

## Agriculture Bill – New Clause on Powers to report on agriculture workers and farm or land-based employers

We are seeking support for an amendment to the Agriculture Bill which would require the Secretary of State to report on the impact of the Act on agricultural workers in England, and to consult on the findings of that report and the merits of establishing a sector negotiating body.

The clause is as follows:

### **Report on impact of Act upon agricultural workers**

*(1) The Secretary of State shall, within 18 months of Royal Assent being given to this Act, lay before Parliament a report containing an assessment of the impact of the provisions of this Act on agricultural workers in England.*

*(2) The report under subsection (1) shall include assessments of the impact of the Act upon each of the factors listed in subsection (3).*

*(3) The factors are agricultural workers'—*

*(a) living standards,*

*(b) pay,*

*(c) conditions of employment, and*

*(d) accommodation.*

*(4) The report under subsection (1) shall include an analysis of the impact on each factor under subsection (3)—*

*(a) in each region of England, and*

*(b) in each agricultural sector, within the meaning given in Part 2 of Schedule 1.*

*(5) The Secretary of State shall, no later than three months after the report under subsection (1) has been laid, open a public consultation on—*

*(a) the report laid under subsection (1) and any conclusions which it might draw or proposals which it might contain, and*

*(b) the merits of establishing a sector negotiating body to be responsible for setting on an annual basis minimum—*

*(i) living standards,*

*(ii) pay,*

*(iii) conditions of employment, and*

*(iv) standards and terms of accommodation for agricultural workers.*

*(6) "Agricultural worker" shall, for the purposes of this section, be taken to mean any person engaged in—*

*(a) agriculture, as defined in section 109 of the Agriculture Act 1947, or*

*(b) forestry."*

### **What would this Amendment do?**

The amendment would provide the space for a consultation on the impact of new agriculture policy on workers and make recommendations as to whether a new negotiating body should be established. This would start to put the 140,000 England workers on same footing as workers in the other three nations in the UK (Scotland and Northern Ireland have Wages Boards and Wales has an Agricultural Advisory Panel).

The impact assessment and consultation laid out in the amendment would help to ensure that new policy affecting workers will result in making working in farming and on the land an attractive prospect for all skill levels for workers here and from overseas. This is vital as we leave the EU to secure good workers and as just 0.6% of those who harvest the UK's crops are currently British. There are already plenty of examples of farmers not having access to workers.

The clause will mean we would be identifying the need and style of a new body - to bring in a up-to-date approach - to make pay awards and negotiations much more efficient, less burdensome and difficult for what are often SMEs and very isolated workers who deserve the best protection.

### Why do we need this?

The UK Agriculture Bill is an opportunity to frame new mechanisms to ensure [fair wages and conditions for agriculture workers](#). Agriculture could and should be a great career choice, otherwise [why would anyone want to pick our crops?](#)

The National Minimum wage does not cover the specific and unique conditions associated with land based workers often in isolated rural situations and needing specific issues covered such as accommodation, living standards, sick pay, and additional tools.

The abolition of the previous Agriculture Wages Board (AWB) in England in 2013 broke a career structure – with 6 clear pay grades linked to skills, qualifications and experience – and ended a history of pay and protections with statutory underpinning. These covered the many thousands of workers on which the industry has depended, many of whom come from outside the UK.

The old AWB set statutory rates of pay and also set other terms and conditions, to form a full package of rights and protections, important for workers in isolated workplaces and rural areas including: grades that reflect skills, certification and experience; overtime, in an industry characterised by long and unpredictable hours; holiday entitlement; and sick pay that underpins proper recovery from illness and injury in the most dangerous occupation in the UK. It also covered maximum deductions for tied housing; allowance for keeping a working dog; payment of on-call and night allowance; and other issues specific to land working.

Many farmers objected to the abolition of this body in 2013 for instance one noted in response to the consultation *“We employ two farm staff and it gives me the tools I need to pay them a fair wage”*; another said *“I do not want to damage {strong personal relationship} by having to negotiate wages with them”*.

The Defra 2012 Impact Assessment of the Abolition of the AWB identified Workers would lose £140.5 million in wages, £97.8 million in Annual leave and £8.7 million in sick pay.

Surveys show that since the abolition of the wages board there has been a reduction in pay awards and increased working hours. Workers have also seen worsening terms and condition such as more hours, no sick pay... *“ever lower wages, reduced employment rights, failing health and safety standards, increases job and housing insecurity”* said one tractor driver.

This amendment covers workers working on farm, enterprise in agriculture, horticulture and forestry

#### Contact details

Contact Vicki Hird, Coordinator of the Sustainable Farming Campaign for Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming. Email: [vicki@sustainweb.org](mailto:vicki@sustainweb.org); tel: 020 3559 6777; mobile: 07903 478249; twitter: [@vickihird](https://twitter.com/vickihird). See Sustain pages for more information on our work: farming [www.sustainweb.org/foodandfarmingpolicy/](http://www.sustainweb.org/foodandfarmingpolicy/) and Brexit [www.sustainweb.org/brexit](http://www.sustainweb.org/brexit)