and pre-trial interview. Specific questions were repeated at the end of the trial to find out if participant attitudes had changed as a result of participation. The repeat questions were supplemented by other questions relevant to either the start or the end of the trial.

4.4 Anecdotal facilitator feedback from initial one to one meetings and workshops raised the following issues:

- Sub-optimal timing of the trial in relation to the options and features being assessed. In some trials the timing (June to November) was not ideal for the focus on winter food supplies for farmland birds nor breeding waders, being on the early side for the former and the late side for the latter. This is thought to have had a subsequent impact on the experience and engagement of the participants in five of the eight trials. This issue was also mentioned by participants as one of two key areas for improvement at the end of the trials.
- Time demands on participants.
- Difficulty in measuring progress on newly established agreements.
- Lack of farmer's confidence in their ability to carry out assessments, especially in relation to fauna and flora species identification.
- Lack of farmers' confidence in their ability to link management actions to outcome delivery.
- The need for any methodology to be simple and easy to do.
- Verifiability and compliance in any future roll out of self-assessment as a paid activity.

Answers to specific questions in the pre-trial survey and interviews

4.5 A reasonable level of support for self-assessment:

- In the pre-trial survey 60% of respondents gave a score of between 8 and 10, on a scale of 1 to 10, when asked if they supported the idea of self-assessment.
- When asking participants if they had any additional comments about self-assessment during the pre-trial interview, of 97 comments:
  - thirty were wholly positive;
  - twenty-eight positive but with caveats;

- thirty-one neutral or irrelevant; and
- eight negative about self-assessment.

- The wholly positive comments generally focused on the potential for self-assessment to help agreement holders focus on outcomes and achievement with additional mention of learning opportunities and the potential to feed into agreement adaptation. Where caveats were mentioned these most frequently related to skills requirements, need for training & guidance, time availability, the need to minimise mis-reporting and need for a simple approach. Negative responses were far more varied but included concerns about a lack of skill, fear that it would result in increased visitors, being seen as "cost cutting" and the difficulty for agreement holders who live away from the agreement land.

4.6 Good levels of support for the objectives of HLS agreements:

- Participants showed strong levels of support for the objectives of the HLS options in the pre-trial survey. Participants were asked the extent to which they supported the objectives of their agreements on a scale of 1 to 10. The scores were highly skewed with a median of 9 and a mean of 8.3. There is, however, a degree of contradiction to this. The pre-trial interviews indicated that only a minority of agreement holders were able to recall the basics of the indicators of success, objectives and prescriptions included in their agreement documents. It is worth noting, however, that agreement holders were not forewarned of pre-trial interview questions. To quote one local facilitator "*We know that farmers do understand the purpose of their agreements and have a good knowledge of the options, but when put on the spot it is asking a lot for them to be able to recite what the prescriptions and IoS are*".

4.7 Considerable levels of concern over management prescription restrictions:

- In the pre-trial interview participants were asked to think specifically about the management their agreement required them to carry out. They were asked if they had any concerns about achieving the objectives of the options as a result and to explain these concerns. Seventeen of the 43 participants did not have any concerns over their ability to deliver against agreement objectives.
- For the 26 who did express a concern, the most frequent responses related to a strong desire for more flexibility in recognition of weather impacts and a perceived need for rush & weed control. Thirty-two percent of all comments related to this.
- Following these concerns the most common issue, accounting for 25% of comments made, was difficulty in delivering the prescribed management. In this respect three particular areas were mentioned, difficulty with wet grassland and water level management, grazing related issues and difficulties with establishment of seed and wildflower mixes.

4.8 There was large gap between the regard that agreement holders wished to be held in by society and the regard they felt that they were held in:

- The largest gap existed in terms of the general public, followed by the media, then the local community and finally other agreement holders.

Training, support and advice needs

4.9 The need for training and guidance was a major issue at inception meetings, in surveys and at interviews. A lack of confidence in ability was also a key factor for those who did not support the concept of self-assessment at the outset. In the pre-trial survey only 18 of the 43 of participants gave a score of between 8 and 10, on a scale of 1 to 10 when asked if they felt confident about carrying out self-assessment.

4.10 The local trials were left to develop their own plans for provision of training and support materials to participants. Almost all provided relevant species identification guides, one provided copies of an Natural England illustrated guide, one provided a bird song CD and another provided links to

relevant websites and phone apps. One trial provided a bespoke set of laminated sheets with detailed photographs of habitat in good condition including close ups of key plant species.

4.11 Facilitators reported that the most significant requests from participants were for training and assistance with field work. In some cases these requests could not be met due to time constraints on Natural England staff. Four trial leads did run training sessions and one who didn't felt, in hindsight, that they should have. The most frequent subject area covered by the training was species identification and in some cases provision was made for training in habitat evaluation and bird survey methodology. In one case trained NGO staff carried out the fieldwork. Additional activities included a farm walk in one trial and in three trials facilitators accompanied at least some of the participants on their field visits for mentoring purposes.

4.12 Save for support materials such as identification guides only one trial supplied additional resources, a handheld GPS.

4.13 The post-trial interview asked participants to comment on improvements they would like to have seen. Training was again an identified priority; 70% of responses mentioned training, skills, guidance and support provision as areas for improvement while 75% of the responses expressing satisfaction specifically mentioned training, information and support provision as strong points. When asked about the advantages and disadvantages of self-assessment in the post-trial interview, a number of respondents reported a feeling of ineffectiveness due to lack of appropriate knowledge and skills.

4.14 Overall this gives strong emphasis to the need for adequate training and support for agreement holders if self-assessment is to be taken further.

4.15 RELU policy practice note 37; Improving the success of agri-environment initiatives, (Liddon, A., July 2012) provides additional evidence of the potential for improved outcome delivery through provision of training to agreement holders.
www.relu.ac.uk/news/policy%20and%20practice%20notes/37%20Bullock/PPN37.pdf

4.16 The results of the studies supporting this practice note showed that not only are the experience and skills of the farmer very important in ensuring that the schemes are implemented as effectively as possible, but his or her attitude and engagement with the scheme's objectives also play a major role in their level of success. The researchers found that the farmers who took part in a training course showed a higher level of skill, and were also more positive and professional in their approach when putting the schemes into practice. The scientists concluded that a relatively small investment in could provide good value for money by enhancing the environmental outcomes.

4.17 Professor James Bullock from CEH was involved in the project. He said, "Stimulating the motivation and understanding of farmers does seem to be key to getting the most out of these agri-environmental interventions".

Field assessment and recording

4.18 Most local trials involved agreement holders in the development of field assessment and recording methodologies. This maximised the appropriateness to the users, but even where agreement holders were involved some participants still had difficulties in their field assessments. In one trial participants had the choice of identifying "types" of birds rather than species to mitigate against identification problems.

4.19 Adaptations of Natural England's integrated site assessment methodology and recording forms was the most common approach adopted and only two trials made a significant deviation from this format. The NGO-led trial used their existing methodology and one trial left individual participants to their own devices. In practice, two trials reported that further simplification would have been desirable and inclusion of fauna caused the largest difficulties. Assessment of

particular sward variables such as % cover measures and tussock distribution also caused some difficulty. Examples of the methodology recording forms are attached at Appendix 7.

4.20 In all trials save the NGO led one, participants carried out their own field work. In a limited number of cases the facilitators joined the participants and in one case a partner organisation accompanied the agreement holder. The degree to which field assessments could be carried out while undertaking the normal farm routine varied across the option types being assessed. Arable option visits were generally carried out as part of the normal farm routine, while for grassland options special visits tended to be made. In the commons trial, quadrats were located near to routes used by graziers during their flock management activities.

4.21 On average the visits took just over one hour and an average of two visits were made over the trial period, although there was a wide range for both figures. Two trials recorded management activities while filling in field assessment forms. There were only minor issues reported in terms of legibility of records, but in terms of completeness some trials had significant issues.

4.22 In most cases field assessment records were stored on Genesis, the IT system that supports Environmental Stewardship, but in only one trial is it clear that participants retained their records. Alternatives suggested were a central database, to which participants could upload their results, supplying data to county recording schemes and the potential for partner repository and analysis services. In half of the trials, records needed tidying by facilitators prior to storage.

4.23 The issue of verification of field records was frequently raised by both facilitators and participants. In particular it was felt that there was high potential for participants to misreport results where they did not meet the IoS requirements. The use of photography was mentioned as a means to address this, but may in itself have significant training requirements.

4.24 Although impacting more on some trials than others, all local trials were hampered to some degree by the severe wet weather conditions during the summer of 2012. This ranged from difficulty in making site assessments on an area subject to continuous flooding, to a lack of birds in flight and time constraints caused by the impact of the weather on farming operations.

4.25 Self-assessment could potentially feed into Natural England's integrated site assessment (ISA) programme and, as mentioned, several trials used adapted ISA methodologies. None of the HLS agreements were scheduled for inclusion for ISA visits over the trial period and the potential thus remains untested.

4.26 While meeting the principles set out for this trial, the development of bespoke methodologies is not considered feasible for any wider roll out of self-assessment due to the time involved and the probable need for consistent approaches should it be funded through agri-environment scheme budgets. Any new standard methodologies not tested during the trials should be subjected to user testing by agreement holders before introduction.

4.27 In terms of time demands on agreement holders there was a wide variation reflecting the different options being assessed and the different approaches applied. Participants did compile time and costs logs however and these have been used to arrive at average time costs. This is covered in 'Budget and resource requirements – p24'.

Local trial impacts

4.28 Post-trial survey and post-trial interviews indicated:

Increasing levels of agreement holder support for HLS agreement objectives

4.29 Six out of seven facilitators who responded felt that participation in self-assessment would improve the delivery of agreement objectives through an increase in agreement holder engagement with, and understanding of, the objectives.

4.30 The pre- and post-trial surveys asked three identical questions at the start and the end of the trial to help identify any change in agreement "ownership" by participants. Of 43 participants who filled in the pre-trial survey, 35 also completed the post-trial survey. The comparisons below only use the results from the 35 who completed both. The results were subject to statistical analysis with the following results:

- Although there was already a high level of support for the objectives of the HLS options being assessed at the start of the trial, this showed a significant increase by the end of the trial.
- The high level of personal importance given to the achievement of the objectives of the options at the start of the trial saw a significant increase by the end of the trial.
- The high level of personal importance attached to delivery of environmental improvements remained static over the course of the trial.

Change in agreement holder knowledge of agreement objectives and prescriptions

4.31 There were also two repeated questions in the pre- and post-trial interviews. Q1 asked the participants to recall, from memory, the objectives of the option(s) subject to self-assessment. Similarly, Q2 asked participants to list the option prescriptions.

4.32 The responses from the participants who responded to the questions in both the pre- and post-trial interviews were compared to give an assessment of change over the trial period. Analysis of the results employed the Related Samples Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test.

4.33 In terms of the ability to recount objectives / IoS the results showed that there was no change over the course of the trial. There were, however, significant concerns raised about the data arising from the analysis of the results. These concerns are detailed in Appendix 4. As such the results for Q1 are not seen as reliable. They are also not consistent with the more anecdotal views of facilitators and participants which do indicate an improvement over the course of the trials.

4.34 In terms of ability to state the option prescriptions the results of the statistical test were conclusive. These showed a statistically significant improvement over the course of the trials.

Agreement holders' sense of achievement

4.35 Six out of seven facilitators who responded reported, with particular strength, that agreement holders gained a sense of achievement and enjoyment of the features on their farms as a result of participation in self-assessment.

Participant views on the benefits and disadvantages of self-assessment

4.36 When asked in the post-trial interview what the benefits and disadvantages of self-assessment were, 37 comments covered benefits. **Thirty-three of these related to improved understanding and potential for improved delivery of agreement outcomes.**

4.37 Thirty-three comments related to disadvantages, 27 of these related to additional time and work burdens and four to a lack of skills for the job. The 27 that related to time and work burdens included 8 about finding a good time to carry out the assessments within the context of a very wet summer.

4.38 During the post-trial survey 70% of respondents said that the ability to influence changes to their agreement would make them more likely to continue with self-assessment.

Changes to HLS agreements

4.39 One of the assumed benefits of self-assessment is that agreement holders will be better informed about how their options are performing, better able to link management actions to outcome

achievement and thus have an increased ability to make better informed requests for amendments to their agreements.

4.40 At post-trial interview, although the response rate was low, some participants stated that self-assessment drew their attention to outcome related management issues. In general these were about the need for increased flexibility in light of weather conditions, occasional conflicts between management prescriptions and the influence of external factors such as predators.

4.41 Three participants made, or intended to make, requests for changes to agreement objectives and seven to management prescriptions as a result of the trial. In one case there was a request to add capital works. Facilitators also acted as catalysts for changes to agreements and this took place in five of the eight trials. In three trials, IoS were added or amended and in five trials management prescriptions were amended.

4.42 Facilitators were specifically asked if they viewed the IoS as appropriate and understood by agreement holders. Three trials responded in the negative, four in the positive and one was ambivalent. Arable IoS appear to be more readily understood by agreement holders than grassland ones. In general the negative responses laid the blame on the fact that IoS used language more appropriate to Natural England staff and needed to be simplified and slimmed down for agreement holders. Two facilitators mentioned the potential value of having overarching agreement level IoS. Facilitators also felt constrained by Genesis in their ability to improve agreement documentation and one raised the additional issue of limited budget availability for agreement amendments.

Participant views on the regard with which they are held by society

4.43 The large gap between the regard that agreement holders wished to be held in by society and the regard they felt that they were held in, did not change over the trial timeframe. The majority of participants indicated that they did not think that self-assessment would help in improving their image. One agreement holder did however contribute an article on his HLS agreement to his parish newsletter as a result of self-assessment.

Natural England and agreement holder relations

4.44 Facilitators were asked if they thought that self-assessment had improved relations between Natural England and agreement holders. Of the four who responded, 3 facilitators responded in the positive and one in the negative. There was also a tendency towards the view, where Natural England staff facilitated, that self-assessment improved their own understanding of management issues and practicalities faced by agreement holders.

Views on the future of self-assessment

General views

4.45 At the end of the trial, five of the eight facilitators supported the concept of introducing self-assessment on a wider scale under the new programme. Two gave unconditional support while the other three all gave caveats to their support. In order of frequency mentioned these caveats were:

- The high demands on Natural England staff time needs to be recognised and adequate resource allocation made.
- There needs to be a means of ensuring that agreement holders do not falsify data or otherwise “cheat”.
- There must be investment in time and money for training of agreement holders.
- There would need to be some means of verifying data quality if it is to be used for any wider purpose.

- The implications for agreement holders whose data shows suboptimal option performance needs to be clear and without financial penalty.
- The time involved for agreement holders must be recognised in payment levels.
- Self-assessment should not be imposed, it should only operate on a voluntary basis. As such it should not become a standard requirement of HLS options.
- If third parties are involved it must be on the basis of agreement holder approval.
- It must be delivered in a way that avoids it being seen as another bureaucratic burden by farmers.
- Data storage and interpretation facilities must be in place.

4.46 Only one facilitator was against a role for self-assessment as part of a new Rural Development Programme. However, this response acknowledged that the view may have been, at least in part, due to the negative impact that the wet summer had had on their trial. In one trial with partner participation the facilitator was ambivalent but the partner positive.

4.47 In terms of the potential of self-assessment to help provide long term environmental improvements, participating agreement holders' responses were mixed with no clear overall opinion in the post-trial survey. However, 28 of 35 respondents (80%) stated that they were likely or very likely to continue with self-assessment in the future. In some cases this was reliant on funding availability, but others intended to carry on regardless.

4.48 The post-trial interview also asked participants for their views about the future incorporation of self-assessment in agri-environment schemes, the probability of its success and any other comments. This question had a particularly high response rate with 115 comments made. 93 directly stated either endorsement or resistance to wider application of self-assessment in agri-environment schemes. Twelve gave unconditional endorsement and 68 gave conditional endorsement. Adequate support, in various forms, for agreement holders was by far the most frequently mentioned condition followed by the need for a simple, flexible and low demand approach. The ability to minimise any tendencies for misreporting was also included. Only 13 of the 93 comments were negative.

4.49 In summary, facilitators and participants gave strong support to a place for self-assessment in future agri-environment schemes. There are however significant caveats to this support. These primarily relate to the need for adequate training and support for agreement holders, adequate resource allocation from Natural England, the ability to compliance proof activities and the adoption of an approach that minimises burdens on farmers while being robust enough to inform agreement refinement and adaptation.

Partner involvement

4.50 Partners played a wide range of roles in the trials. In one case a partner NGO undertook the entirety of the facilitation. In this case they also undertook all the field work, reporting back to agreement holders and making suggestions if any beneficial changes to management practices or HLS agreement prescriptions had been identified. In another trial a partner assisted in identifying suitable agreement holders, attended meetings and helped develop the field assessment methodology. One partner organisation attended a local trial meeting and delivered a presentation on appropriate habitat management. This stimulated much discussion and left the agreement holders inspired to make beneficial changes to their agreement management. In another trial a partner joined a participant in their field assessment work to the reported benefit of both parties.

4.51 In only two trials was there a total absence of partner involvement. In one of these the facilitator reports that, in hindsight, inviting a specific partner organisation with an interest in the habitat involved would have been of value.

4.52 In discussions between facilitators and participants further opportunities for, and benefits of, partner participation were identified. These primarily related to involvement of NGO organisations. The most frequent suggestion was the inclusion of relevant partners in training, best practice visits and field work mentoring. It was also suggested that species records, such as those derived from NGO bird surveys could usefully be made available to agreement holders. There were opposing views on the potential to make this a two way process, with agreement holders providing partners with species records from their self-assessment. Some were against this in principal due to the perceived potential use of the data by planning authorities etc.

4.53 In two trials NGO partners had a much longer term involvement with monitoring the HLS agreements concerned but withdrawal from this involvement is seen as high probability due to funding issues. The establishment of a funded self-assessment supplement was viewed as a potential solution that may allow continued and increased involvement. Participants took two views of this, on one hand it was fully supported and seen as a solution to time constraints and potential skills shortages among agreement holders. Another view taken was that it would lead to unwelcome diversion of funding from the farming community to NGOs.

Group working

4.54 In three trials the volunteer participants were part of a group prior to the trials. In one of these, where the participants were affiliated to a partnership project, the participants did not work as a group during the trial and there was little evidence of sharing of experiences. In another, the participants were part of a wider producer group and again, but to lesser degree, this did not appear to result in significant collaboration during the trial. The strongest collaboration was exhibited by a trial based on a grazed common. In this case, although not all participants played a full role, a cohesive subgroup demonstrated strong joint participation in all aspects of the trial. This was the only trial where participants came together to discuss the trial outside of meetings organised by the facilitator. The facilitator for this trial reports that group working contributed to the success of the trial, pointing particularly to the effect of positive peer influence on participation rates.

4.55 In one trial the participants acknowledged the value of group working, but time constraints meant that this was not adopted. In a further two trials participating agreement holders knew each other prior to the trial, but this does not appear to have translated into any significant group working during the trial.

4.56 Despite the strong advocacy for group working in the ECSFDI paper and the view of several local trials that group working had high potential in areas such as networking, best practice, resource sharing and training, practicalities including time constraints, relationships and geographic dispersal presented significant barriers.

Stakeholder reaction

4.57 The initial draft of this report was circulated to the Environment Agency, CLA, RSPB, NFU and GWCT. The following is a summary from the three who were able to respond within the short time allowed.

RSPB:

- Having farmers that understand their agreements and Indicators of Success (IoS) is vital to the success of individual HLS agreements. However, following the trial, we remain unconvinced that a paid supplement is the most appropriate route to take.
- The critical element required to increase awareness of IoS amongst agreement holders is good aftercare and support from Natural England and, where appropriate, NGOs and others without the need for a paid supplement.
- If Defra decide to include a supplement for self-assessment in a future scheme, it is essential that all the caveats included in the paper are adhered to, not least:

1) The need for adequate training and support;
2) The need for adequate resource allocation from Natural England;
3) The ability for any funded activity to be compliance checked; and
4) If third party involvement is required but the agreement holder does not approve then they should forego any self-assessment funding.

- Any supplement should be tied to a discrete number of options for which it is deemed to be useful, rather than all HLS options.
- The RSPB would query the need to apply a supplement per option, as opposed to per agreement. It would seem that the latter would better reflect that it is the agreement outcomes, rather than individual option outcomes, that are most important, and also prevent agreement holders receiving the supplement for multiple options, which would inevitably lead to diminishing returns.

NFU:

- There was an element of self-selection by the agreement holders involved. There may be other difficulties if the approach was applied to all agreement holders.
- The number of participants was low and only a discrete subset of HLS options were considered.
- The benefits to the agreement holder need to be identified and emphasised.
- Scaling up the approach to a full agreement would not be possible as the farmer would run out of time to do all the assessments required by, and receive training for, each option.
- Given the apparent low level of agreement knowledge exhibited at the start of trials, NE need to invest more time explaining this at agreement application stage. OR were the results simply due to an unreasonable expectation in the ability of agreement holders to recite agreement objectives and prescriptions.
- How would self-assessment sit alongside RPA inspection & NE agreement monitoring activities?
- Time limitations upon agreement holders may impact on self-assessment.

GWCT:

- Agreement holders do need support from advisers to help them through the self-assessment process.
- Training and support could be provided from a range of appropriately qualified and trusted advisers who can work with the agreement holder. It could be beneficial for the farmer's FEP agent, where qualified, and relevant NGO staff to help assist with this process.
- Further work should be carried out on wading bird options, building on work by agreement holders Philip Merrick and Henry Edmunds.
- Lack of farmer confidence in carrying out assessments and to link their management actions with the desired outcomes is often the case. The approach to support and training that is outlined in the report, to combat this issue, is welcomed.
- There is a very real issue with the way in which HLS prescriptions are initially presented to agreement holders and how those agreement holders are engaged in development of their agreements. GWCT believe that the key here is full support and engagement of the potential agreement holder from the outset of the application process. Best practice examples of FEP agents and NE project officers working together, with the agreement holders, to ensure there is a good understanding from the start of the application process should become the norm. It is vital that there is a good understanding of the indicators of success from the completion of the FEP process.
- Presentation of the agreement documentation could be further improved and is key to helping get good engagement and understanding from the outset of an agreement.
- GWCT would be keen to be involved in the development of suitable training packages and support material is a welcome recommendation.

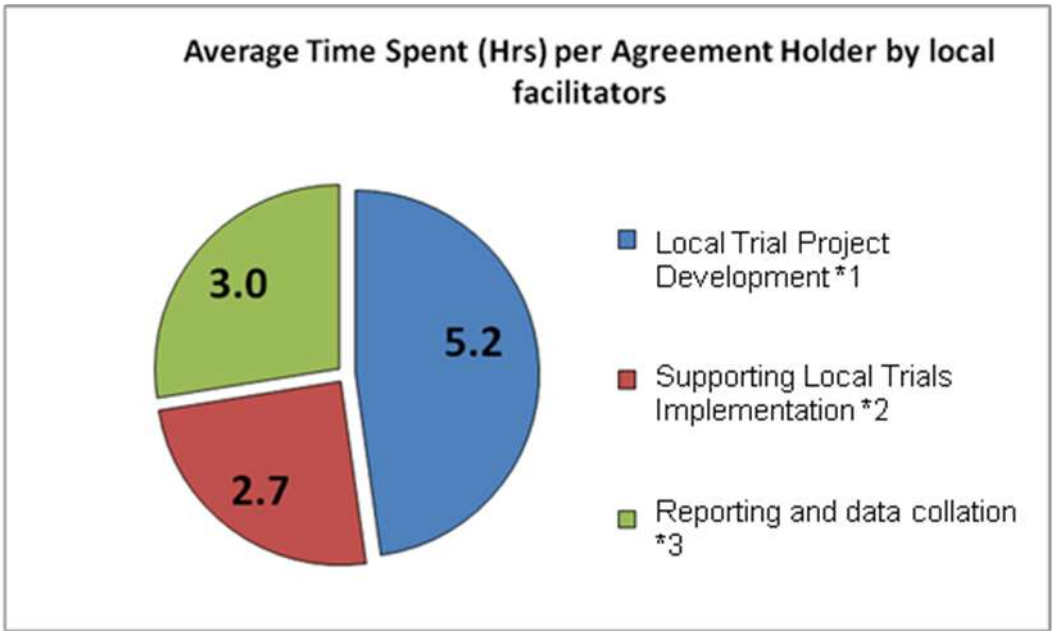
Budget and resource requirements

Natural England staff time

4.58 This section draws on information provided by facilitators in their resource log returns.

4.59 On average there were 2.4 meetings per participating agreement holder by local facilitators. This included initial meetings & workshops to agree the scope of each local trial, the HLS options that would be assessed, the field methodology to use, field work support and feedback collection.

4.60 In terms of actual time spent, facilitators spent an average of 11 hours per participating agreement holder, allocated between various activities as follows:



*1 The time devoted to local trial development can be seen as a year 1 resource cost for any agreement option. This would only have a minimal requirement in subsequent years. Taking the average of 5.25hrs, this would thus equate to approximately 0.5 hours per option per agreement over its 10 year life span.

*2 The time devoted to supporting implementation (ie training, assistance with field work) would be highest in year one, reducing over subsequent years as agreement holder confidence and ability increased. It is suggested that the need over years 1 & 2 would remain at an average of 2.75hrs, decreasing by 50% over years 3 & 4 and then by 75% over subsequent years. This would give an annual average of 1 hour per agreement option per year over the lifetime of the agreement.

*3 Reporting back largely involved reporting back to the national project group and chasing up farmers for attitudinal survey results and resource logs. This time can hence be considered extraneous to the core self-assessment activity. It should be noted however that negligible time was devoted to analysis and storage of field data gathered and feedback provision. Assuming that Natural England would wish to make wider use of the data or provide analysis and feedback services for agreement holders an additional time cost would be incurred. It is suggested that the 1 hour per agreement option is used as a proxy for these activities.

Figure 2 Average (mean) time spent per agreement holder by local facilitators

4.61 There was, however, considerable variation between local trials as shown in the table below:

Table 1 Average (mean) time spent, minimum time and maximum time (hrs) by local facilitator per agreement

	Average (mean)	Minimum	Maximum
Local trial development	5.25	1.7	10.2
Supporting implementation at HLS agreement level	2.75	0.6	7.2
Reporting & data collation	3.0	1.2	8.25

4.62 In summary, based on average times and the notes accompanying Figure 2, it is estimated that there would be an annual time cost to Natural England of 2.5 hours per HLS option per agreement to facilitate self-assessment. This figure is averaged over the 10 year lifespan of an agreement and it should be noted that initial set up time in year 1 would be considerably in excess of this.

4.63 It should also be noted that the times recorded do not include any allocation for undertaking self-assessment driven agreement amendments on Genesis.

4.64 Extrapolated to the current population of 11000 live HLS agreements and assuming self-assessment is undertaken on 2 HLS options per agreement, this would represent a resource demand of 37 FTE[1]. Based on a salary cost £1.83M[2], this equates to approximately 1% of the current annual RPDE revenue expenditure on HLS agreements[3].

Additional costs to Natural England

4.65 Additional costs to Natural England included staff Travel and subsistence (T&S) and fell into 3 main categories:

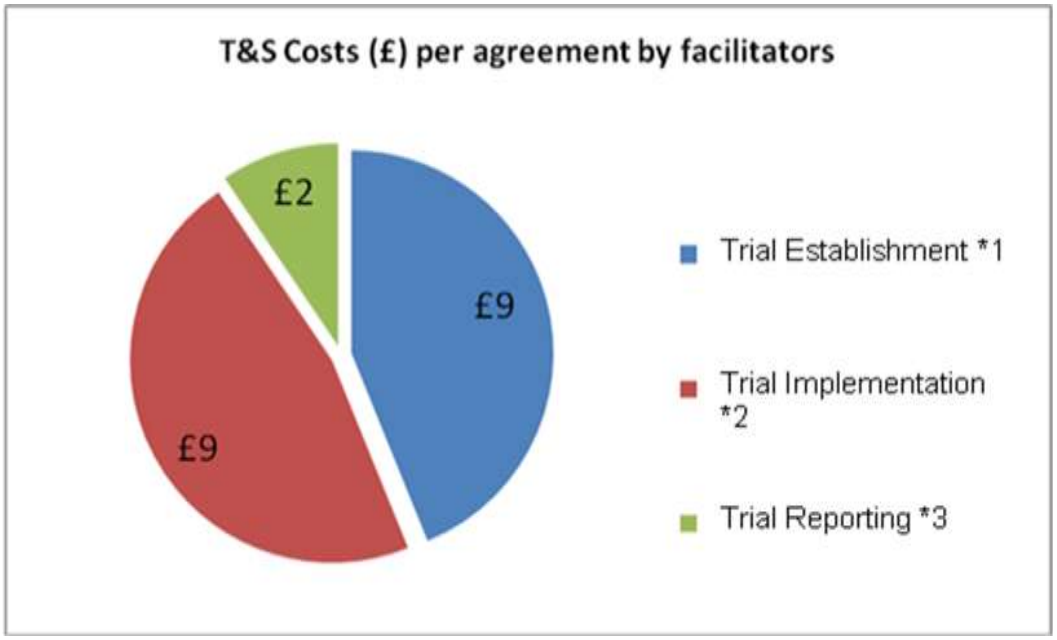
a) Costs associated with local trial establishment meetings with agreement holders, including T&S, venue hire and refreshments.
b) Costs associated with supporting implementation by agreement holders including staff T&S, equipment and supporting materials.
c) Costs associated with data collection and reporting.

4.66 The average T&S and other costs associated with each of these three categories is presented below.

[1] Based on 38 teams, this equates to approximately 1 FTE per local Land Management Team.

[2] Based on a 7.5 hour day, 200 productive days per FTE and an annual FTE cost of £50,000.

[3] Current annual revenue expenditure on HLS agreements drawn from Genrep report PR046 on 3rd January 2012, summing the (O)ELS and HLS components' 10 year revenue values and dividing by 10 to give a figure of £197M.

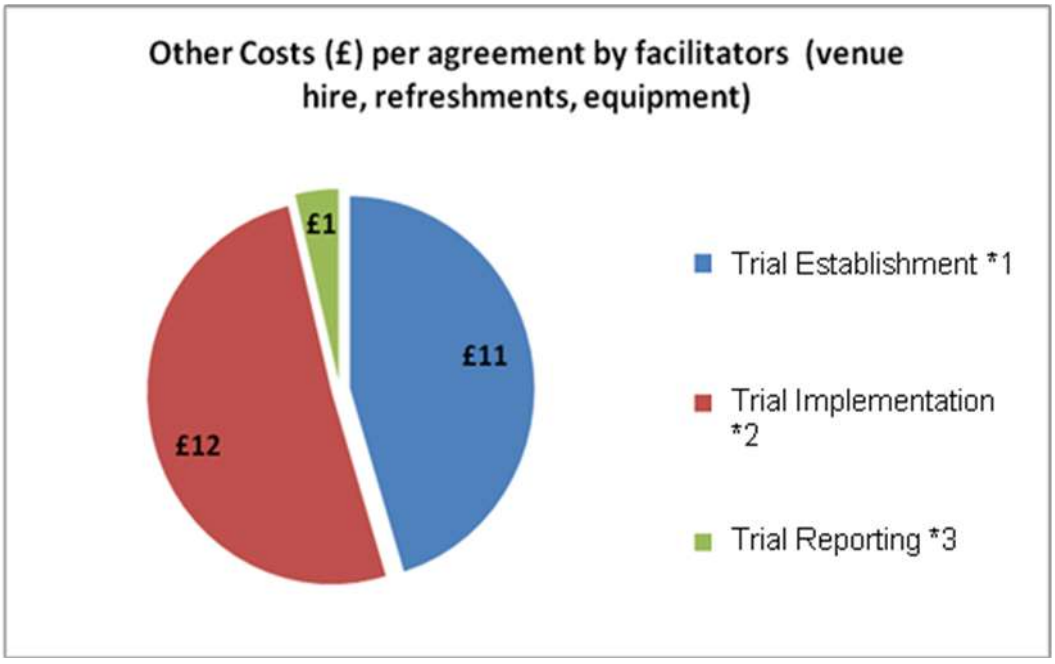


*1 Trial establishment T&S costs can be seen as one off costs that would only apply to year one. When averaged over a 10 year agreement lifespan, this would thus equate to approximately £1 annually per HLS option per agreement.

*2 Trial implementation T&S costs are centred on delivering training and supporting agreement holders in implementing field work. These can be expected to reduce in subsequent years in the same way as time spent supporting implementation as covered in the notes for Figure 2. This would give an average cost per HLS option per agreement per year of £4.

*3 Reporting costs largely relate to conducting wash up surveys and interviews with agreement holders and can be considered as exclusively related to the trialling aspect, ie they would not be incurred if Self-assessment is introduced as a business as usual process.

Figure 3 Average (mean) T&S costs per agreement by facilitators



*1, *2, *3 All costs here could be considered as one off trial establishment costs that would only be incurred in year one. When averaged over the 10 year lifespan of an agreement this would equate to approximately £2.50 per HLS option per agreement per year.

Figure 4 Average (mean) of other costs per agreement

4.67 As with the time spent per agreement, there was considerable variation in the cost incurred by each local trial. These are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Average (mean) costs, minimum and maximum costs per agreement

	Average (mean)	Minimum	Maximum
Trial establishment (T&S)	£9	£0	£28
Implementation at HLS agreement level (T&S)	£9	£0	£44
Reporting (T&S)	£2	£0	£24
Trial establishment (other costs)	£11	£0	£55
Implementation at HLS agreement level (other costs)	£12	£0	£54
Reporting (other costs)	£!	£0	£25

4.68 Using the average costs and taking into the consideration the notes accompanying Figure 3, it would seem reasonable to give an estimated additional annual cost of £7.50 per HLS option per agreement to implement self-monitoring. Extrapolated to the current population of 11000 live HLS agreements and assuming self-assessment is undertaken on 2 HLS options per agreement, this would represent an annual cost of £165,000.

Rural Development Programme funding implications

4.69 This section draws on information provided by participants in their time and cost logs. The template used is attached at Appendix 9.

Table 3 Average (mean) costs, minimum and maximum costs per agreement of trial participation

Time and cost averages to agreement holder participation in the trials	**Average (mean)**	**Min**	**Max**
Workshops, training and development (hrs)	3 *1	0.75	4
Field assessments, incl write up (hrs)	3.9	0.25	9
Group working (hrs)	2	0.5	3
Reporting (hrs)	2.1 *2	0.75	4
Total Time (hrs)	**11**		
T&S costs (@ £0.45/mile)	£5	£0	£22
Other costs	£0		
Total Costs	**£5**		
Total average trialling costs including agreement holder time @ £30/hours *1	**£335** *3		
Number of assessment field visits	2	1	6
Time per field visit (hrs)	1.25	0.5	2.5
Total time in the field	**2.5**		

*1 Workshops, training and trial development took an average of 3 hours per agreement holder. This will reduce after year one. On the assumption that the time will reduce by 50% in years 2 to 4 and by a further 50% over years 5 to 6, a reasonable annual average estimate would be 1.2 hours.

*2 This figure relates to trial specific tasks such as completion of time logs and wash-up interviews and surveys. This time cost would not be required in any wider roll out of self-assessment.

*3 This figures includes trial specific elements that would not be required in any wider roll out, as noted at *1 & *2.

4.70 Taking into account the figures in Table 3 and the accompanying notes, a reasonable estimate for the average annual time for agreement holders to undertake self-assessment on a single HLS option would be 4 hours in the absence of group working or 6 hours with group working. Along with the T&S cost, and allowing £30/hour, this would give a total annual average of £125 or £185 per option over the agreements 10 year lifespan. The annual average revenue cost of the HLS element of agreements is £11,780 (data extracted from Genrep PR046 report on 3rd Jan 2013). Assuming an uptake of self-assessment on two options per agreement, the cost would thus be between 2% and 3% of the average annual revenue cost of the HLS element of agreements. For the current population of live agreements this would be between £1.4M and £2M.

5 Recommendations

5.1 There should now be a wider scale, but restricted, implementation of self assessment based on a discrete subset of HLS options. The aim should be to refine standard methodologies, agreement holder training packages, costs and resource requirement for these options. Given that the best successes in this trial featured arable options, hay meadows and moorland habitats these should be the primary focus of any further development.

5.2 Within this implementation, the following recommendations should be incorporated:

- Incentives should be provided for participation. The potential to use the existing HLS Management Plan (PAH) payment to provide a short-term mechanism for limited implementation should be further explored.
- Field assessment methodology and associated paperwork must be as easy to use as possible and tested with the farming community prior to use.
- Indicators of Success and the current approach taken to them, will need to be revised to make them more suitable as a basis for self-assessment.
- Training packages and support materials for agreement holders are essential and should be prepared in advance to allow adequate preparation for self-assessment. Partner organisations may have a role to play in this.
- A voluntary approach to the uptake of self-assessment by agreement holders should be applied to maximise buy in and quality of results.
- Field visits must take place at the appropriate time of year for the HLS option being assessed. Where possible peaks and troughs in the farming year should also be taken into consideration.
- Initial field assessment visits by agreement holders should be made on an accompanied basis for mentoring and training purposes. This role may be able to be filled by partners as well as Natural England.
- The implications of shortfalls in the achievement of outcomes being identified through self-assessment needs to be made clear and unambiguous. This should not result in retrospective penalty if, despite following prescriptions, an option fails to perform.
- Set dates for completion of field work and return of field assessment records by agreement holders should be established.
- Results verification and compliance checking methods need to be developed. Photography may be able to contribute to this.
- Natural England must follow through such that effort by agreement holders is reciprocated. A clear response strategy and provision for the storage, interpretation and use of resulting data should be developed by Natural England.
- Partner organisations, especially NGOs, have much to offer within self-assessment, but to avoid any negative reaction it is important that this is done with the full approval of individual HLS agreement holders.
- Local community volunteer involvement should be encouraged and taken up. This has potential to increase wider understanding of farming and agri-environment schemes. It also has potential to boost the regard that agreement holders are held in by society, through industry lead promotion, and to contribute to DEFRA community engagement policies.
- Alternatives to Natural England delivering facilitation, training and support should be explored. For example, there may be scope to use Rural Development funding to support 3rd party delivery of these aspects in a similar fashion to the way that ETIP is currently funded.
- A two tier approach should be considered. The primary focus of self-assessment on increasing agreement holder understanding and ownership of agreement outcomes does not demand production of high quality scientific data. There may, however, be a role for a more

demanding self-assessment tier whose data can be fed into the wider science community and scheme evaluation studies.

Appendix 1 Summary Stakeholder views on self-assessment prior to development and implementation of the trials, extracted from August 2011 responses to MESME proposals

ADAS

No comment.

CAAV

Getting farmers to self-monitor just looks like adding another regulatory burden.

In relation to self-assessment, in my opinion there are a number of different types of agreement holders. Whilst those with core objectives in the environmental world will be very happy to follow through on self-assessment, those whose primary role is in farming are less likely to do so. Farmers' aims and aspirations are basically to farm the land, taking into account both agricultural and environmental considerations. In my experience, self-monitoring never works, nor does the use of advisers - who also have an interest in the local area. Farmers and landowners do not generally wish to break the rules or the law, but in all ELS/HLS agreements there are parameters or guidelines which are to say the least grey. The danger is that HLS is managed on a "book basis", rather than reflecting the balance between nature, agriculture and the environment generally to produce a benefit. Benefits are by their nature in environmental terms generally subjective.

CLA

The CLA is supportive of self-monitoring provided that it is voluntary and not compulsory for the agreement holder involved. Such an approach would require guidance and advice but would need to be simple and not burdensome for the agreement holder to complete. It would also need to be free to agreement holders. If any of these principles could not be met then a payment would need to be attached to it as a voluntary option.

Co-oP

No comment.

English Heritage

Allowing applicants to take greater ownership of progress towards IoS has to be a good thing, if only to make them better aware of what is expected of them.

GWCT / FWAG

This approach could increase ownership of agreements – we would welcome the opportunity to help develop this approach and we believe it should be well researched and piloted before being adopted.

LEAF

LEAF has a strong history on the use of self-monitoring and assessment and we are clear that there is effective ownership and progression with its use. We therefore believe the scope to be a good one.

NFU

Some agreement holders will be interested to carry out self-monitoring, but only if this is simple, voluntary and carries a low administrative load. We can see that this kind of monitoring could provide a useful insight into the scheme and potentially provide a useful mechanism to flag up issues to Natural England.

RSPB

In future encouraging applicants to monitor their own progress towards the better worked up indicators of success is an excellent way to maintain motivation and commitment to an agreement. However it can never be a substitute for agreement assessment and monitoring to ensure compliance, in addition to understanding and progress.

TFA

This could work well with a fully developed idea, encouraging farmers to monitor their own agreements. We would suggest that ETIP may be useful to help farmers gain an understanding, perhaps at group meetings or 1:1's. This should be instead of or in turn for reduced inspections or used as monitoring with the project officers. It is important that farmers' suggestions are listened to with regard to outcomes, as this has been a problem in the past.

Appendix 2 Selection criteria used select the local trial locations

The aim was for each criterion to be met by at least one local trial. Cumulatively the local trials hit 20 of the 23 desired criteria. Nature Improvement Areas (NIA) and Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) were also originally covered but the NIA based trial refocused due to other pressures on the NIA at the time and the CSF trial pulled out prior to implementation. No proposals included coverage of EA Demonstration Test Catchments.

Table A Selection criteria

Selection criteria		
NE land management region	South West	✓
	East & South East	✓
	Midlands	✓
	North	✓
Existing monitoring activity over and above NE/RPA activity	By NGO body 1	✓
	Other	✓
3rd party involvement	Landlord	✓
	Agri-business (for example, dairy company)	✓
	Local govt.	✓
	NGO	✓
	In EA DTC	X
	None	✓
	NIA	X
Existing collaboration	Existing group	✓
	Group agreement	✓
	None	✓
Geographical continguity of farm holdings	Yes	✓
	No	✓
Focus of agreement outcomes	Biodiversity – grassland	✓
	Biodiversity – arable	✓
	Resource protection	X
Existing known management issues (may be related to agreement holder concerns)	Yes	✓
	No	✓

Appendix 3 Agreement holder pre-trial survey template and responses

HLS self-assessment trialling project – agreement holder participant questionnaire

Pre-trial survey

Questionnaire for completion by participants

Introduction

HLS self-assessment seeks to provide agreement holders with a greater understanding of the aims of their agreement and the way that management influences whether these aims are achieved. It is also intended that self-assessment will offer an opportunity for land managers' experience and knowledge to influence agreement management.

Natural England and its partners are trialling self-assessment in a number of areas in order to understand if it would be a viable option for a future agri-environment scheme. The trials are designed to provide information on the practicalities and costs of self-assessment and most importantly, to gather agreement holder's views on the value of self-assessment.

In order to help us gather this information, we have designed this short questionnaire. You will be asked to complete a similar questionnaire at the end of the trial. The questionnaire should take you around 15 minutes to complete.

Your answers will provide critical information on the likely impact of self-assessment, so please do take the time to consider each question and complete the questionnaire fully. The views you express during this interview are confidential, and will not be used to identify you as an individual.

Trial:	
Participant:	

Question 1

1) On a scale of one to ten, with one being not at all and ten being entirely, to what extent do you support the objectives of the agreement option being assessed in the trial?

Don't support at all									Entirely support
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

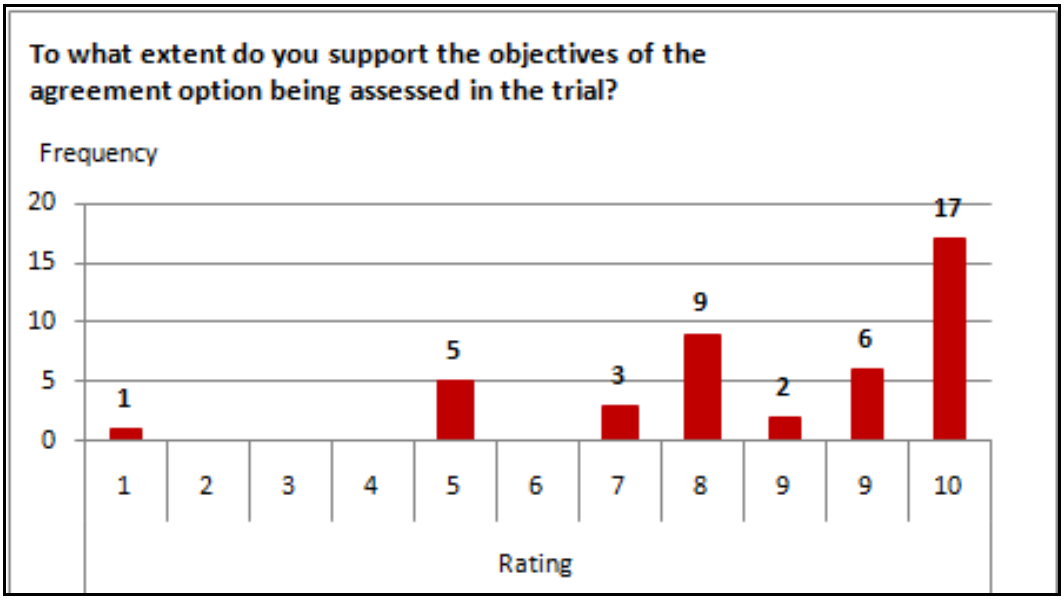


Figure A Results for Q1

Demonstrates broad existing agreement with the objectives of the option assessed in the trial. Scores are skewed to the right with a median value as high as 9.0., and mean of 8.33.

Question 2

2) On a scale of one to ten, with one being not at all and ten being very, how important is it to you personally that the objectives are achieved?

Not important at all									Very important
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

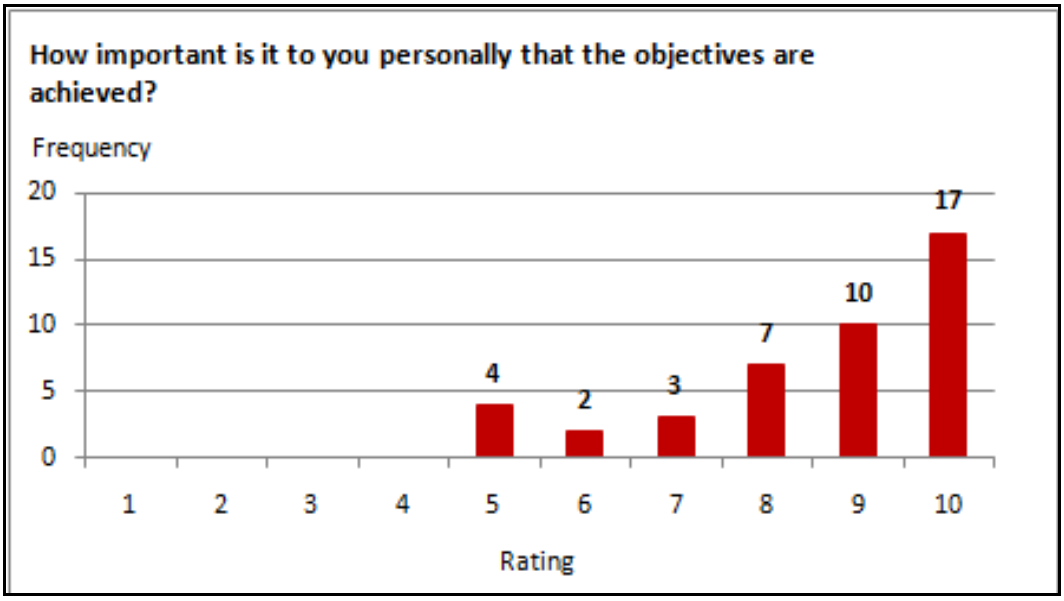


Figure B Results for Q2

Again scores on this measure are skewed, with a median of 9.0, and a minimum of 5.0. It is difficult to imagine many participants offering a negative response to this question. It is interesting to note that six participants responded around the central value of 5 – 6.

Question 3

3) And again on a scale of one to ten, how important is it to you personally that the agreement results in environmental improvements?

Not important at all									Very important
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

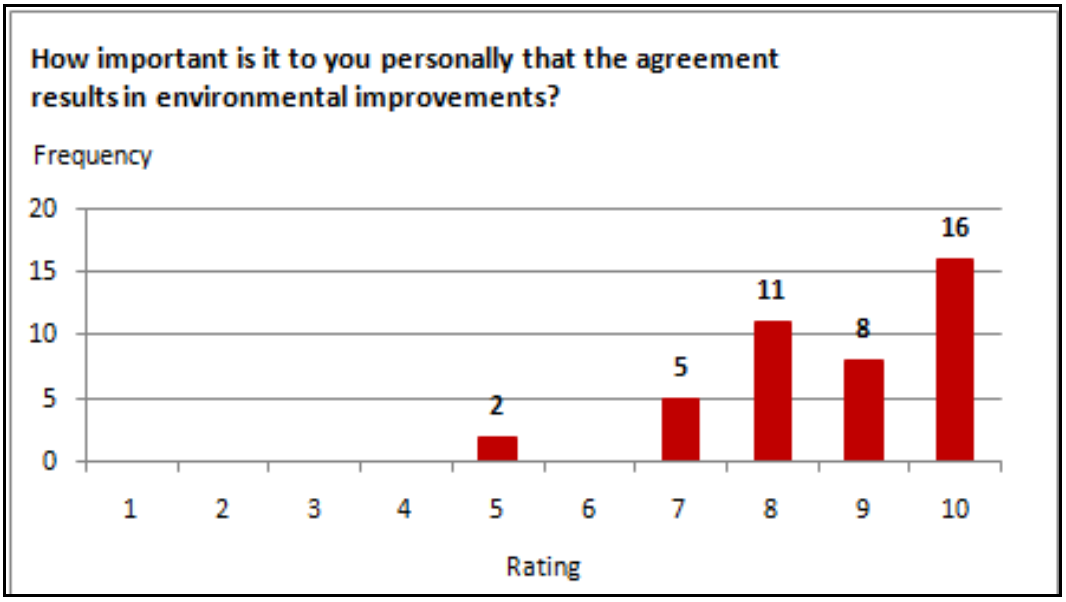


Figure C Results for Q3

Aside from a couple of scores of 5.0, the remainder of participants already score this question very highly, suggesting the delivery of environmental improvements from agreements is held in high regard. It will be interesting to see whether there is any movement in the lower scores following the post-trial questionnaire.

Question 4

4) On a scale of one to ten, with one being not at all and ten being entirely, to what extent do you support the idea of self-assessment?

Don't support at all									Entirely support
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

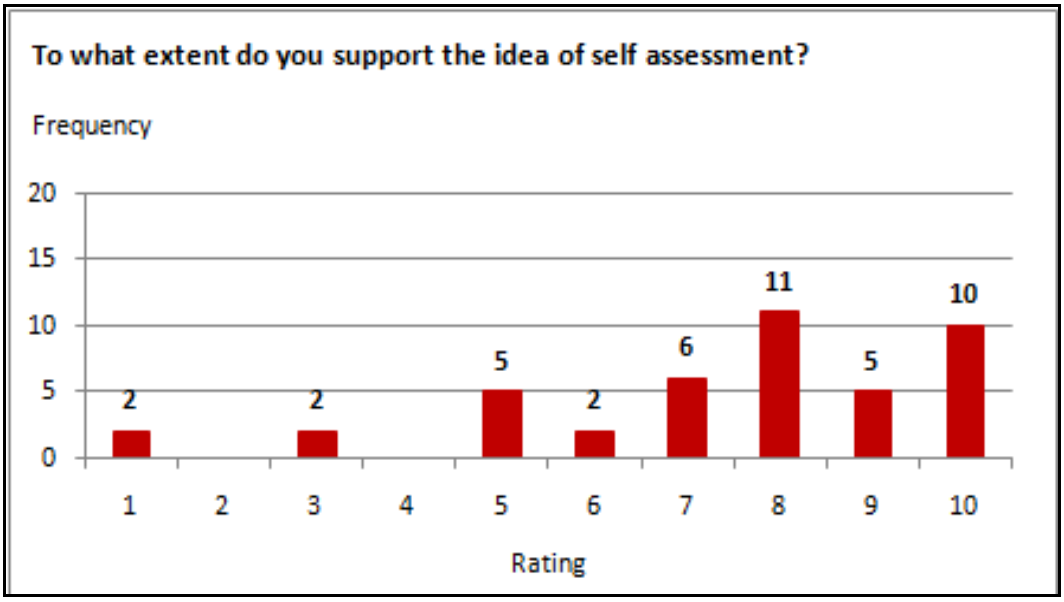


Figure D Results for Q4

A much more mixed set of responses for this question. Scores are less densely packed around the mean and around a quarter of participants score this measure at 6.0 or below. However, the majority of participants seem to be support the idea, which is to be expected given that they opted-in to the trial in the first place.

Question 5

5) On a scale of one to ten, with one being not at all, and ten being very concerned, how concerned are you that self-assessment will lead to greater scrutiny of your agreement?

Not concerned at all									Very concerned
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

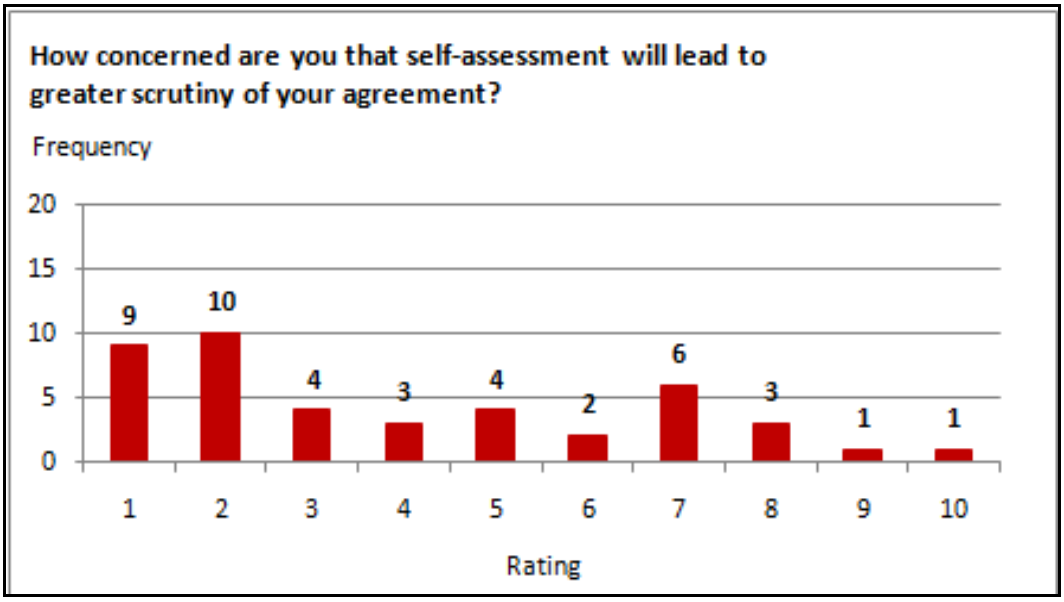


Figure E Results for Q5

Here a score of one equals "not concerned" and a score of ten equals "very concerned". Here it can be seen that again, respondents are less sure about this question in comparison to others. It is interesting to note that this question correlates quite strongly with the question above about support for self assessment - suggesting that reassuring agreement holders that this system is not about increased scrutiny may lead to increased buy-in for the scheme.

Question 6

6) On a scale of one to ten, with one being not at all, and ten being entirely, how confident do you feel about carrying out self assessment?

Not confident at all									Entirely confident
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

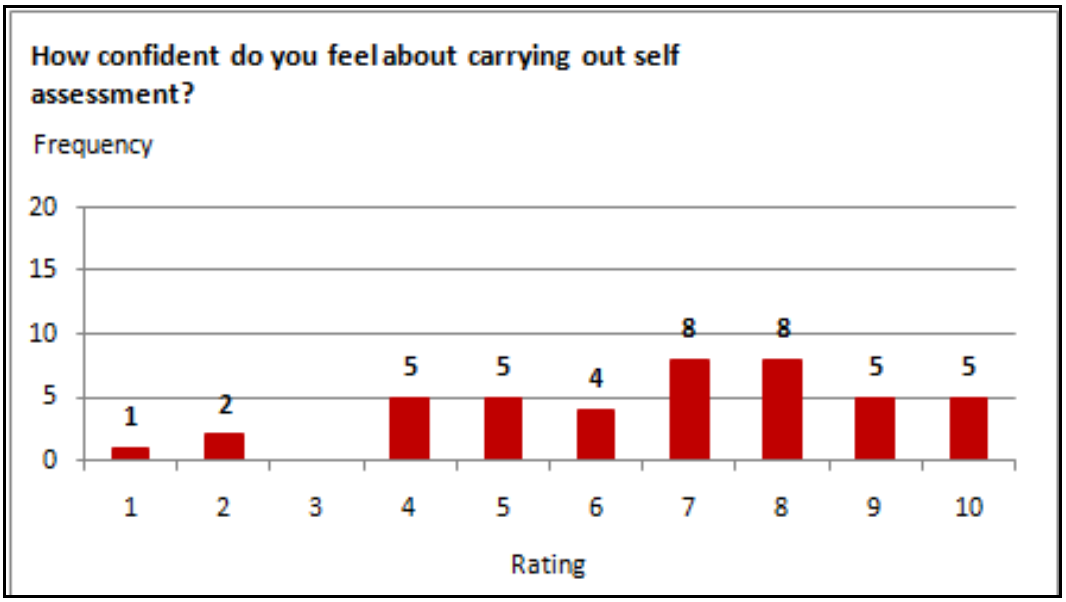


Figure F Results for Q6

A much wider distribution of scores for this question, with fewer scores of 9.0 and 10.0 and a lower median of 7.0. The scores provide good evidence that there is uncertainty amongst participants about how they will carry out self-assessment, and were this a full scale roll out such results may give cause for concern.

Question 7

7) Again, on a scale of one to ten, how would you rate the chances that self-assessment will help provide long term environmental improvements?

Very low chance									Very high chance
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

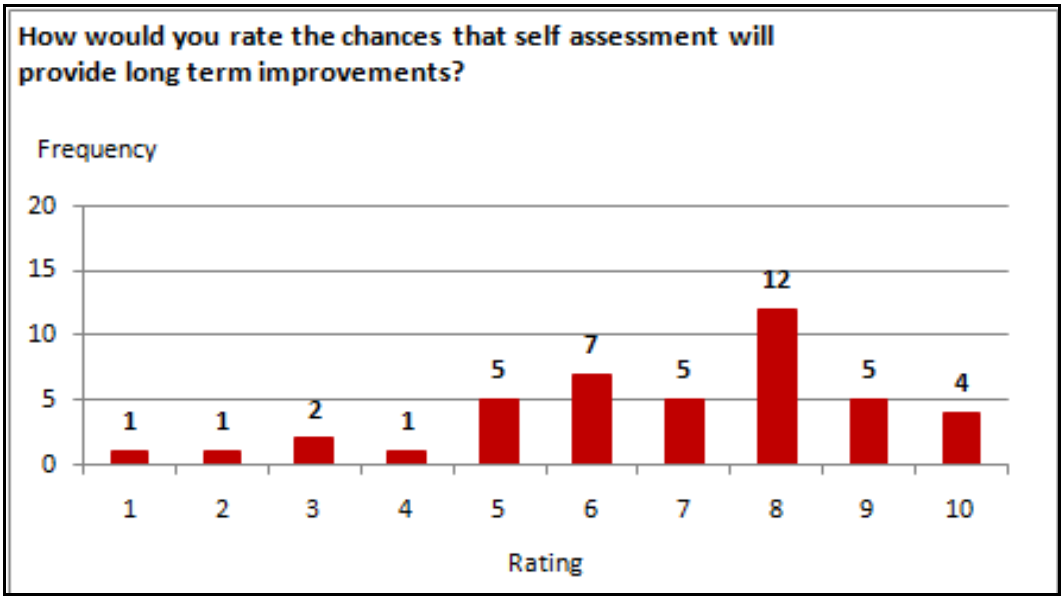


Figure G Results for Q7

It is encouraging to see that around half of participants rate the chances of success at an 8.0 or above. However, 17 rate the chances of success at six or below. This question correlates with the one above about overall support for self assessment - suggesting the two concepts are tied.

Question 8

8) How important or unimportant do you feel it is for an agri-environment agreement holder to be positively regarded by:

	Very important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Very unimportant
a) Other agreement holders					
b) The local community					
c) The general public					
d) The media					

Question 9

9) And how positively or negatively do you feel you are currently regarded by:

	Very positively	Positively	Neither positively nor negatively	Negatively	Very negatively
a) Other agreement holders					
b) The local community					
c) The general public					
d) The media					

Question 10

10) And to what extent do you think self-assessment will change the way you are regarded by:

	Much more positive	More positive	Stay the same	More negative	Much more negative
a) Other agreement holders					
b) The local community					
c) The general public					
d) The media					

Gap analysis - importance versus current level of regard - favourable agreement only.		
	How important or unimportant do you feel it is for an agri-environment agreement-holder to be positively regarded by...?	How positively or negatively do you feel you are currently regarded by...?
Other agreement holders	66.7	42.9
The local community	92.9	57.1
The general public	88.1	23.8
The media	73.8	28.6

Figure H Results for Q8, Q9 and Q10

This gap analysis shows the potential for change. In the left column the positive results to the important/unimportant question are aggregated (ie the important and very important scores are combined). In the right column the positive answers to the positive/negative question are aggregated (ie the positive and very positive scores are combined). It can be seen that while almost three quarters of participants feel it is either important or very important to be positively regarded by the media, only 28 percent feel they currently are.

The picture is even more negative for the general public measure - almost all participants feel it is either important tor very important to be positively regarded by the general public, but less than a quarter feel they currently are.

What is then more problematic is that participants aren't convinced that self assessment will change things much. Just over three quarters think things will stay the same with regards to other agreement holders; two thirds think nothing will change for the local community or general public; and just under three quarters think that the media's opinion will either stay the same or worsen as a result of self assessment.

Appendix 4 Responses to the pre-trial interview

Question 1

1) Can I ask you, from memory, what you understand the objectives are for this option?

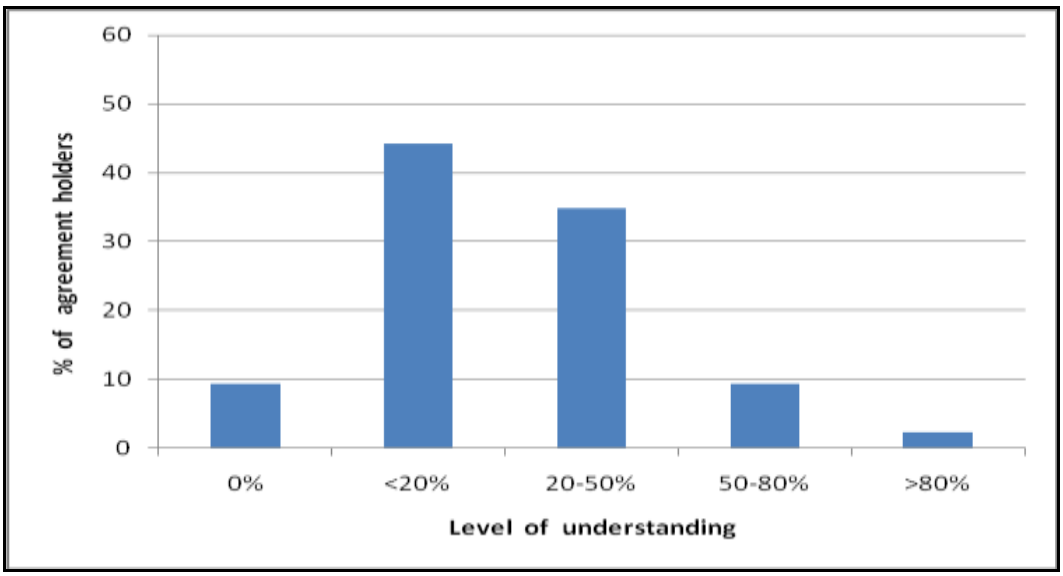


Figure I % match between the agreement objectives described by agreement holders and the objectives and IOS set out in agreement document

Question 2

2) And can I ask, again from memory, what management your agreement requires you to carry out on your land that is under this option?

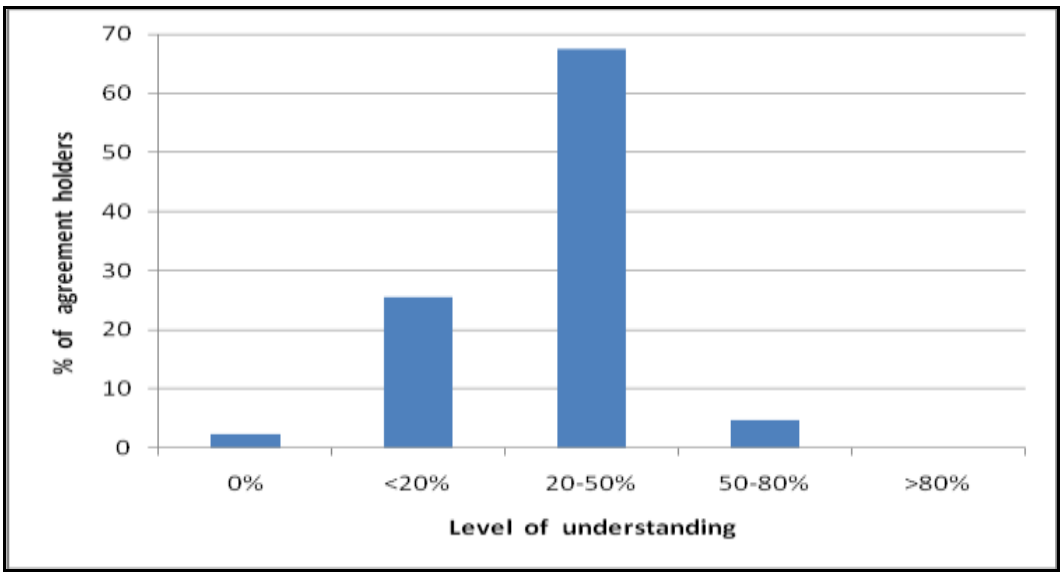


Figure J % match between the management prescriptions described by agreement holders and the management prescriptions set out in the agreement

Notes and caveats on the results for Q1 & Q2

The following methodology was used to obtain a measure of agreement holder familiarity with the detail of the objectives, Indicators of Success (IoS) and management prescriptions included in their agreement document.

Agreement holders were asked to recall the objectives and/or Indicators of Success (IoS) and the management prescriptions included in their agreement for the HLS option(s) they had elected to assess. This was carried out using the standardised interview schedule. The stated objectives, IoS and management prescriptions were noted by the interviewee, separately for each option. As far as was possible and in most cases, agreement holders' descriptions were noted word for word.

In order ensure consistency of approach, the interview results from all eight local trials for Q1 & Q2 were analysed by a single member of staff from the national project team. For each HLS option, the list of objectives/IoS and prescriptions stated by agreement holders were compared against those set out in the agreement documents. Where an objective/IoS or management prescription described by the agreement holder had captured the broad meaning of the agreement document, it was counted as a match. The match rate across all the objectives/IoS and management prescriptions was then calculated as a percentage and banded as shown in the charts. It is acknowledged that this may not be a very effective absolute measure of agreement holder familiarity with their agreement objectives, IoS and management prescriptions.

The results suggest a low level of agreement holder familiarity with and focus on their agreement objectives, IoS and prescriptions. The feeling from several of local trial delivery leads is that the results under-estimate the true level of agreement holder understanding. To quote from the report of one of the trial leads "When the results were presented participants also felt that the apparent lack of knowledge of agreements is deceptive, they do know what is needed but just can't verbalise it when put on the spot. 'Tongue-tied' was how one put it."

Or as one stakeholder pointed out "I still think this is unreasonable expectation. That's like asking you if you could recite all of the handbook requirements word for word, as well as the SPS requirements that farmers need to know. Even NE staff find the IoS complex and confusing".

The wording of Question 1 made it unclear whether it related to listed FEP features, the IoS, the objectives stated in the general option description or the handbook description for the option concerned, all of which differ in their degrees of specificity. As a result there was some uncertainty among facilitators on how to approach Q1 and a lack of consistency in approach in how it was handled.

In combination, the factors above raise questions about the validity of the results for Question 1 in particular. There is low confidence in the reliability of the results as a measure of the knowledge that agreement holders have of their agreements' objectives. This also applies to the comparison between the pre-trial and post-trial responses to Question 1 contained in Annexe 6.

There is, however, a perception amongst facilitators and stakeholders that the results reflect the complexity and relative inaccessibility of the wording in agreement documentation.

Question 3

3) Thinking specifically about the management your agreement requires you to carry out, do you have any concerns that the objectives for the agreement option or options included in the trial can be achieved? Can you briefly explain these concerns?

Table B Responses to Q3

Summary issue		No of times raised
Participant needs more flexibility to manage...	To carry out field operations earlier in year/in response to weather conditions	16
	To control rushes/weeds/ragwort	
	To clear ditches	
	To Spring graze for weed control on organic farm	
	Water levels	
	Cutting frequencies & dates	
Rules around location of options too inflexible, not able to be adapted where target species are present in non-target locations		1
Where management requirements are uncertain at the outset, there needs to be more flexibility to match the actual costs as they arise		1
Prescriptions need to be more tailored to the holding and to the individual land areas		1
Management prescriptions need amending/adapting	Needs a management plan	3
	Management plan impractical	
	Management plan too prescriptive	
Additional management action/funding is needed	For predator control	2
	To control tor grass	
Participant doesn't like the prescriptions (?!)	For retaining water	2
	Grass mix unpalatable to stock	
Delivering management prescriptions adds to the work load (?!)		2
Prescriptions are confusing	Livestock unit equivalents	1
Management is difficult to deliver	For wet grassland is difficult/access is difficult	11
	For livestock/grazing especially when relying on graziers	
	To establish seed/wildflower mixes	
There are problems with herbicide resistance, particularly blackgrass		1
Natural England needs to keep up to date with industry rules/eligible products		1
More support is needed over implementation of difficult management options		2
Participant not sure if option is right for his land type		1
Membership of an organisation or group can be very helpful in getting support/learning from the experience of others		1
Early to say if management is right	Water level management is complex	1
Agreement holders may not be control of the outcomes, for example, ground nesting birds being disturbed by dog walkers, predated etc.		2
10 years isn't long enough for outcomes to be achieved on some sites/with some management options		1

Question 4

4) Do you want to raise any other issues or do you have any other comments about the self-assessment trial, including whether you feel you already carry out a degree of self-assessment for the agreement option include in the trial, whether you have any concerns about including self-assessment in agri-environment agreements more widely and whether self-assessment is likely to be successful if widely adopted?

Of 97 comments, 30 were wholly positive, 28 positive but with caveats, 31 neutral and 8 negative about self-assessment raised.

Table C Responses to Q4

Summary issue		No of times raised and classification off responses in terms of support for self assessment
Participant supports self-assessment/thinks it is a good idea/ because...	will focus his/her attention on outcomes	13 (+ve)
	help to build sense of achievement	
	allow him/her to feed back issues	
	help to increase knowledge on what works well	
Participant supports self-assessment/thinks it is a good idea because will show if outcomes being delivered and potentially require Natural England to amend management prescriptions which he/she thinks are inappropriate		2 (+ve)
Participant supports self assessment but...	Will be too expensive: training,..	16 (conditional +ve)
	thinks agreement holders may not/be able to do a good job	
	thinks agreement holders may not have the time	
	it's too soon to tell if it will work	
	it will need commitment	
Participant thinks that self-assessment will work generally		7 (+ve)
Participant thinks self assessment should be added as an agreement option/payment		3 (+ve)
Participant/agreement holders think they already carr(ies/y) out some self assessment		16 (neutral)
Participant thinks that it will be helpful to involve third parties		2 (+ve)
Participant thinks that self assessment might work, but...	Thinks that monitoring will be low on agreement holder's priority list	12 (conditional +ve)
	Important to set outcomes carefully	
	Important to keep it simple	
	Needs more guidance	
	Thinks agreement holders & Natural England really need independent verification that outcomes being met.	
	Will need close supervision	
	Some might falsify results	

Table continued…

Summary issue		No of times raised and classification off responses in terms of support for self assessment
Participant feels able to self-assess IOS but not SSSI outcomes which he/she regards as being too stringent		1 (neutral)
The results of self assessment will be variable depending on the participant		2 (neutral)
Participant thinks that self assessment won't work, because it should be done by professionals		1 (-ve)
Participant doubts that self assessment will improve outcomes		1 (-ve)
Participant doesn't have the skills to carry out self-assessment	RSPB/volunteers/consultants should do it Needs more training	8 (neutral)
Agreement holders need more information on baselines		2 (neutral)
Participant does not want more disturbance from/and/or more people visiting the agreement land		3 (-ve)
The design of self-assessment shouldn't be focussed on preventing the falsification of records		1 (-ve)
Self assessment appears to be cost saving exercise		1 (-ve)
Self assessment is difficult for agreement holders who do not live on the land		1 (-ve)
It will be necessary to actively promote self assessment to encourage participation		2 (neutral)
Self assessment will be useful for engaging the farming community/general public		3 (+ve)

Appendix 5 Post-trial survey template and responses

HLS self-assessment trialling project – agreement holder participant questionnaire

Post trial survey

Questionnaire for completion by participants

Introduction

This is a repeat of the questionnaire which you completed at the start of the self-assessment trial. Many of the questions are the same but some are different, so please do take the time to consider each question and complete the questionnaire fully.

The views you express during this interview are confidential, and will not be used to identify you as an individual. The questionnaire should take around 15 minutes.

Trial:	
Participant:	

Question 1

1) On a scale of one to ten, with one being not at all and ten being entirely, to what extent do you support the objectives in your agreement?

Don't support at all									Entirely support
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

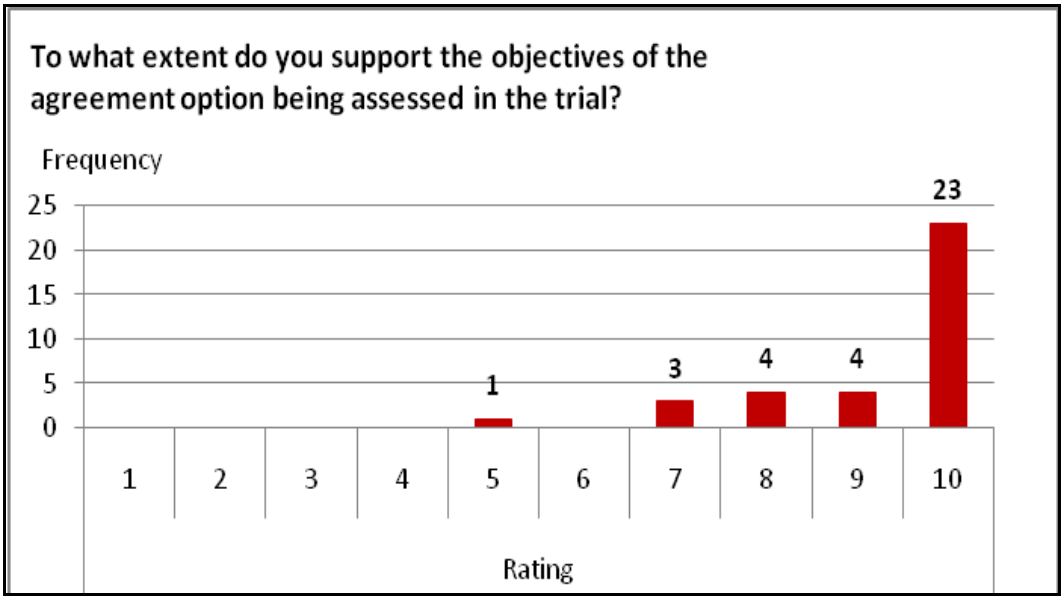


Figure K Results for Q1

The post-trial questionnaire demonstrates strong overall agreement with the objectives of the option assessed in the trial. Scores are skewed to the right, with a median value of 10.0 and mean of 9.26. The result of the Related Samples Wilcoxon signed Ranks Test show that the post-trial ratings are significantly higher than the pre trial rankings (p = 0.18).

Question 2

2) On a scale of one to ten, with one being not at all and ten being very, how important is it to you personally that the objectives are achieved?

Not important at all									Very important
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

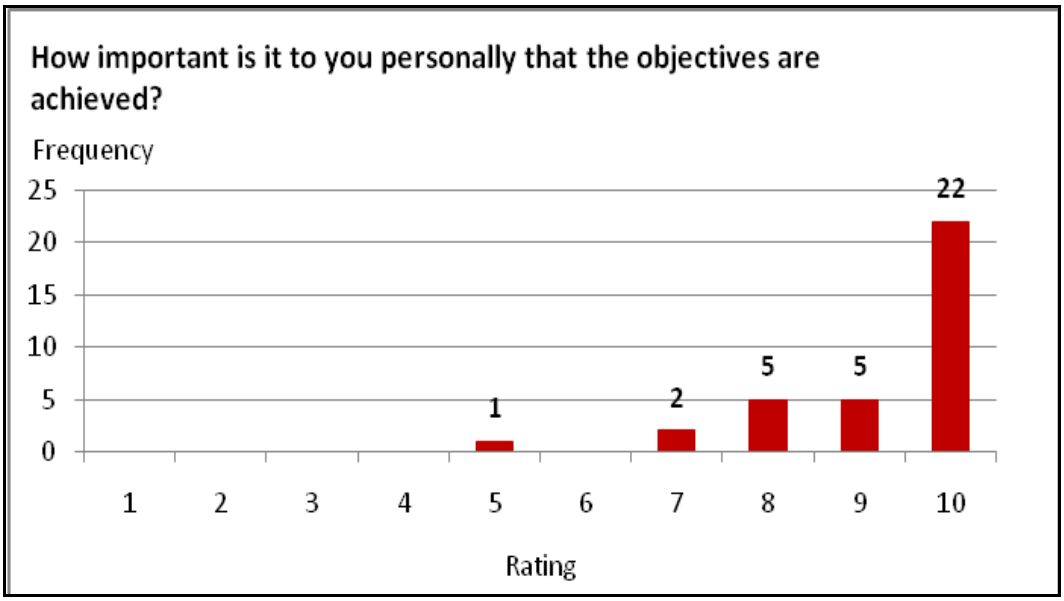


Figure L Results for Q2

Again scores on this measure are skewed, with a median of 10.0, and a minimum of 5.0. Ratings on this question are more favourable than they were during the pre-trial phase. Indeed the results of the Related Samples Wilcoxon signed Ranks Test show that the post-trial ratings are significantly higher than the pre-trial ratings (p = 0.13).

Question 3

3) And again on a scale of one to ten, how important is it to you personally that the agreement results in environmental improvements?

Not important at all									Very important
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

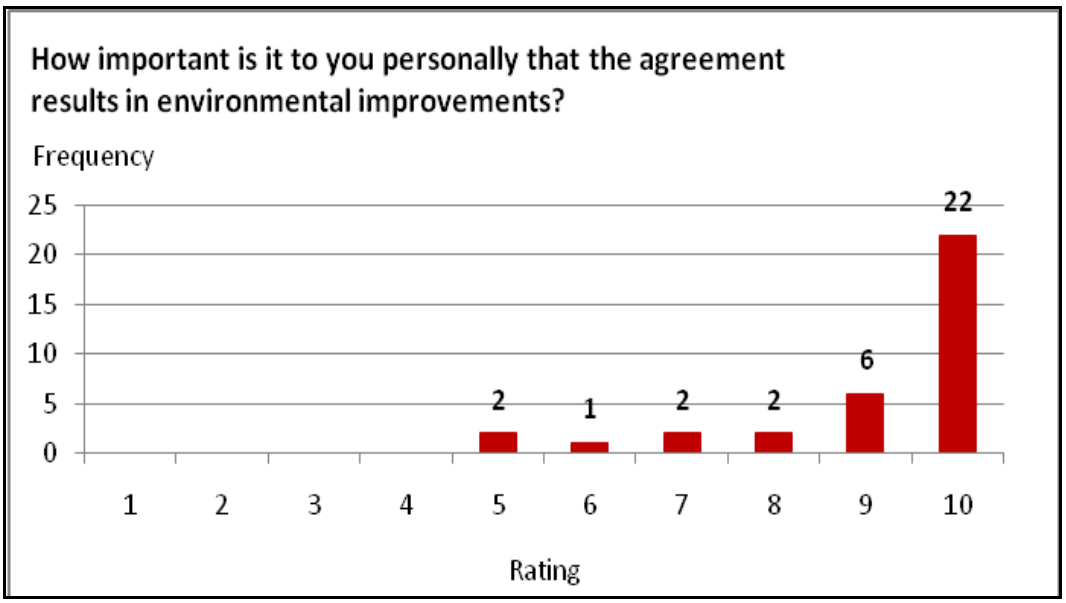


Figure M Results for Q3

Although the mean rating increased from 8.69 to 9.13, and there were overall a higher number of '10' ratings in the post-trial (22) than in the pre-trial (16), differences between the two samples are not statistically significant.

Using the Related Samples Wilcoxon signed Ranks Test reveal there is no significant difference between the pre-trial and post-trial ratings for this measure (p = 0.267).

Question 4

4) On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate the chances that self-assessment will help provide long term environmental improvements?

Very low chance									Very high chance
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

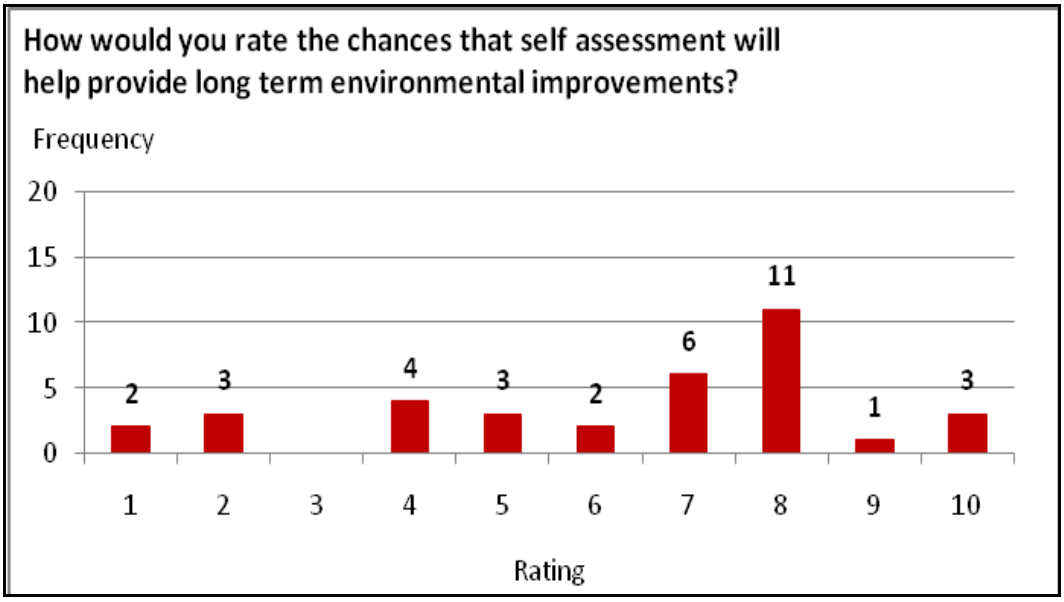


Figure N Results for Q4

This question results in a much more mixed set of responses. Scores are less densely packed around the mean and around a third of participants score this measure at 5.0 or below, while the mean score was 6.3.

Question 5

5) Based on your experience during the trial, how likely or unlikely would you be to continue with self assessment in the future?

Very likely	Likely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Unlikely	Very unlikely

Results: Encouragingly, 28 of the 35 respondents - 80 percent, responded that they would be either likely or very likely to continue with self assessment in the future.

Question 6

6) And based on your experience during the trial, how likely or unlikely would you be to recommend self assessment to other agreement holders?

Very likely	Likely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Unlikely	Very unlikely

Results: Slightly less responded that they were either likely or very likely to recommend self-assessment to other agreement holders. Here around 69 percent said they would recommend it.

Question 7

7) On a scale of one to ten, with one being not at all, and ten being very concerned, how concerned are you that self-assessment will lead to greater scrutiny of your agreement?

Not concerned at all									Very concerned
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

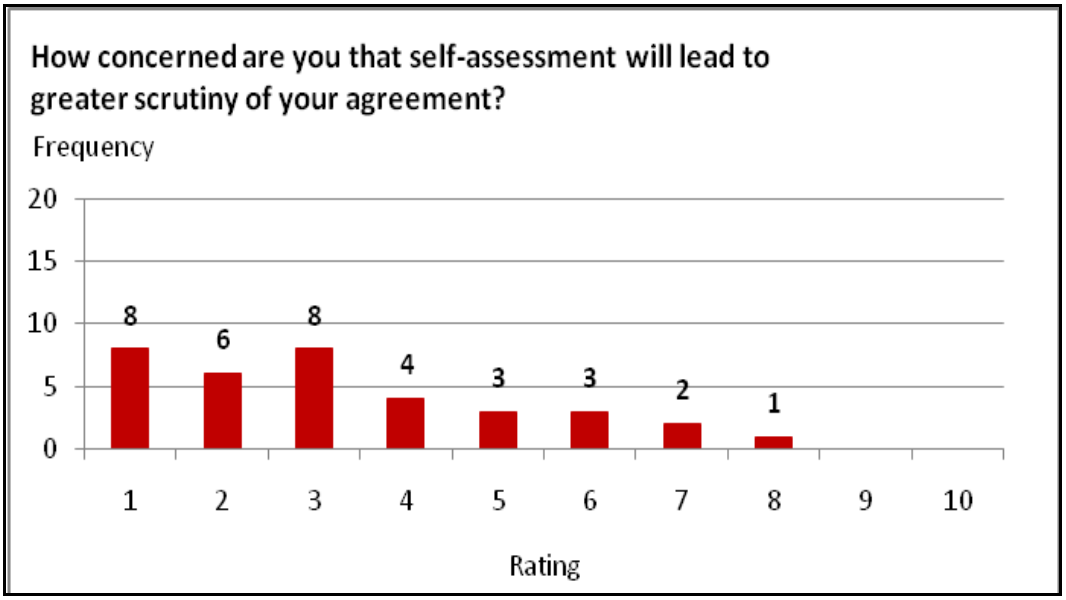


Figure O Results for Q7

Respondents were less sure about this question in comparison to others.

The post-trial mean score of 3.3 is lower than the pre-trial equivalent of 4.0. In addition the maximum score pre-trial was 10.0 whereas it is only 8.0 post-trial. However the results of the Related Samples Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test indicate there is no significant difference in the pre-trial and post-trial ratings ($p = 0.326$).

Question 8

8) Would you be more willing to continue with self-assessment if this would result in fewer visits to assess your agreement?

Yes	No

Results: Only 31 respondents answered this question and the results are essentially split down the middle. Some respondents also stated separately that they would prefer more visits.

Question 9

9) Thinking about the way the issues below have been approached during the trial, would you like to change them or keep them the same?

	Would change	Would keep the same
a) The choice of feature to monitor		
b) The method used to monitor the feature		
c) The way data was recorded and collected		
d) The training and support provided		
e) Working with other agreement holders		
f) Working with landlords, volunteers or other partners		
g) The impact self assessment had on your agreement		

Table D Responses to Q9

Valid	Frequency	Valid percent
Would you change the method used to monitor the feature?		
No	29	87.9
Yes	4	12.1
Total	33	100.0
Would you change the way the data was recorded?		
No	29	87.9
Yes	4	12.1
Total	33	100.0
Would you change the training and support provided?		
No	27	79.4
Yes	7	20.6
Total	34	100.0
Would you change the way you work with other AHs?		
No	25	80.6
Yes	6	19.4
Total	31	100.0
Would you change the way you work with landlords, volunteers or other partners?		
No	22	88.0
Yes	3	12.0
Total	25	100.0
Would you change the way self-assessment impacted your agreement?		
No	25	92.6
Yes	2	7.4
Total	27	100.0

Looking at this series of questions which asks whether respondents would change ('yes') or keep the same ('no') certain elements of self-assessment the following is clearly evident:

- On the whole participants seem to agree that few changes need to be made In particular there was almost universal consensus that there was no need to change the way self assessment impacted on the overall agreement.
- The area where there was the least agreement was around training and support where seven participants stated they would like to see some sort of change.

Question 10

10) As a result of the trial, have you asked or do you intend to ask for your agreement objectives to be changed?

Yes	No

Results: Looking at the responses participants gave to this question it is clear that few intend to ask for agreement objectives to be changed as a result of the trial.

	Frequency	Valid percent
No	32	91.4
Yes	3	8.6
Total	35	100.0

Question 11

11) As a result of the trial, have you asked or do you intend to ask for your management prescriptions to be changed?

Yes	No

Results: In contrast to the above, slightly more - 11 percent, intend to ask for management prescriptions to be changed as a result of the trial.

	Frequency	Valid percent
No	28	80.0
Yes	7	20.0
Total	35	100.0

Question 12

12) Would the ability to influence changes to your agreement make you more likely to continue with self-assessment?

Yes	No

Results: Almost two thirds of participants stated that the ability to influence changes in their agreements would make them more likely to continue with self assessment.

	Frequency	Valid percent
No	10	28.6
Yes	25	71.4
Total	35	100.0

Question 13

13) How important or unimportant do you feel it is for an agri-environment agreement holder to be positively regarded by:

	Very important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Very unimportant
a) Other agreement holders					
b) The local community					
c) The general public					
d) The media					

Question 14

14) And how positively or negatively do you feel you are currently regarded by:

	Very positively	Positively	Neither positively nor negatively	Negatively	Very negatively
a) Other agreement holders					
b) The local community					
c) The general public					
d) The media					

Question 15

15) And to what extent, if at all, do you think self-assessment will change the way you are regarded by:

	Much more positive	More positive	Stay the same	More negative	Much more negative
a) Other agreement holders					
b) The local community					
c) The general public					
d) The media					

Results for Q13, Q14 and Q15: The Related Samples Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Tests indicates there is no significant difference between pre- and post-trial rating.

Appendix 6 Post-trial interview results

Question 1

1) Can I ask you, from memory, what you understand the objectives are for this option?

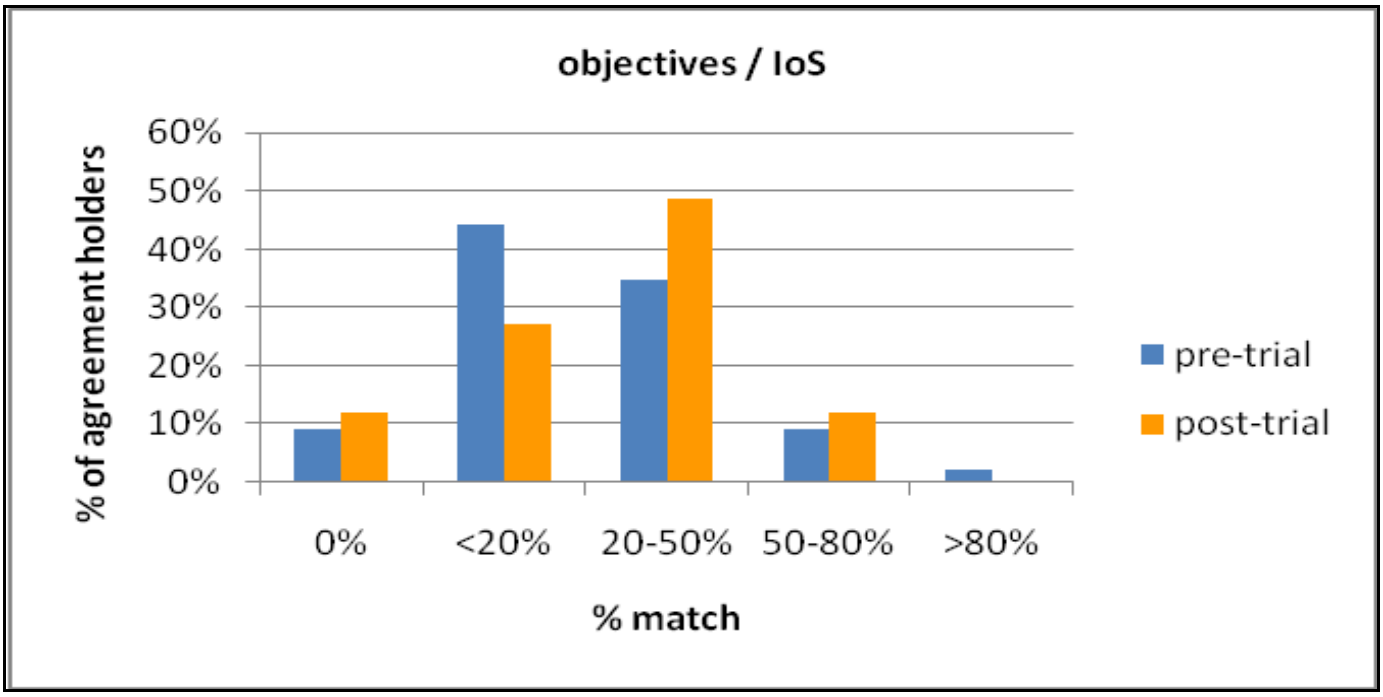


Figure P Results for Q1 (43 pre-trial & 33 post-trial respondents): % match between the agreement objectives described by agreement holders and the objectives and IOS set out in agreement document

Figure P shows the percentage of respondents at pre- and post-trial interviews whose answers fell into the following bands when comparing their answers with the objectives/IoS stated in the agreement documentation:

- 0% (no match);
- <20% match;
- 20-50% match;
- 50-80% match; and
- >80% match.

Of the 43 respondents to the pre-trial interview, only 35 responded to the post-trial interview and of those only 33 answered Q1.

The more detailed comparison between the pre- and post trial interview results for Q1 in Table E below is limited to the 33 who answered Q1 in both interviews.

For this analysis, the percentage match between the objectives of the option(s) as stated by the agreement holders and that stated in agreement document was converted to a ranking, as follows:

rank	% match
2	0% match
3	<20% match
4	20-50% match
5	50-80% match
6	>80% match

Table E Cross tabulation of the pre- and post-trial results for Q1

			IOS / objectives end of trial				
		Rank	**2.0**	**3.0**	**4.0**	**5.0**	**6.0**
IOS / objectives start of trial	**Rank**	**Number of participants →** ↓	4	9	**16**	4	0
	2.0	3	2	1	0	0	0
	3.0	13	1	8	**4**	0	0
	4.0	15	1	0	**12**	2	0
	5.0	1	0	0	0	1	0
	6.0	1	0	0	0	1	0

In Table E we can see that of the sixteen participants who ranked '4' at the end of the trial, four had improved having been ranked '3' at the start. The other twelve showed no change. This is shown by the entries **emboldened** in the above table.

The results of the comparison were subject to the Related Samples Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. The result of this test is that there was no statistically significant change in the ability to correctly state that the objectives/IoS of the options during interview (p = 0.405).

There are significant caveats around these results, as detailed in the notes accompanying the interpretation of Q1 and Q2 at pre-trial stage in Appendix 3 at page 34. In summary it is not felt that these results are reliable.

Question 2

2) And can I ask, again from memory, what management your agreement requires you to carry out on your land that is under this option?

Figure Q, below, shows the % of the respondents whose answers at pre- and post-trial interviews fell into the bands used in analysing the results for Q1. In this case, of the 43 participants who undertook the pre-trial interview, only 34 responded to Q2 in the post trial interview.

The more detailed comparison between the pre- and post trial interview results for Q2 shown in Table F below only uses the results from the 34 participants who answered Q2 in both interviews.

The percentage match between the option(s) prescriptions as stated by the agreement holders and that stated in agreement documents was converted to a ranking in the same as carried out for Q1.

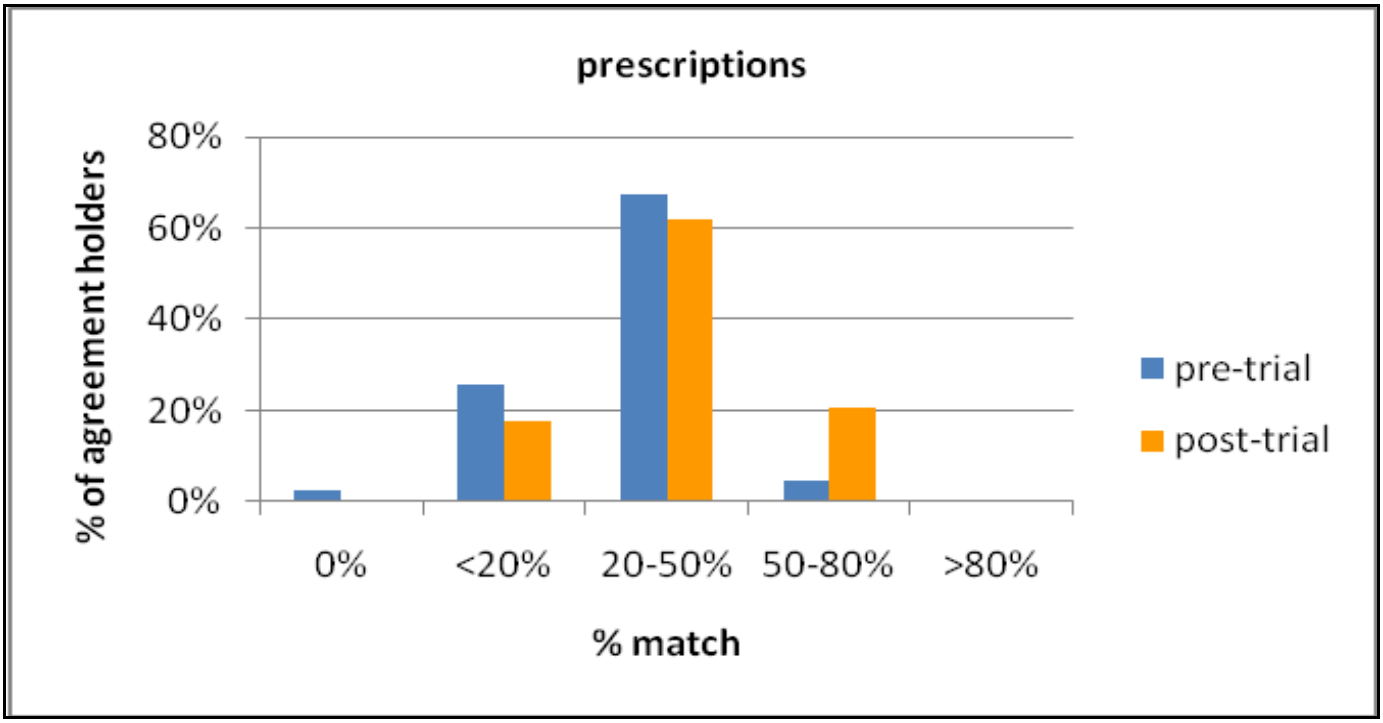


Figure Q Results for Q2 (43 pre-trial & 34 post-trial respondents): Pre-trial % match between the management prescriptions described by agreement holders and the management prescriptions set out in the agreement

Table F Cross tabulation of the pre- and post-trial results for Q2

			Management prescriptions end of trial				
		Score	**2.0**	**3.0**	**4.0**	**5.0**	**6.0**
Management prescriptions start of trial	**Score**	**Number of participants →**	0	6	**21**	7	0
	2.0	1	0	0	**1**	0	0
	3.0	10	0	3	**5**	2	0
	4.0	22	0	3	**15**	4	0
	5.0	1	0	0	0	1	0
	6.0	0	0	0	0	0	0

In the table 4 we can see that of the twenty one participants who ranked '4' at the end of the trial, six had improved, one having been ranked '2' and five having been ranked '3' at the start. The other fifteen showed no change. This is shown by the entries **emboldened** in the above table.

Again, the results of the comparison were subject to the Related Samples Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. This time the result showed a statistically significant improvement in the ability to correctly state the prescriptions of the options during interview. (p = 0.14).

Question 3

3) Based on your experiences during the trial, what do you feel have been the main benefits and/or disadvantages of self-assessment or you as an agreement holder?

Table G Table of responses to Q3

Benefits	**No of times raised**
It has helped me/us to focus on and understand what the agreement is supposed to achieve	8
It helped me develop more knowledge about the target features	1
It has provided me with a structured way of measuring progress	2
It has given me/us the incentive to make time for and take notice of agreement features/the results of my management practice	12
It provided information on what is being achieved	2
It has improved my understanding of the effects of my management on agreement features	4
It has helped me/us to carry out better management planning	1
It has given me better access to specialist advice	2
Total no. of responses related to focus on achieving outcomes	**(32)**
Working to deliver self assessment has helped build better relationships (between commoners/landlord/Natural England)	2
Enabled me to share information on what was being achieved with the local community (through parish newsletter)	1
Total no. of responses related to sharing information/relationship building	**(5)**
It has reduced the number of visits from Natural England/third parties	1
It has reduced workloads for Natural England/third parties	1
Total no. of responses indicating benefits	**37**
Disadvantages	**No of times raised**
The extra work involved in delivering self assessment	12
Finding a suitable time with the right weather conditions to carry out the assessment	8
The planning for and additional burden involved in remembering to carry out assessments at the right time	3
More paperwork/Having to fill in forms	4
Total no. of responses related to additional burden on agreement holders	**(27)**
I felt that I did not really have the knowledge, skills and time to carry out self assessment effectively	4
It has not helped me to feel any less disillusioned and confused about my agreement and farming in general	1
There was a lack of consistency of approach between agreement holders	1
Total no. of responses indicating disadvantages	**33**

Number of 'different' issues raised = 19 (benefits = 12, disadvantages = 7) Total number of issues raised = 70

Question 4

4) Would you like to make any other comments about the way issues have been approached during the trial and how could this be improved?

Table H Table of responses to Q4

Summary issue	No of times raised
It was presumed that our level of knowledge was higher than we felt it to be	2
Would have liked more support/training/guidance	8
Would have like clearer information about intended agreement outcomes	1
It would have been helpful to have the involvement of specialists (an independent assessment)/specialist equipment (GPS)	2
Would have liked better supporting materials: a map, better forms	4
Total no. of responses relating to training and resources	**17**
The trial could have been timed to fit with options and/or farm management better	5
The trial should have been longer	1
Birds are a difficult feature for agreement holders to assess, wildflowers would have been easier	1
Another trial participant suggested to me that it is possible to simply create false records	1
Total no. of responses related to the need for improvement	**25**
The group meetings/sharing knowledge with other agreement holders were very helpful	2
The information provided, recording forms and support were good	5
The training provided was useful	2
Total no. of confirming satisfaction	**9**

Question 5

5) Thinking specifically about the management your agreement requires you to carry out, has taking part in the trial raised any issues for you about achieving the objectives for the option or options included in the trial? Can you briefly explain these concerns and say how the trial has made you aware of them? If you have asked or intend to ask for your agreement to be amended can you briefly describe how?

Table I Table of responses to Q5

Summary areas of concern which trial drew attention to...	No of times raised
Hay cutting dates and the need to adapt to weather conditions/seasonal variation	1
Grazing and the need for more flexibility to adapt to weather conditions/seasonal variation	1
Management of weeds, the need for more concerted and regular management and conflicts with other management requirements	5
Restrictions on herbicide use can make it difficult to deliver requirements and the derogation system is too slow to allow effective reaction to conditions on the ground	2
Cattle grazing requirements may result in problems with delivering other prescriptions and IOS around poaching	1
The effects of weather and seasonal variation are not taken into account in the way agreements operate	2
Delivery of agreement outcomes is likely to be influenced by factors outside the agreement holders control, especially for populations of mobile species	1
Establishment problems with wild bird seed mixes and obtaining good advice on seed mixes and their establishment	1
Predator control and disturbance of ground nesting birds needs to be given more attention	3

Number of 'different' issues raised = 9. Total number of issues raised = 17

Question 6

6) Based on your experience during the trial, do you want to raise any other issues or do you have any other comments about the self-assessment trial, including a) concerns about including self-assessment in agri-environment agreements more widely and b) whether self-assessment is likely to be successful if widely adopted?

Table J Table of responses to Q6

Summary issue	
Statements unconditionally supportive of wider roll out	
Self assessment would be successful/because	**No of times raised**
It would be successful	2
It would improve agri-environment agreement monitoring by/providing more continuity/involving those with closer contact with and better knowledge of the land	3
It will encourage agreement holders to focus on agreement features and the results of their management practice	1
It might help some agreement holders to focus on what their agreement is supposed to be achieving	4
It would help to inform more adaptive agreement management	1
Speaking to others/neighbours suggest that they would be supportive/interested in participating	1
Total no. of unconditional positive responses	**12**

Table continued…

Conditionally supportive Statements	
Self assessment would work best if....	**No of times raised**
Third parties, particularly research bodies/bodies with a serious interest in understanding biodiversity management in the long term , could become involved and add support	5
Government, public, private bodies and land owners and managers could be more integrated to deliver self assessment and act on the information it would provide	1
If agreement holders are facilitated to work together and learn from each other (group discussion, workshops, field visits)	5
If the delivery body has the resource to provide adequate follow up/support when self assessment indicates a need for agreement amendment	5
If outcomes can be adapted as the agreement progresses	3
Total no. of responses related to outcome focus and adaptation	**19**
If monitoring can be carried out during the agreement holder's routine without requiring time and journeys specifically for assessment	4
Agreement holders are required to produce proof, photos for example, that the self assessment work has been carried out	1
Agreement holders could choose what they felt able to contribute to self assessment	1
If self assessment requirements can be tailored to the agreement and agreement holder	4
If recording can be kept simple/user friendly	5
If regular prompts could be given when assessments need carrying out (by email for example)	4
Total no. of responses related to the delivery approach	**19**
It could provide agreement holders with a means to get more enjoyment out of their land management	1
The same feature identification, measurement criteria, terminology was used for SSSI and agri-environment agreements.	1
Agreement outcomes could encompass socioeconomic, cultural and heritage outcomes in a more holistic way.	1
Self assessment might be successful/but	**No of times raised**
Some agreement holders may not take the requirements seriously/would put other farm work first	4
Some agreement holders might just regard self assessment as 'easy money'	4
Some agreement holders might falsify records	3
Total no. of responses doubting agreement holder ability and commitment	**11**
Significant support, access to specialist advice, guidance, training and tools (maps, forms, timetables) would be needed	11
It should be voluntary	3
It would need to be supported by a payment	1
Carrying out self assessment could become something that agreement holders and the delivery body pay lip service to rather than take seriously	1
Total no. of qualified positive responses	**68**

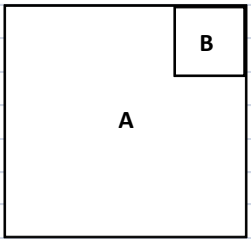
Table continued…

Statements not in Support	
Self assessment would not be successful/because	**No of times raised**
It would not be successful	1
Agreement holders will not have the time/resource to carry it out	3
Agreement holders will not have the expertise to deliver it effectively and/or interpret the results	5
Most agreement holders will not want to fill in assessment forms	1
Agreement holders do not want to advertise the fact that they have an agreement and are in receipt of public funds	1
It will lack credibility	2
Total no. of negative responses	**13**
Other/miscellaneous issues raised	**No of times raised**
Self assessment should be an agreement requirement	1
There should be payments to cover the costs of delivering self assessment	1
It would be better/should be made possible to pay third parties (with the right expertise) to assess the delivery of outcomes	4
The additional resource which would be needed by the delivery body would be justified	1
Monitoring will need to be carried out consistently over a few years before it can provide meaningful result because seasons vary	3
It should allow a better understanding of the relationship between annual variation in weather and the delivery of outcomes	1
Paying agreement holders for self assessment could result in significant negative publicity over inappropriate use of public funds	1
It will not be easy for agreement holders to deliver self assessment effectively	1
Agreement holders will find some features much easier to monitor than others	3
It would be a good idea if....	**No of times raised**
If there could be publicity about measuring and delivering outcomes to demonstrate to the public that agri-environment agreements are worthwhile and recognise the effort made by agreement holders	3
If self assessing agreement holders can be given regular feedback on what they are achieving	1
There could be a national database and website where self assessment data and related management advice could be shared and agreement outcomes demonstrated.	1
If signs could be provided to self assessing agreement holders to inform members of the public about self assessment	1

Appendix 7 Examples of monitoring forms used by local trials

Kinniside Common Trial, Cumbria

MONITORING FORM: HEATH	
Site:	
Grid ref:	
Date:	
Heath/Fragmented heath?	
Winter grazing? Y/N	
Photo taken A?	
Photo taken B?	
Heath Species present: Y/N	
Heather – Calluna	
Bilberry	
Cross leaved Heath	
Bell heather	
Gorse	
Cladonia lichens	
Minimum sward height (cm)	
Maximum sward height (cm)	
Average sward height (cm)	
Area A:	
% of shoots grazed – heathland species?	
% of shoots grazed – grasses?	
Area B:	
Number of heath plants?	
% of shoots grazed?	
Measurement x 5 on heather plants	Length in cm
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
Birds seen/heard on visit? List species.	
Completed by:	



Oxfordshire species rich grassland

Agreement Reference		Name of SSSI (if applicable)	
Management option (ES code) and any supplementary option(s)		SSSI Unit number (if applicable)	
RLR Parcels		HLS feature, ie Farm Environment Plan (FEP) code	
Assessed by		Date of assessment	

It can be useful to record information for points or stops especially if there is variation in the feature of if a number of separate areas/parcels are being assessed.

Variable	Target [from Indicators of Success or other guidance]	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Average %	Target Pass/ Fail
Cover of injurious weeds, ie creeping/spear thistle, curled/broad leaved dock, nettle, ragwort %													
Cover of wildflowers %													
Cover of grass %													
Cover of trees & scrub %													
Average sward height cm													
Cover of bare ground %													

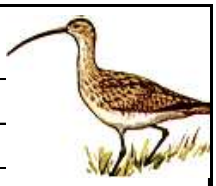
Evaluation and management	
Are the targets and/or Indicators of Success being met? If not consider which ones are failing and why that might be.	
How has the land been managed since the last assessment? What actions do you need to take or changes in management do you need to make?	

It may help to record information from a number of points during the structured walk. This is particularly useful if there is variation in the feature of if a number of separate areas/parcels are being covered. This table can be used to record information from stops but it is optional and there is no requirement to record at points or to complete a particular number.

Lowland Meadow Specagreement holders											
Variable/ Species	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	**Average**
Agrimony											
Common Knapweed											
Meadowsweet											
Lady's Bedstraw											
Meadow Vetchling											
Rough/Lesser hawkbits											
Oxeye Daisy											
Common Bird's-foot-trefoil											
Cowslip											
Yellow-rattle											
Salad Burnet											
Great Burnet											

Staffordshire upland waders

Wader Survey Form 2012



Observer		parcel number(s)	
Holding number		HLS code	
Address			

Details/Conditions	Visit 1 (1st - 15th June)	Visit 2 (15th-30th June)	Visit 3 (1st -15th July)
Survey Date			
Time (within 3 hours after dawn, or 3 hours before dusk)			
Weather (avoid wet/windy/cold)			
Ground Conditions	estimate the percentage of the field area that is:		
Wet and squishy			
Damp and soft			
Dry and hard			
Tussock distribution (see diagram and use letter)			
Tussock height			
rank from 1 to 4 0-10cm			
1 = least frequent 11-25cm			
4 =most frequent 25-40cm			
40cm plus			
Height of rest of/even sward			

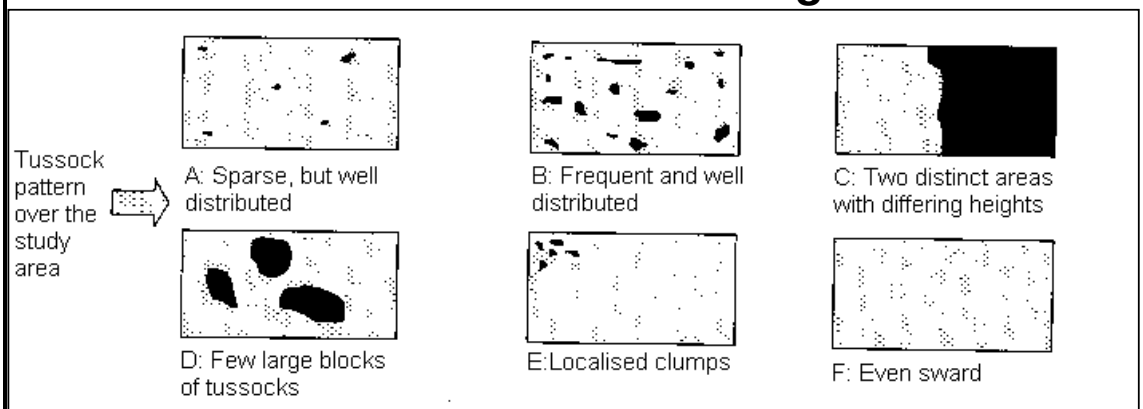
Waders		Visit 1 Observed	Visit 1 heard	Visit 2 Observed	Visit 2 Heard	Visit 3 Observed	Visit 3 Heard
Tally of numbers	Snipe (adult)						
	Snipe (chick)						
	Lapwing (adult)						
	Lapwing (chick)						
	Curlew (adult)						
	Curlew (chick)						
	Others						

Notes:

Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3

PTO for rush distribution diagrams

Tussock Distribution Diagrams



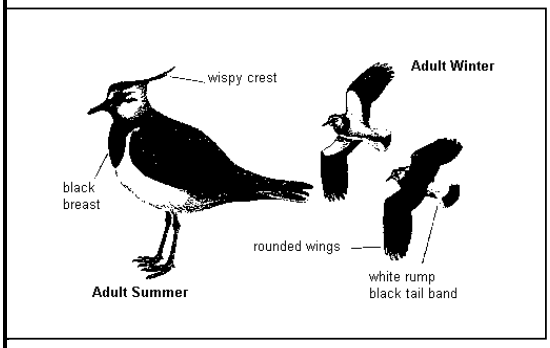
Guidelines

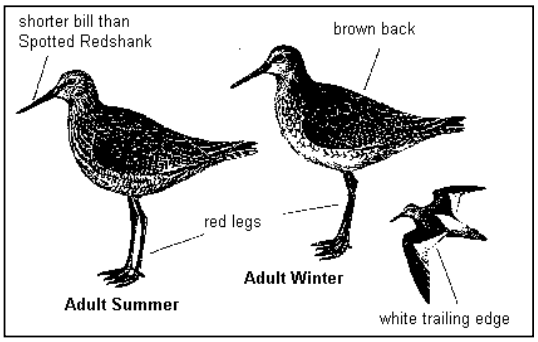
Choose a mild day within each visit period - birds will be less active in wet and windy weather.
Walk carefully on a predetermined route, so that all parts of the field are approached to within 100m. Cover all areas equally. At least every 100m, stop, scan the field and listen for bird calls in every direction.
If possible, try to keep track of, and record, each new bird sighting and call as they are encountered.

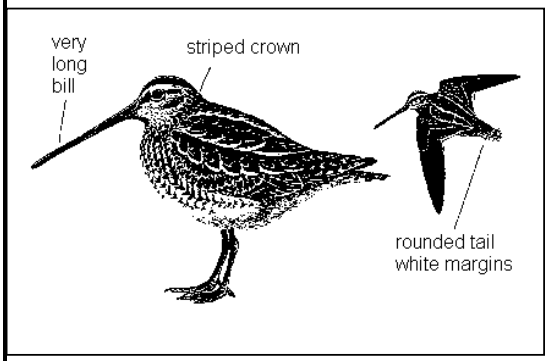
Keep disturbance to a minimum - there is no need to search for nests or get too close to adults

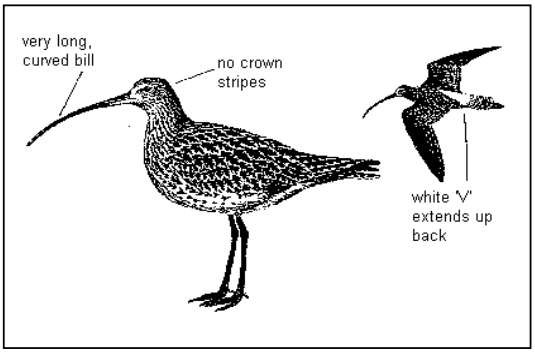
Why record the conditions?

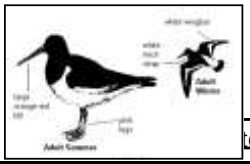
Ground conditions: At high water levels, invertebrate food is brought to the surface, so wet muddy areas and damp grassland are important feeding areas for birds and chicks. The ideal is a mosaic of flooded, unflooded and shallow pools. The wet areas will decrease through summer, and your records will monitor this change.
Rush/tussock distribution and height: Different bird species use the tussocks of grass and rush for nesting and hiding, eg snipe and curlew; others such as Lapwing, also need short, open swards to view predators.











tcher

NB: birds can be said to be breeding if:
- you see them singing/displaying
- you find nests, eggs or young
- adults repeatedly alarm call
- distraction displays are seen
- territorial disputes are seen

Marlborough Downs arable and Hertfordshire arable

Site assessment form for Nectar Flower Mix HF4 (EF4) and Floristically Enhanced Grass Buffer Strips HE10

Please use one form for each block / area of this option. Complete the tables on pages 2-4 at least twice during the growing season, such as June and September, or more often if possible.

Farm name		Agreement reference	
Agreement holder		Assessed by	
RLR parcel number(s)		Size of plot (s)	

Establishment

Complete the table below. Cutting dates are for the current year of the agreement. Any further information can be added in the notes section.

Soil type (tick):	Light ☐	Medium ☐	Heavy ☐
Sowing date:	Method:		
Cutting date:	Details:		
Cutting date:	Details:		
Time spent on establishment:			

Your indicators of success for this option

General indicators of success for HF4/HE10 which should apply to your agreement

- By year 2 there should be at least 75% cover of desirable species (for example, those sown).
- By year 2 there should be no more than 5% cover of undesirable species.

Please list any additional indicators of success your agreement may have for this option, and any target bird species which this option is targeting:

General observations

Complete the table below. Any further information can be added in the notes section.

What to measure ⬇	Date:	Date:	Date:	Date:
% Cover of grass				
% Cover of bare ground				
% Cover of desirable broadleaved plants				
% Cover of weeds (for example, thistles, nettles, grass weeds)				
Height of the crop in cm (ruler below)				

Notes, further observations and outcomes

Record your observations on how your option areas are succeeding, and meeting your indicators of success. You will need to undertake specific actions in order to improve how the areas are working and / or achieve the indicators of success?

Flowers present on each plant (how much pollen and nectar is available)

List all of the plants in the seed mix in the left column. Record the date in the top of the table. Then record the percentage of open flowers for each plant type by ticking the boxes.

		Date ➔				
Species in the mix, and any species growing which was not sown (list below) ⬇	Quantity in mix	Species sown present? Y/N	0-25%	25-50%	50-75%	75-100%

Appendix 8 Facilitator feedback report template

HLS Self-assessment trialling project – facilitator feedback form **End of the Trial** **COVER SHEET**

Trial name:	
Lead facilitator:	
Other facilitators:	
No. of agreements involved:	
No. of participants involved:	
Features/outcomes monitored:	
No. of criteria measured:	
Brief outline of methodology used:	
List of recording forms provided:	
Initial workshop date:	
Monitoring period:	
Details of significant pre-trial management issues:	

Facilitation

What issues presented and/or discussed at group or individual meetings did participants appear to have most difficulty with?

What issues were the most significant source of requests for reactive support?

If you think that participants needed support which you were not able to provide for any aspect of the trial please give details.

Group work

Did agreement holder participants work together as a group? YES/NO

Did an agreement holder group exist before the trial? YES/NO

Where a group did not exist, were group members already known to each other before the trial? YES/NO

Did the group exist before the agreements? YES/NO

Is the HR8 group applications supplement included in any of the agreements and if so, in what proportion?

If you can find out, please state how many times the participant group met during the trial, in addition to the meetings organised and attended by facilitators

If participants worked as a group do you think that this contributed to the success of the trial and in what ways?

Monitoring methodology

Was monitoring carried out during participants' normal routine or were separate visits needed? Please provide a brief explanation.

How much time on average did each participant spend on each monitoring visit, based on the details provided in the participant logs?

On average, how many monitoring visits did each participant carry out during the course of the trial, based on the details provided in the participant logs?

On average, how frequently did each participant carry out monitoring during the course of the trial, based on the details provided in the participant logs?

Briefly describe the features and outcomes that participants measured, including if they measured area, density, presence/absence, number?

Were keys, guidance or equipment provided/used, please give a brief description?

Was species identification required, if so what?

Briefly describe how data was recorded, using a form/template or free text?

Please describe briefly the extent to which the data provided by participants is: legible, complete, in the agreed format and free of obviously spurious results, describing any significant and/or recurrent issues.....

Legible

Entirely illegible									Entirely legible
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Completeness

Entirely incomplete									Entirely complete
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Format (if no standard format was required, indicate not applicable)

Not in agreed format									conforms entirely to agreed format
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Obviously spurious results?

Many spurious results									No spurious results
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Were there any other issues with the provision of data, if so please give brief details below.

Natural England costs

Do you think there were financial needs which impacted on the success of self-assessment and if so, what were they?

Conversely, do you think that the trial covered any costs unnecessarily?

Other support time and costs

Was time spent on the trials by Natural England staff or partners, in addition to the lead facilitator's time? If so, please describe the situation briefly.

Follow-up and adaptive management

Please give an estimate of the time which you would need to spend modifying agreements in order to respond to issues identified by the trial.

Would this require.....

Adding option objectives? YES/NO

Amending option objectives? YES/NO

Adding IoS? YES/NO

Amending IoS? YES/NO

Adding management prescriptions? YES/NO

Amending management prescriptions? YES/NO

As facilitator do you think that the IOS included in the agreement at the start of the trial were suitable, relevant, comprehensive and able to be understood by agreement holders? YES/NO

If not please give briefly describe why not.

Do you think that agreement holders find/found the IOS included in the agreement at the start of the trial suitable, relevant, comprehensive and able to be understood? YES/NO

If not please give briefly describe why not.

Is your ability to respond to the issues identified in the trial limited by the extent to which current scheme rules restrict modification of agreement documents? YES/NO

Data

Has the trial contributed to the existing ISA programme? Please give brief details.

How is the data to be stored? Please give brief details.

Did the data records need tidying or amending before storage? YES/NO

Facilitator views on the trial

Are there particular aspects of the way self assessment has been applied in your trial that you would change, not already covered in the questions above and, if so, what are they:

with regard to choice of features to monitor,

with regard to the methodology used,

with regard to the way data was recorded and collected,

with regard to the training, support and facilitation provided,

with regard to working with other partners,

with regard to interaction between agreement holders,

and, finally, with regard to the impact on the agreements?

Do you think that the self-assessment trial will help to deliver the following. Please give a brief explanation for your views.

The agreement objectives.

Environmental improvements.

Agreement holder engagement and understanding.

Agreement holder sense of achievement from and enjoyment of the features in their agreement.

Natural England understanding of management issues and practicalities.

Improved relationship between Natural England and agreement holders.

Having taken part in the trial, do you think that self-assessment should be introduced more widely?

Are there any concerns you have, in addition to the issues covered above, about the possible wider application of self-assessment and, if so, what are they?

Appendix 9 Participant cost / time log template

Log of time spent on self assessment trial	
Trial:	
Participant:	

This needs to include all the time you have spent:

Column 1	attending workshops and training events
	contributing to the design and developing of the trial, including reading and considering background material
Column 2	carrying out monitoring; if monitoring is carried out during your normal daily activities, record only the time you have spent assessing features, measuring and recording, if you have had to make a special journey to carry out monitoring, include your travelling time as well
	completing, collating and submitting records
Column 3	attending group events and supporting fellow participants
Column 4	providing feedback on the trial outcomes, both at the start and the end of the project

Record time spent in hours and minutes to the nearest 15 minutes.

Date	Time spent			
	Workshops, training & trial development	Monitoring & records	Group activity	Providing information on trial outcomes

Please also record the following information:

- How frequently did you carry out monitoring? For example: once every month.
- How many times during the trial did you carry out monitoring?
- How long did you usually spend monitoring on each occasion?

Log of costs deriving from self assessment trial

This needs to include all direct costs deriving from the trial, including:

- travel, recorded in miles,
- materials and equipment.

Date	Costs			
	Travel	Equipment and materials	Other	
				Note

Natural England works for people, places and nature to conserve and enhance biodiversity, landscapes and wildlife in rural, urban, coastal and marine areas.

www.naturalengland.org.uk