NEW FOREST COMMONERS' CONSULTATION

Undertaken on behalf of the

FOREST FARMING GROUP

by

NEW PARK CONSULTANCY LTD

February 2025

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1. Executive Summary

1.1.1. The Forest Farming Group (FFG) commissioned New Park Consultancy Ltd (NPC) to undertake a feasibility study in April 2024 to identify the appropriate management principles in order to deliver the FFG's objectives and to explore how those management principles can be supported through DEFRA's Environmental Land Management Schemes.

1.1.2. To inform the study, NPC conducted a consultation aimed at New Forest common rights holders. The consultation involved a series of workshops, an open meeting, and an online survey. We have referred to this as the 'commoners' consultation'.

1.1.3. The online survey was completed by 139 respondents, with the majority (90%) being active commoners and 10% of respondents being non-practising rights holders.

1.1.4. Incentives for participation in a future scheme appeal differently to different groups within the commoning community. Differentials include the age of the commoner, the area in which the commoner turns out their animals, the type of animal the commoner keeps and their herd size.

1.1.5. We know that 71% of commoners would not be prepared to sign up to a 30-year land management scheme at this time. For this sentiment to change a scheme would need to have appropriate checks and balances in place, including the ability to exit an agreement in the event that their individual circumstances change. With this in place, there would appear to be a preference for a longer agreement due to the stability this would provide.

1.1.6. The uncertainty of a future scheme appears to be incentivising some commoners to mark additional animals in anticipation of a future headage-based reference year being set. Whilst there is no evidence that this will be the case, it demonstrates the importance of clear communication in relation to the development of future schemes.

1.1.7. The Elected Verderers received the strongest support in the context of who might represent commoners in the development of a future scheme. Commoners, including active and inactive graziers, were keen for a future scheme to be collaborative and transparent with annual reporting and consultation preferred.

1.1.8. DEFRA's policy to phase out direct payments is impacting the largest commoners and cattle commoners the most and could significantly reduce the number of animals available to graze the New Forest Common land given that 48% of the ponies are owned by 10% of the commoners and 57% of the cattle are owned by 26% of the commoners.

1.1.9. Only 20% of commoners could confirm that their back-up grazing land had been entered into an agri-environment scheme. This potentially offers an opportunity to increase the public goods being delivered on a significant acreage across the National Park.

2. Background

2.1.1. The Forest Farming Group (FFG) whose membership includes: the Verderers of the New Forest; Forestry England (FE); The New Forest National Park Authority (NFNPA); Natural England (NE); The New Forest Commoners' Defence Association (NFCDA) and the National Farmers Union (NFU) instructed New Park Consultancy Ltd (NPC) in April 2024 to conduct a Feasibility Study ("the Study") investigating how DEFRA's emerging policy on the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) might best be implemented in the New Forest.

2.2. The Feasibility Study

2.2.1. The Study's remit is to:

- Identify the New Forest's key features in relation to its various statutory designations.
- Identify what area of land is required to protect and support the key features.
- Identify the management principles which should be adopted to protect and enhance the New Forest's key features.
- Establish how the current grazing system plays a role in preserving the key features and how that system can best be supported.
- Advise which agri-environment scheme, or combination of schemes, would be most appropriate for delivering the proposed management principles.
- Advise which governance structure will best support one or more future schemes.
- Identify what further research or studies are required.

2.2.2. The Study is being conducted in the context of reducing amounts of public funding being available to New Forest commoners each year. The Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) ended in 2023 and its successor, "Delinked Payments", will see those that benefited from BPS receive diminishing payments until 2027, which will be the last year of direct payments from DEFRA to commoners. Significant further reductions were announced in the Autumn 2024 Budget. The Verderer's Higher Level Stewardship Scheme operates over the Crown-owned common land in the New Forest. This agreement has been extended but will expire in February 2028.

2.2.3. It is highly likely that any future agri-environment scheme for the New Forest will require there to be an "internal agreement". This is the document that will capture the relationship between the various stakeholders, allowing there to be a single applicant/organisation which can enter into a management agreement with DEFRA. The internal agreement will need to establish how decisions can be taken in a way that represents all those that have a legal interest in the management of the scheme area. This includes all those with rights of common in the New Forest.

2.3. The Commoners' Consultation

2.3.1. To inform the wider feasibility study, NPC contracted Lyndsey Stride (a New Forest commoner and Company Secretary of the Foundation for Common Land) to assist with a consultation of New Forest rights holders through a series of workshops, interviews, an open meeting and an online survey. This consultation follows on from and builds upon the work that Lyndsey coordinated on behalf of the Foundation of Common Land (FCL) as part of a DEFRA-funded Landscape Recovery Test and Trial in 2022.

3. Consultation Methodology

The consultation process comprised a series of qualitative and quantitative data-gathering exercises. The process started with a scoping workshop.

3.1. Scoping Workshop

3.1.1. The NFCDA and Verderers were invited to propose individuals that had a reasonably good understanding of the current agri-environment arrangements and/or the mechanics of the commoning system in the New Forest. The proposed individuals were invited to a workshop on 28th August 2024 where the proposed methodology and objectives of a commoner-wide consultation were shared. Attendees were asked to comment on the methodology and readability of some draft consultation questions.

3.1.2. The feedback received was considered and an online survey was drafted using Survey Monkey. A link to the survey was sent to the FFG subgroup responsible for overseeing the Feasibility Study and the attendees of the 28th August workshop and recipients were asked to complete the questionnaire and feed back any difficulties experienced when completing the online survey. Some useability issues concerning multiple choice answers were received, and appropriate changes were made.

3.2. Open Meeting

3.2.1. An open meeting was held in the Linden Hall at Lyndhurst Community Centre at 7pm on 9th September 2024. The meeting was advertised via a poster on the NFCDA's stand at the 2024 New Forest & Hampshire County show, via the Verderers' mailing list as well as the NFCDA and Young Commoners' social media channels.

3.2.2. The meeting was open to all New Forest common right holders (practising and non-practising) and was chaired by Oliver Cook of New Park Consultancy. The below agenda was followed:

i) Funding available for commoners (what is currently on offer) – Presentation by Oliver Cook
ii) The Cost of Commoning – Presentation by Lyndsey Stride
iii) A Timeline of events & where we are now – Presentation by Oliver Cook with contributions from Andrew Parry-Norton (NFCDA, Chair) and Lyndsey Stride
iv) Introduction to the Feasibility Study (PA2) - Presentation by Oliver Cook
v) The Commoners' Consultation - Presentation by Oliver Cook & Lyndsey Stride

A copy of the presentation can be found at **Appendix A**.

3.2.3. It is estimated that approximately 130 people attended with 118 individuals signing in on entry.

3.2.4. The open meeting was intended to:

i) help inform commoners of the current funding available to them (directly)
ii) update them on the process that was being undertaken as part of securing future public funding for the management of the New Forest's common land.

3.2.5. After the presentations, attendees were encouraged to take part in a number of workshops that had been stationed around the hall. These included:

i) Back-up grazing plans – large, printed plans of the New Forest were provided for commoners to identify the approximate location and extent of any land they are aware of that is used to support commoning. This exercise resulted in 4,246 acres (1,718.61 ha) being identified as being enclosed land that supports commoning in and around the New Forest area. These plans have subsequently been digitised.

ii) Representation ballot – three ballet boxes were provided, and commoners were asked to place a vote on which of the following organisations they would like to represent them in the future development of a land management scheme in the New Forest: Elected Verderers, NFCDA, a third party separately elected individual. Commoners were able to vote for more than one option. This question was to be posed again in the online consultation, but this exercise was intended to get people thinking about the subject.

3.3. Online Questionnaire

3.3.1. An online questionnaire hosted via Survey Monkey was opened on 1st September 2024 and closed on 30th September 2024. The consultation was promoted at the open meeting and a public notice was placed in the Lymington Times & New Milton Advertiser. Web links to the online survey were shared via the NFCDA's and Verderers' mailing lists and social media accounts.

3.3.2. For those unable to complete the survey online, respondents could request and complete a paper copy by post, returning it to New Park Consultancy's offices in Brockenhurst. This was made clear both at the open meeting and via the correspondence shared containing the survey web link.

3.3.3. The Consultation was directed at all those that hold rights of common in the New Forest, i.e.. anyone who owns or rents property within the New Forest with rights of common attached. This included those who are not currently exercising their rights but could potentially do so in the future. This was made clear in the consultation document's introduction.

3.3.4. The survey was to be completed anonymously; however, the respondents name was requested in Question 1 to allow us to check that those who stated that they were currently practising their commoning rights were listed on the Verderers marking fee register. Once the Verderers had confirmed that the full list of names were practising commoners, Question 1 data was deleted before any further data analysis was started.

3.3.5. The below privacy statement was included in the questionnaire introduction:

> ***Data Protection and Privacy***
> It is important for us to be able to check that everyone completing this questionnaire is a genuine New Forest Commoner in order that the data we gain from it can be regarded as real and relevant. For this reason alone we will be asking for your full name at the beginning of this questionnaire, but this will not be tied to your responses in any way. Please be assured that your answers will, therefore, be treated as anonymous. We will not keep any contact details linked with your response. The data will be held in accordance with New Park Consultancy's Privacy Policy, which can be viewed at *www.newparkconsultancy.com/privacy-policy*

3.3.6. A copy of the survey questions can be found at **Appendix B**.

4. Consultation Analysis

The consultation received 139 responses with respondents taking an average of 20 minutes to complete the survey with a 100% completion rate. Six individuals completed the survey by hand and 133 responded online.

4.1. Who Responded

4.1.1. The survey was analysed using various filters to allow the data to be interrogated. The findings are based upon the responses of right holders only (whether practising or not), unless stated otherwise. The following filters were applied to the responses to each question:

i) Age of commoner
ii) Herd size
iii) Type of commoner (cattle, ponies etc)
iv) Common where animals are depastured
v) Agister's area where marking fees are paid
vi) Whether respondents were BPS claimants or not
vii) Whether respondents were a VGS member or not

4.1.2. Of those that responded:

i) 97.84% were rights holders
ii) 89.93% were active commoners (122 commoners)
iii) 62% of respondents were over 50, 11% of respondents were under 30

4.1.3. A number of respondents stated that they were responding on behalf of a couple or even a family. This makes it difficult to know how many commoners are represented through our data sample.

4.1.4. Survey data has been compared against the marking fee register data provided to us by the Verderers for the last full calendar year. According to the marking fee register, in 2023 there were 564 commoners exercising rights over common land owned by the Crown and managed by Forestry England (the "Forest") and 116 commoners exercising rights on contiguous common land held under various ownerships other than the Crown (the "Adjacent Commons"). In 2023 forty individuals paid marking fees for exercising rights on both the Forest and the Adjacent Commons. In 2023 there were 640 practising commoners in the New Forest.

4.1.5. Having reviewed data relating to the Verderers' Grazing Scheme for 2023, we can confirm that our sample size represents 19.2% of the 122 practising commoners entered into the scheme and 26% of the livestock entered into the scheme.

4.1.6. Distinct web links were used when promoting the survey to commoners. The emails that went out via the Verderers and NFCDA mailing lists proved to be the most effective way of reaching commoners. The link distributed via the Verderers mailing list resulted in 81 responses, more than double that received as a result of the NFCDA's emails (40 responses).

4.1.7. 63% of respondents were aged 50 or over. Given that 72% of the animals depastured in 2023 were owned by 33% of the commoners, the age profile of the larger commoners is particularly relevant. The graphs below show that the largest herds are more likely to be owned by those over 50 years of age. Commoners under 50 are more likely to have smaller herds of both cattle and ponies (this finding was supported by both the Young Commoners' group and Verderers' staff at subsequent interviews held to sense-check our findings).

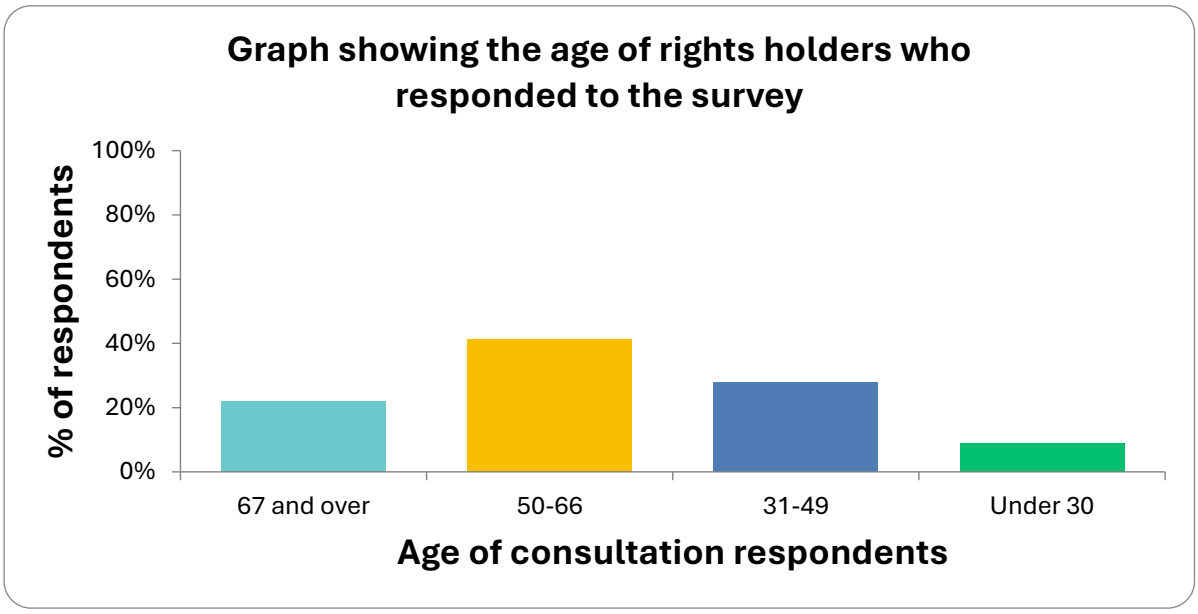


Figure 1: Graph showing ages of right holders who responded to the survey.

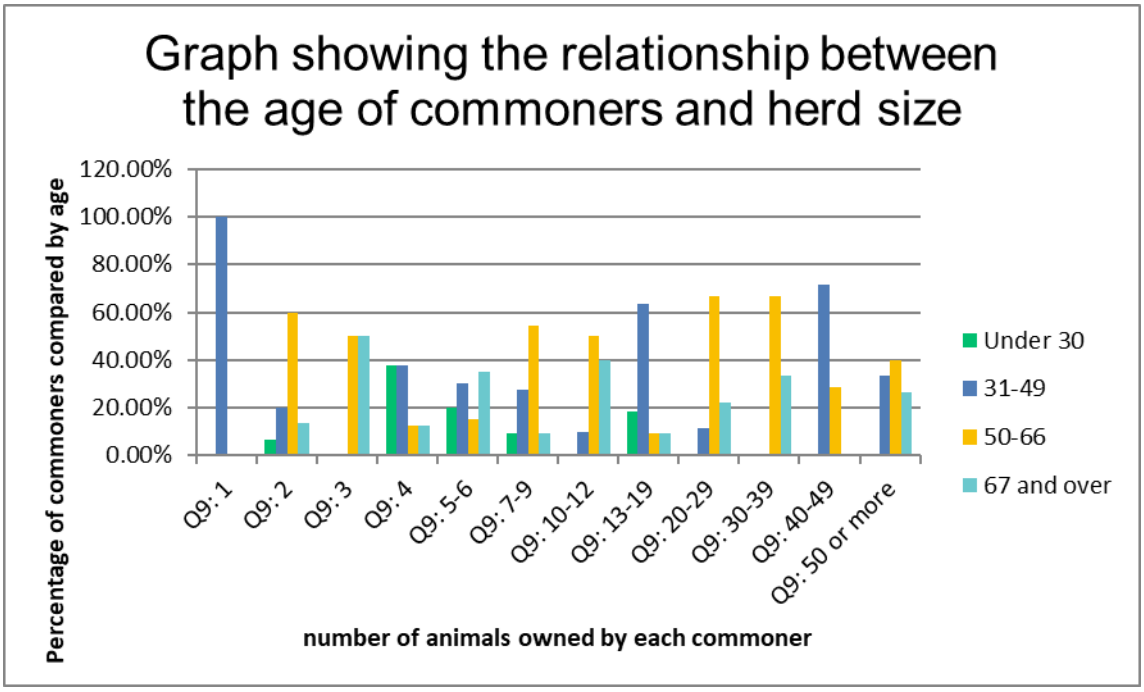


Figure 2: Graph showing age of respondents filtered by age and compared by herd size

4.1.8. There appear to be four identifiable ranges of herd sizes kept by commoners. Excluding commoners aged under 30, who are likely to be in the process of building their herds, the groups appear not to be age dependent:

1-3 animals
4-9 animals
10-29 animals
30-50 animals

4.1.9. The survey data only allowed us to identify the largest herds as being 50 head or more. Marking fee data shows that in 2023 there were 34 herds with 50-100 animals and 9 herds with more than 100 animals, the largest herd being 280 animals.

4.2. Rights exercised and animals depastured (Q5-9 of consultation)

4.2.1. According to the marking fee register held by the Verderers, in 2024 there were 665 commoners compared with 594 in 2006 when the last comprehensive survey of commoning was carried out. This shows an increase of 12%. Despite a reduction in total animals marked there has also been an increase in the number of commoners of 5% between 2023 and 2024.

4.2.2. The 2024 marking fee register also identifies that 10% of commoners own 48% of the ponies in herds of 20 or more ponies. This remains broadly unchanged from the 2006 register which showed that 10% of commoners owned 47% of the ponies in herds larger than 20 (New Forest Commoning Review, 2007). In 2006, 32% of commoners marked one or two ponies. This also remains broadly unchanged in 2024 with 31% of commoners with 1-2 ponies owning 5% of the pony herd. There has however been a 31% increase in the total number of ponies being marked over this period. The most significant difference between the two data sets comes from herds of 40 or more. In 2006 24% of ponies were in herds of 40 or more. This figure rose to 28% in 2024.

PONIES MARKED IN 2006				
	Commoners Turning Out		Animals Turned Out	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1 pony	78	15.79%	78	1.84%
2 ponies	80	16.19%	160	3.78%
3 ponies	55	11.13%	165	3.90%
4 ponies	44	8.91%	176	4.16%
5 or 6 ponies	60	12.15%	319	7.54%
7 to 9 ponies	52	10.53%	408	9.65%
10 to 12 ponies	41	8.30%	443	10.47%
13 to 19 ponies	33	6.68%	514	12.15%
20 to 29 ponies	22	4.45%	497	11.75%
30 to 39 ponies	13	2.63%	431	10.19%
40 to 49 ponies	7	1.42%	302	7.14%
50 or more ponies	9	1.82%	737	17.42%
Total	494		4230	

Table 1: Table showing number of ponies turned out by herd size in 2006

PONIES MARKED IN 2024				
	Commoners Turning Out		Animals Turned Out	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1 pony	100	16.37%	100	1.81%
2 ponies	89	14.57%	178	3.22%
3 ponies	66	10.80%	198	3.58%
4 ponies	42	6.87%	168	3.04%
5 or 6 ponies	87	14.24%	477	8.63%
7 to 9 ponies	73	11.95%	567	10.25%
10 to 12 ponies	45	7.36%	494	8.93%
13 to 19 ponies	47	7.69%	713	12.89%
20 to 29 ponies	20	3.27%	485	8.77%
30 to 39 ponies	17	2.78%	582	10.52%
40 to 49 ponies	6	0.98%	259	4.68%
50 or more ponies	19	3.11%	1309	23.67%
Total	611		5530	

Table 2: Table showing number of ponies turned out by herd size in 2024

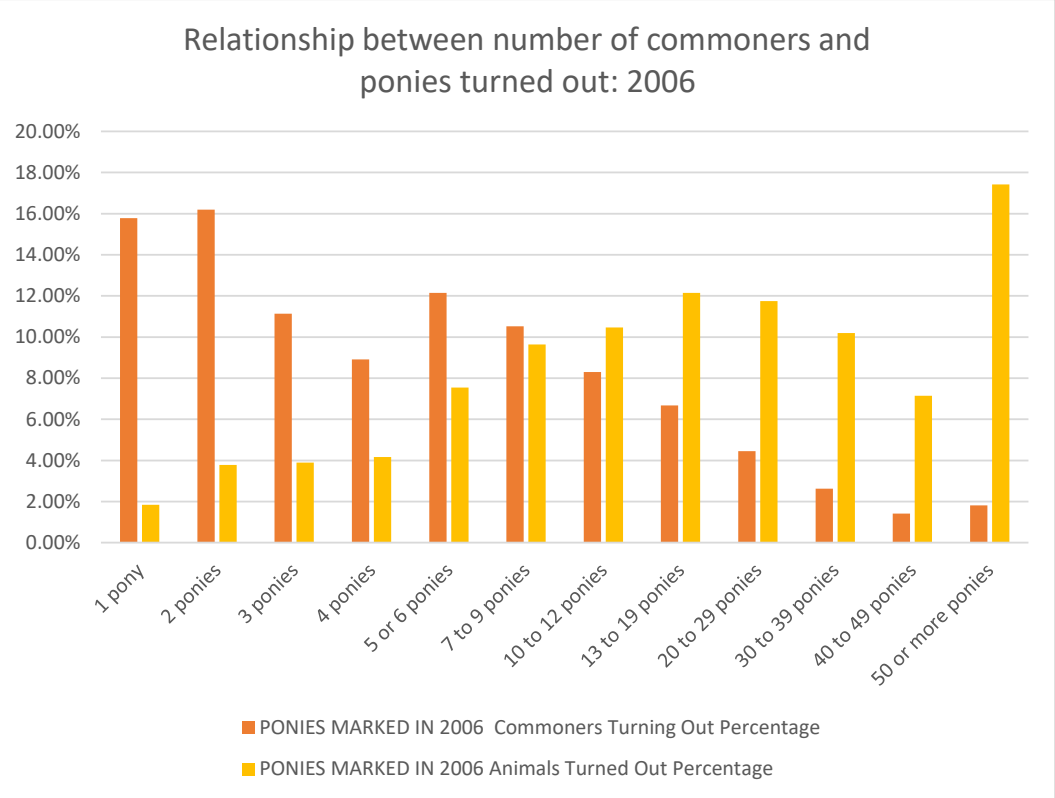


Figure 3: Graph showing relationship between number of commoners and ponies marked in 2006

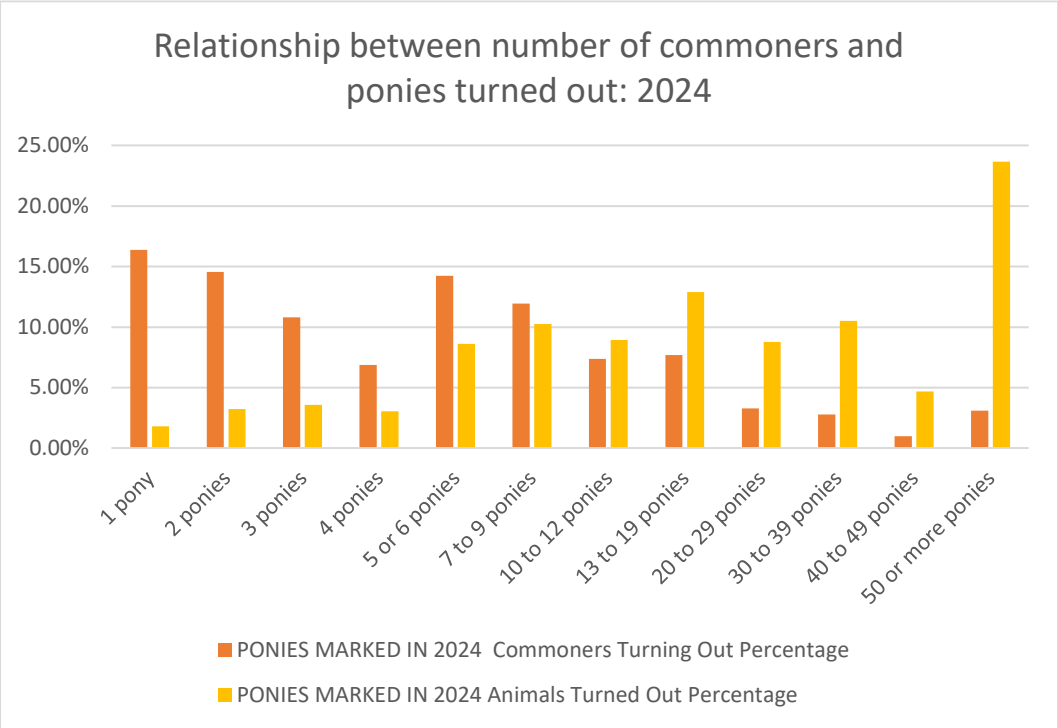


Figure 4: Graph showing relationship between number of commoners and ponies marked in 2024

4.2.3. Whilst in 2006, 17.5% of cattle commoners owned herds of 36 or more, making up just over 52% of all cattle turned out. In 2024, 26% of commoners owned herds of 36 or more cattle, meaning that these individuals owned 57% of cattle turned out. Since 2006 there has been a 19% increase in the total number of cattle marked.

CATTLE MARKED IN 2006				
	Commoners turning out		Animals turned out	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1 to 5 cattle	34	25.95%	118	4.56%
6 to 11 cattle	33	25.19%	277	10.71%
12 to 20 cattle	23	17.56%	359	13.88%
21 to 35 cattle	18	13.74%	478	18.48%
36 or more cattle	23	17.56%	1354	52.36%
Total	131		2586	

Table 3: Table showing number of cattle turned out by herd size in 2006

CATTLE MARKED IN 2024				
	Commoners turning out		Animals turned out	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
1 to 5 cattle	34	23.29%	116	3.76%
6 to 11 cattle	27	18.49%	211	6.85%
12 to 20 cattle	26	17.81%	421	13.66%
21 to 35 cattle	21	14.38%	589	19.11%
36 or more cattle	38	26.03%	1745	56.62%
Total	146		3082	

Table 4: Table showing number of cattle turned out by herd size in 2024

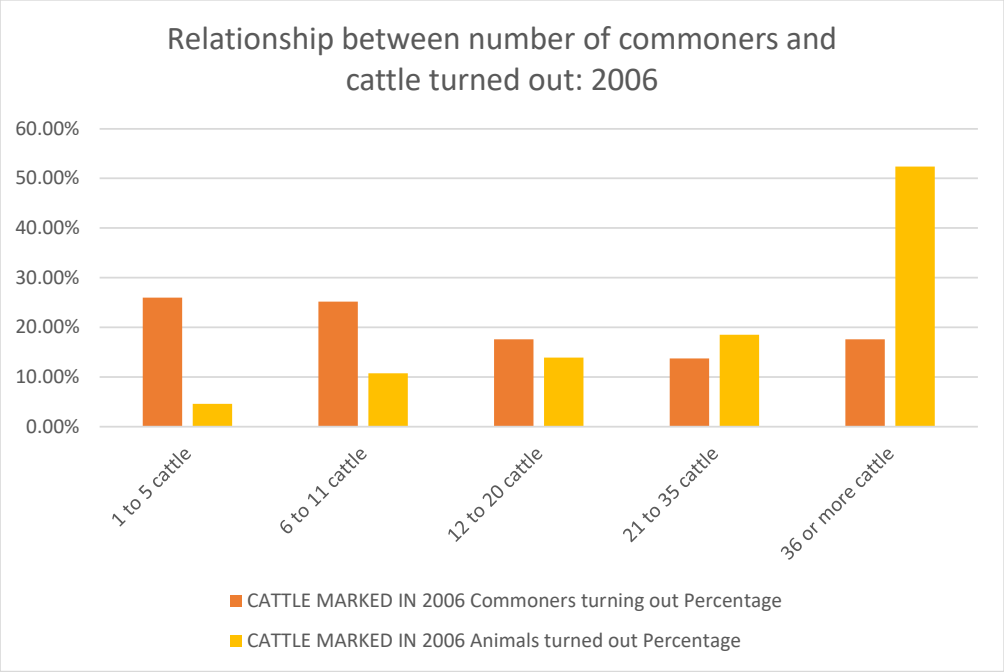


Figure 5: Graph showing relationship between number of commoners and cattle turned out in 2006

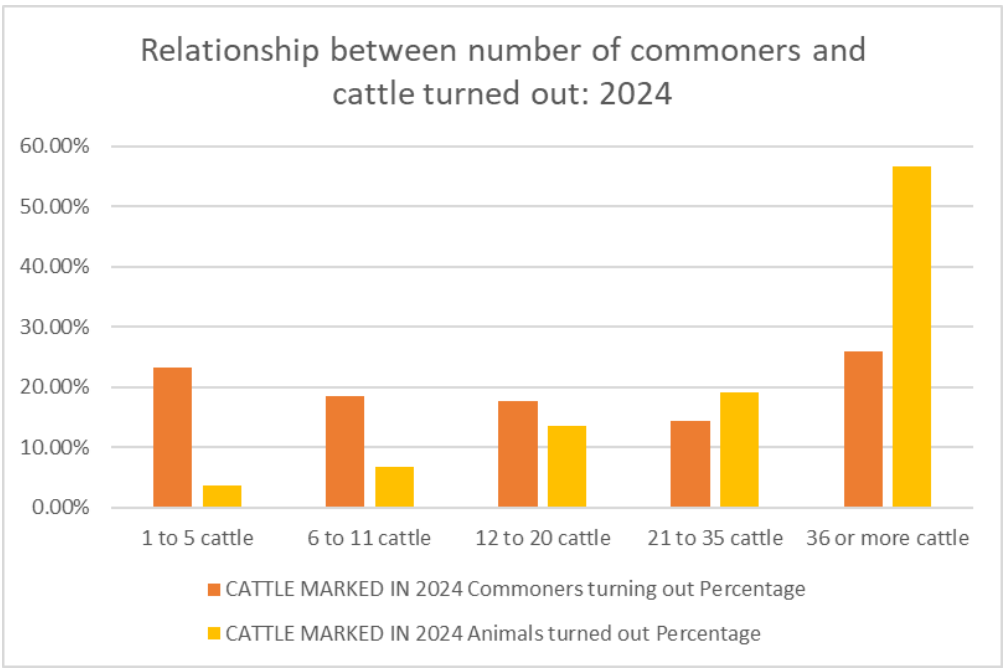


Figure 6: Graph showing relationship between number of commoners and cattle turned out in 2024

4.2.4. In both the current survey and the associated sense-checking interviews, the subject of the increase in animal numbers was raised. This could be attributed to the financial incentive to mark an increasing number of animals in order to maximise income from BPS. Marking fees in 2023 remained high despite commoners being aware that future direct payments would be based on historic activity. In sense-checking interviews this was thought to be attributed to some commoners expecting another base year to be set for headage-based payments in a future scheme. 2024 showed a reduction in animals marked, particularly cattle. This is likely due to faster than expected reductions in direct payments coupled with the relatively high prices for beef cattle, making it an attractive time to sell.

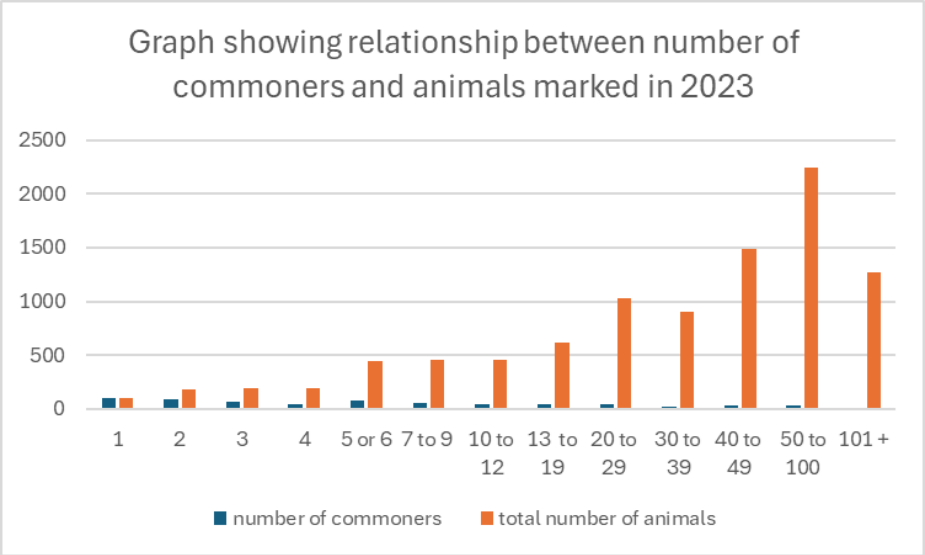


Figure 7: Graph showing relationship between number of commoners and animals marked in 2023

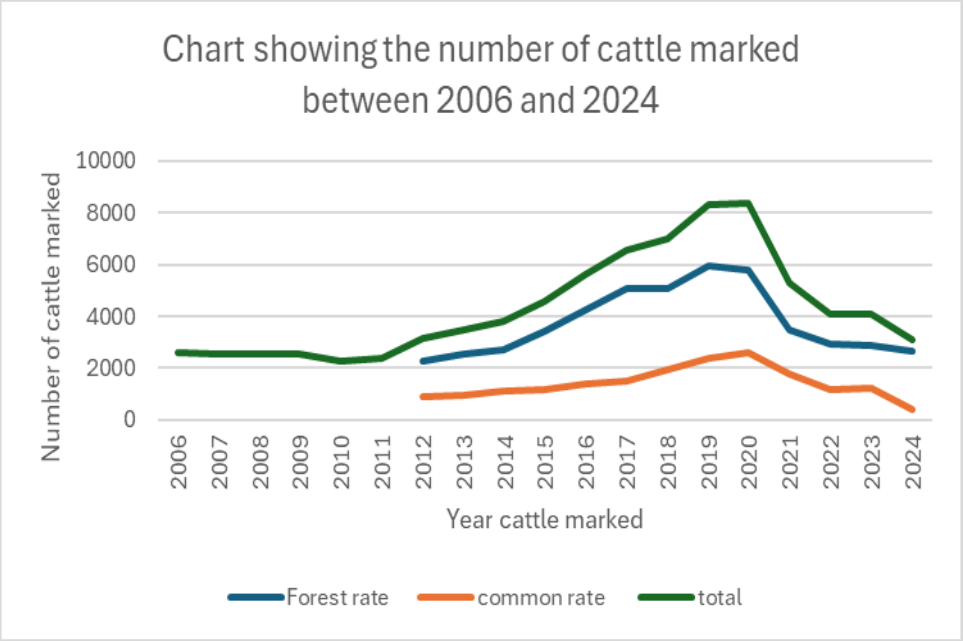


Figure 8: Graph showing the number of cattle marked between 2006 and 2024

4.2.5. Figure 8 shows the significant fluctuation in cattle numbers since 2011 which demonstrates that cattle numbers have been particularly impacted and influenced by direct payments under the Single Payment and Basic Payment schemes. During our follow up interviews, that Agisters highlighted that the marking fee register is not an accurate representation of the number of animals depastured.

4.2.6. Consultees were asked to detail both the Agister to whom they pay marking fees (which denotes the area in which the right holder lives), and the areas in which their animals run (commoners often turn their animals out in multiple areas, this is unaffected by rights). The results show an even spread of commoners in each Agister's area which is compatible with the size of each area as shown by the map. The Head Agister, Jonathan Gerrelli, has a smaller area with fewer commoners and animals to manage.

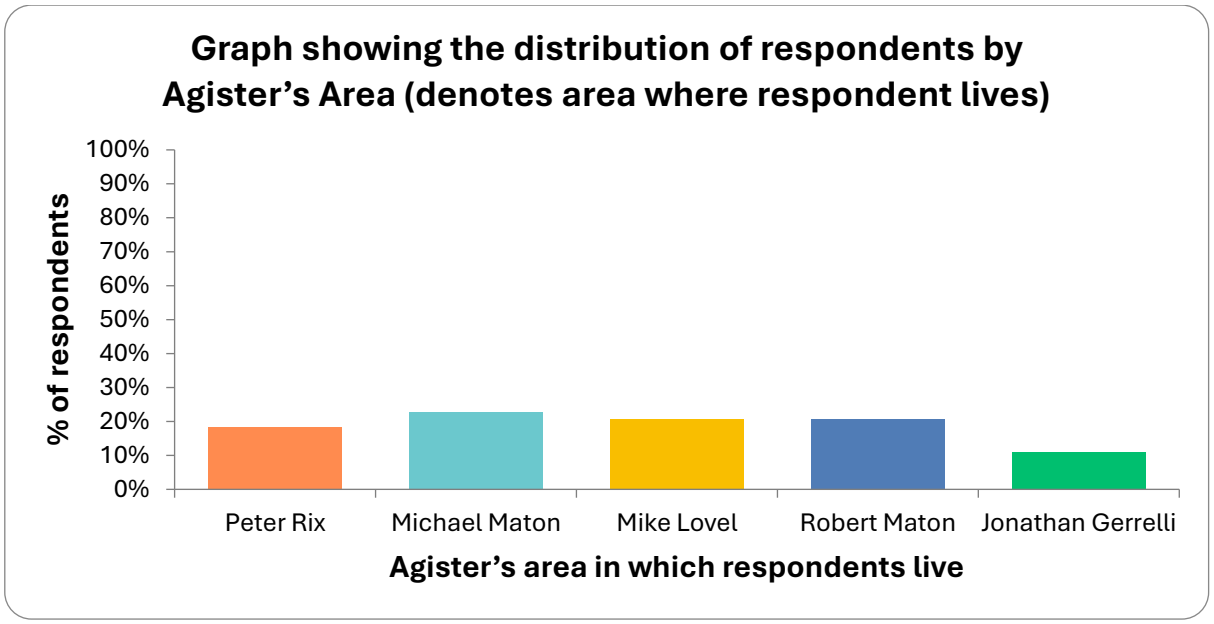


Figure 9: Graph showing distribution of respondents by Agister's area

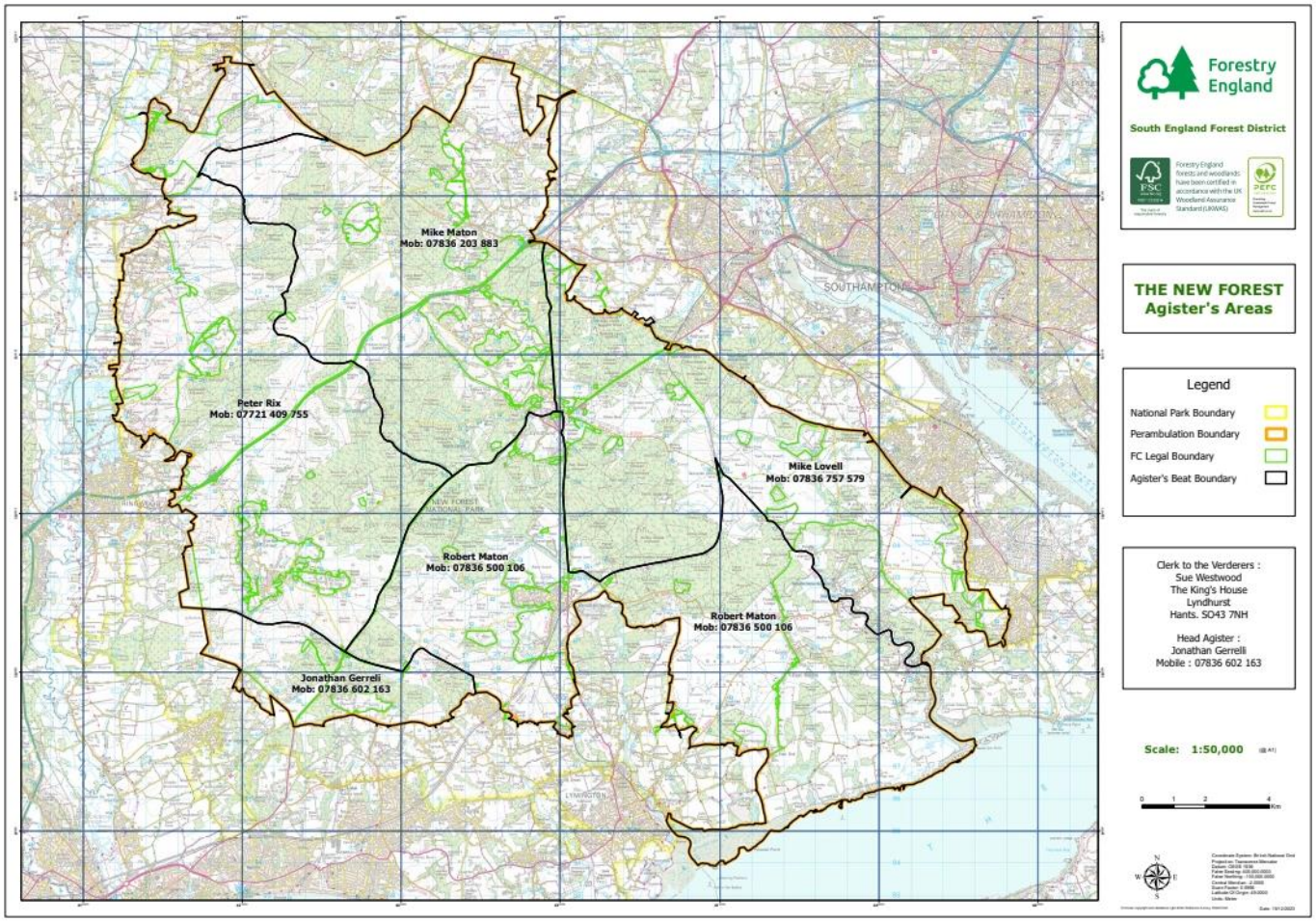


Figure 10: Map of Agisters' Areas

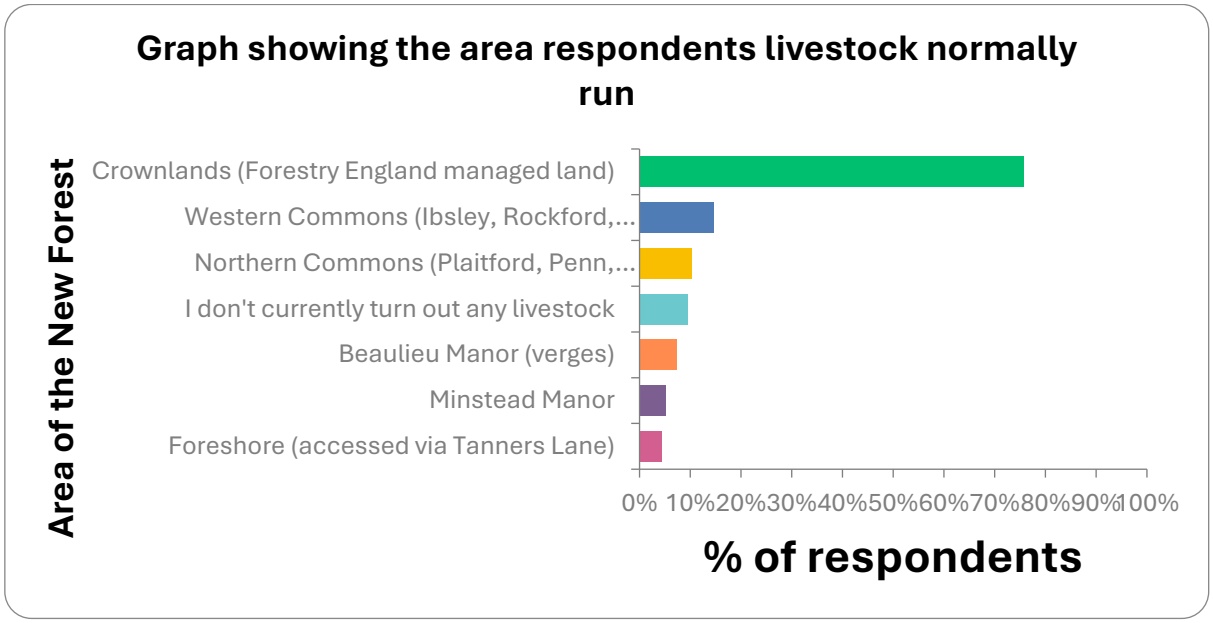


Figure 11: Graph showing the areas where survey respondents animals are depastured

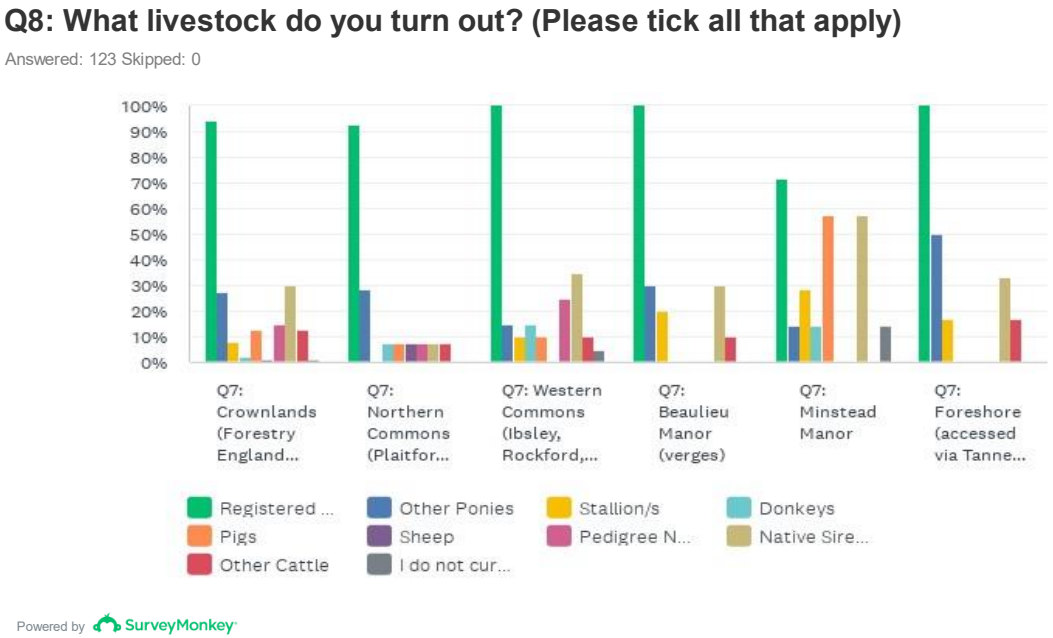


Figure 12: Graph showing livestock depastured compared by the area in which the animals are turned out

4.3. Which rights were exercised by the respondents? (Q6 of consultation)

4.3.1. Respondents were asked about what rights they currently exercise. Of the respondents:

I. 89.71% of respondents exercised the right of pasture
II. 1.49% of respondents exercised the right of pasture sheep
III. 12.5% of respondents exercised the right of mast
IV. 4.41% of respondents exercised the right of estovers
V. 10.29% of respondents were not currently exercising their rights

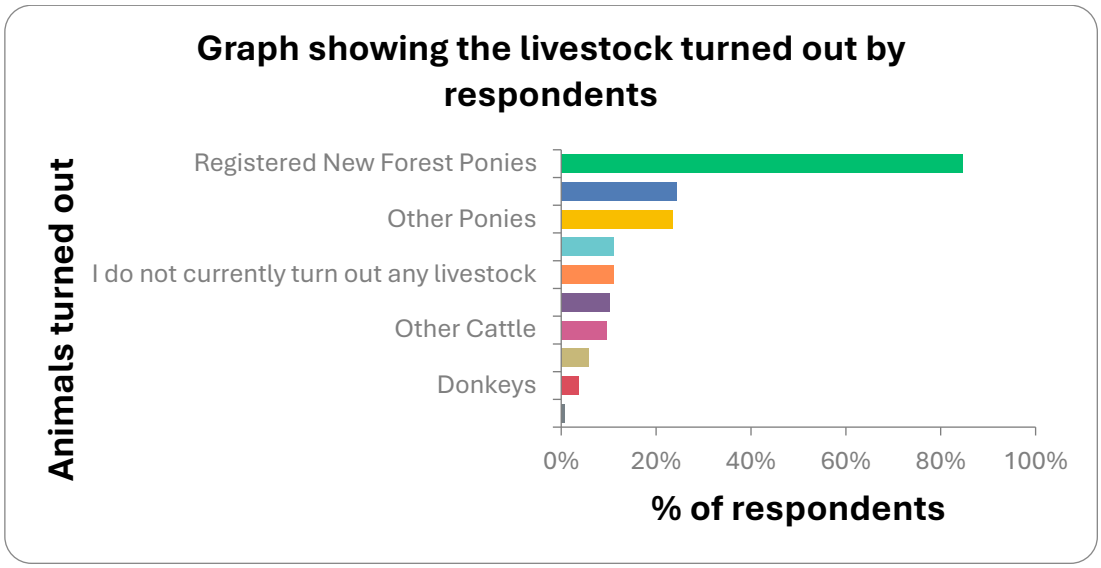


Figure 13 Graph showing livestock depastured by survey respondents in 2024

4.3.2. Comparing the respondent data with the marking fee register, we were able to confirm that our survey data is representative of the current commoning population. We can also see from figure 13 above that we collected data from commoners depasturing a broad range of livestock types.

4.3.3. Figure 14 shows the same dataset but filtered by herd size. There is a positive correlation between herd size and the range of commonable animals kept. Whilst all herd sizes turn out ponies, the smallest herds are predominantly made up of pedigree pony herds.

4.3.4. Smaller herd owners were found to be less likely to keep a stallion. In a subsequent interview with the Verderers' staff, it was mentioned that a reduction in stallions has resulted in fewer fillies being available to grow or maintain herds. As a result commoners, particularly smaller and younger commoners, were more likely to keep all of their fillies as replacements. This could result in reduced selective breeding and in turn, poorer quality fillies being kept. Larger herds were thought to still be able to be more selective and improve the quality of their herd over time, with the current number of stallions being turned out.

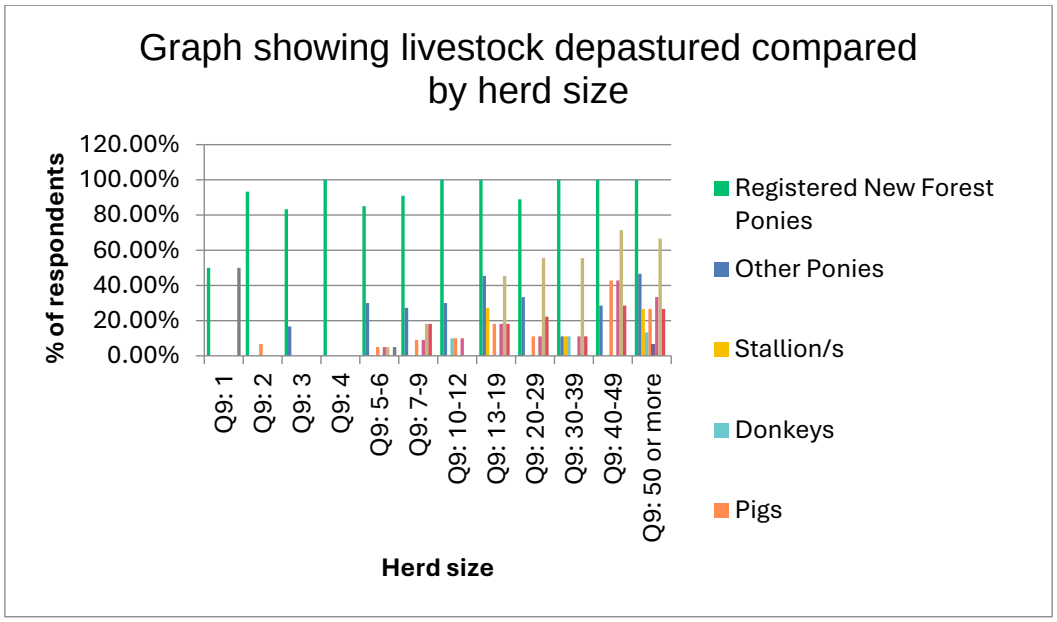


Figure 14: Graph showing livestock depastured compared by herd size

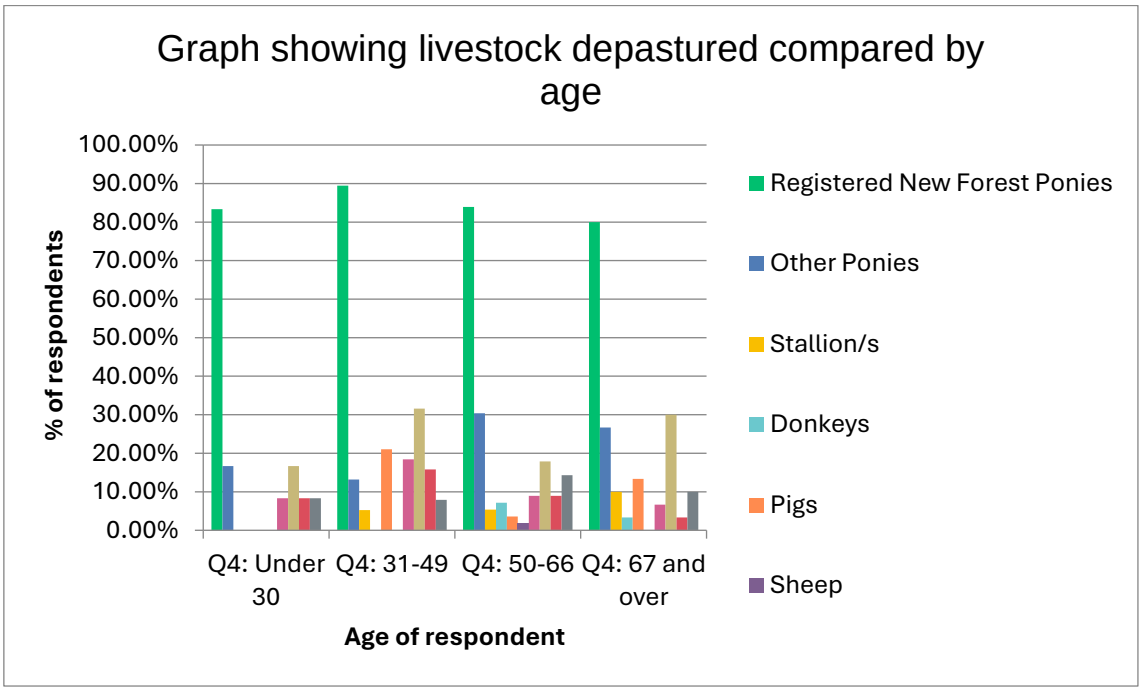


Figure 15: Graph showing livestock depastured compared by age of right holder

4.3.5. A higher percentage of the ponies kept by Younger Commoners are pedigree, in comparison to those kept by older generations. Our interview data suggested that this may be as a result of the Verderers Grazing Scheme incentives. Younger generations are less likely to have been eligible for the Basic Payment Scheme, which incentivised keeping both pedigree and non-pedigree ponies equally.

4.3.6. It was raised at one of our sense-checking interviews that some commoners are currently marking additional animals, particularly on the commons where marking fees are lower, in the anticipation of a reference year being set to calculate future payments, as there has been in the past. This highlights the importance of clear and careful messaging around the subject and the implications of scheme uncertainty. A number of survey respondents raised concern over the use of "headage payments" in their comments.

4.3.7. We note that commoners under 30 are less likely to be keeping cattle, stallions, pigs and sheep. This is potentially likely due to a lack of back-up land and animal handling facilities, and the fact that they are more likely to be farming in partnership with family members who hold the rights of common.

4.4. The Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) (Q10-12)

4.4.1. Qualifying New Forest commoners (from both the Forest and the Adjacent Commons) were able to claim the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) over a notional area of the New Forest Common from 2015 to 2023. As common rights are unquantified in the New Forest, funding was allocated based on the number of livestock units the applicant marked in the previous year. The highest of the three available English payment rates, that for Non-Severely Disadvantaged Areas, worth £232.84/ha for BPS in 2019 was used to calculate the overall level of funding available. Total funding allocated to the New Forest was approximately £3million per year (DEFRA, 2021).

4.4.2. 56% of respondents to the current survey previously claimed BPS. When analysed by age, however, there is a clear correlation between age and claiming BPS, with only 8% of under 30s claiming BPS and 70% of over 67s claiming.

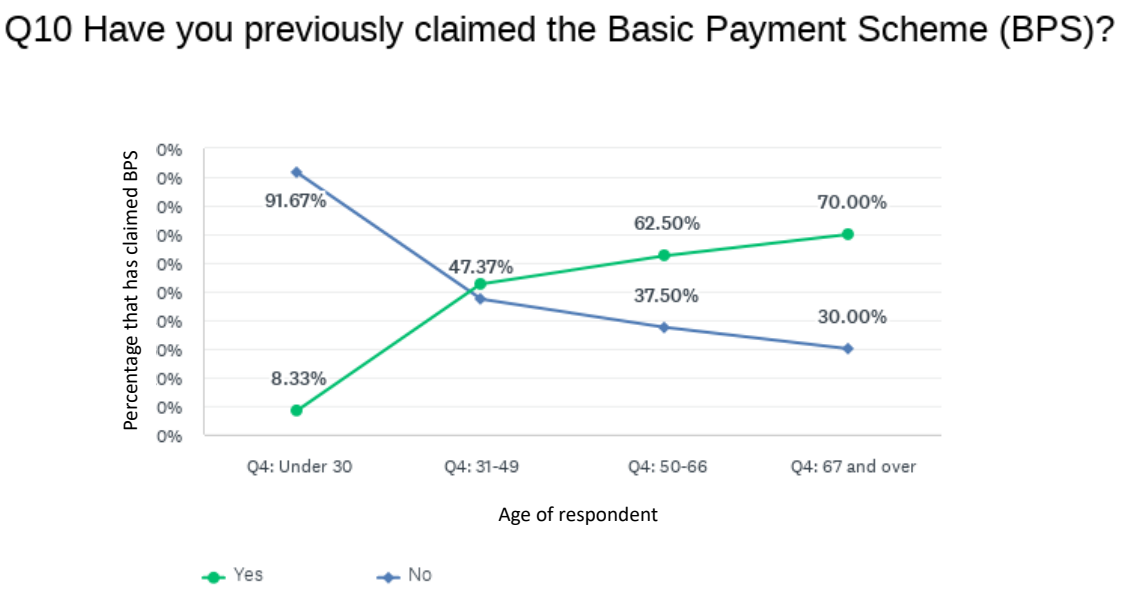


Figure 16: Graph showing the correlation between age of commoner and BPS claims.

4.4.3. The survey asked respondents to confirm what impact reductions in BPS had on livestock numbers. The responses found that:

- Very small commoners (1-3 animals) have either never claimed BPS or have not reduced their numbers as a result of declining BPS.

- Small commoners (4-12 animals) show some reductions in herd size.
- Medium commoners (13-19 animals) show a small reduction (18%) due to BPS reductions.
- Large commoners (20+ animals) show a significant reduction as a result of declining BPS as the graph below shows.

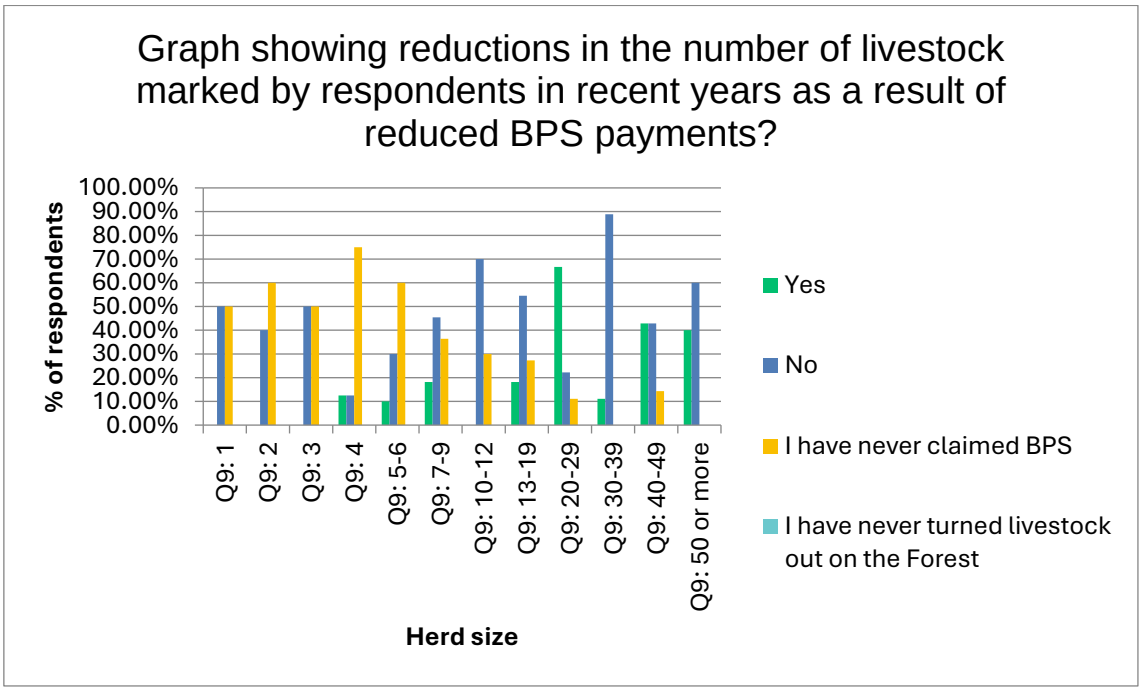


Figure 17: Graph showing reductions in animal numbers as a result of declining BPS compared by herd size

4.4.4. When filtering by cattle commoners only, we can see far greater reductions. The greatest reduction is in pedigree native cattle, whilst non-native and native sired cattle have been less impacted. This could be due to their increased commercial value post Brexit due to an increased demand for British beef. It also suggests that without financial incentive or support there is likely to continue to be a trend away from native breed cattle towards more commercial larger continental breeds.

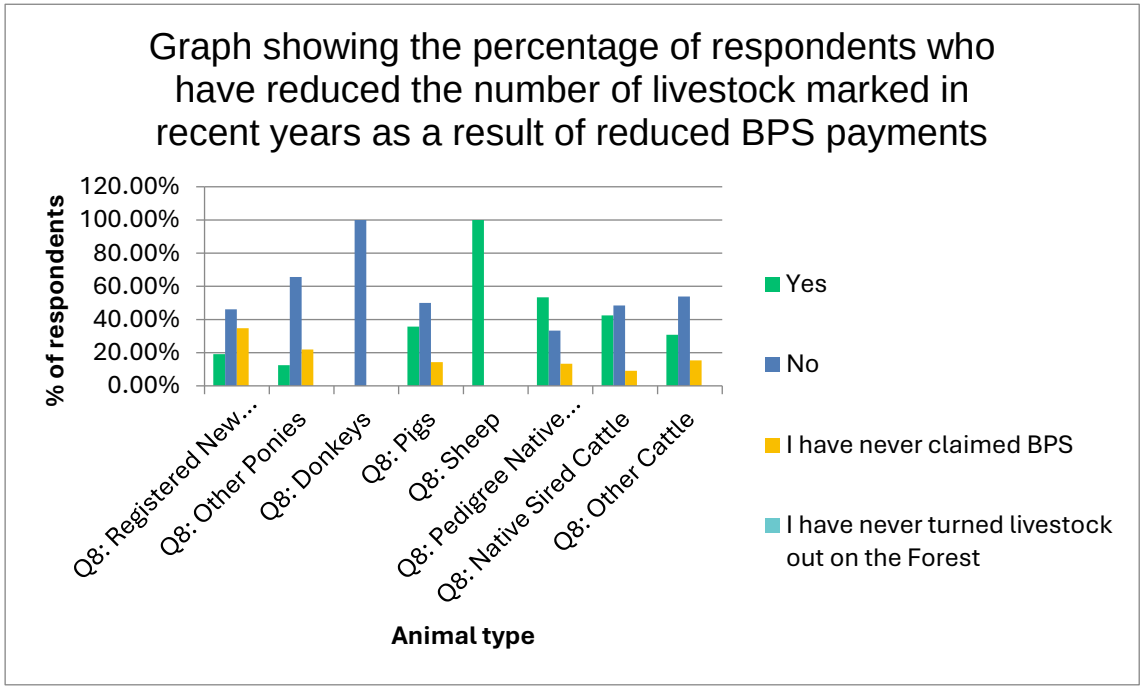


Figure 18: Graph showing reductions in the number of livestock marked as a result of reduced BPS

4.4.5. When filtered by cattle keepers only and compared by common we can see far more significant reductions in cattle numbers on the Adjacent Commons.

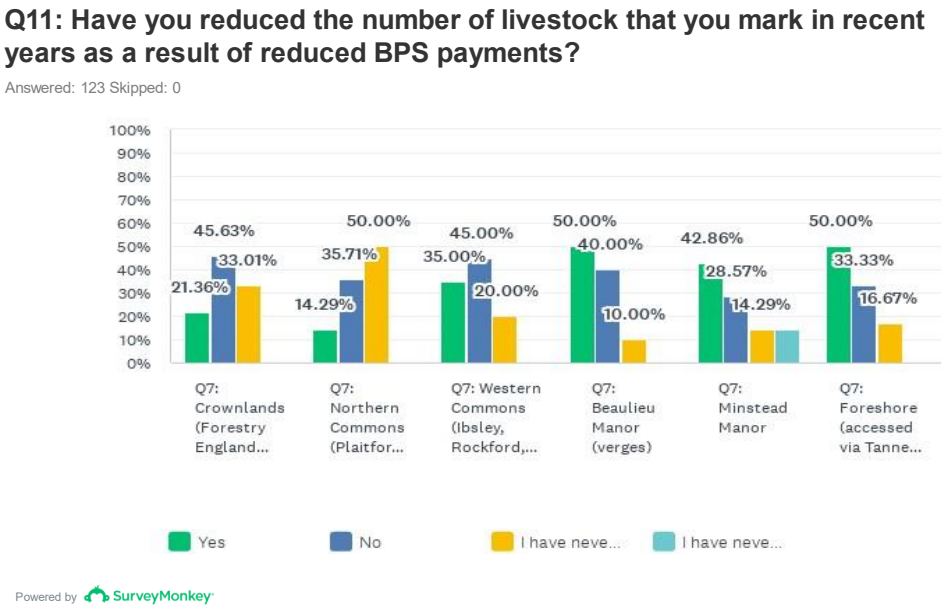


Figure 19: Graph showing reductions in livestock numbers as a result of declining BPS compared by area of common (yellow = never claimed BPS; pale blue = never turned out)

4.4.6. Commoners using the Northern and Western Commons (predominantly owned and managed by the National Trust) report the smallest decline in livestock numbers as a result of declining BPS payments.

When filtering this data with that collected under Question 20 (asking the respondent what their commoning activity would do should they not receive any further financial support) we can see that without financial support, 53% of cattle commoners with pedigree native cattle are likely to reduce their herd size, compared with 45% and 38% of native sired cattle keepers and other cattle respectively. We also sorted this data by the location that the respondents' livestock was depastured. This found that the impact on the Adjacent Commons could be greater than that on the Forest.

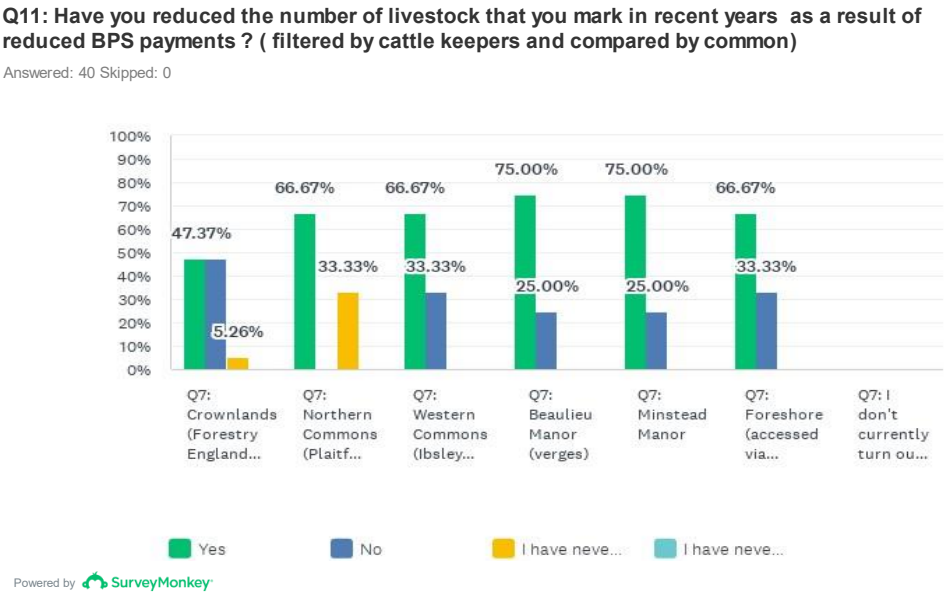


Figure 20: Graph showing reductions in cattle numbers as a result of reduced BPS compared by common

4.5. The Verderers Grazing Scheme (VGS)

4.5.1. The Verderers Grazing Scheme provides direct financial support to commoners through a small capital works fund and an annual revenue payment received in lieu of the commoner signing up to an annual agreement undertaking to follow a number of best practice measures. The scheme is operated across the whole common and is funded by the larger landowners that benefit from agri-environment schemes in place. According to the Verderers' office, in 2023 the VGS had 469 members with 450 members receiving payment.

4.5.2. 71% of consultation respondents were members of the Verderers Grazing Scheme. As with BPS, the under-30s were less likely to be members of the VGS.

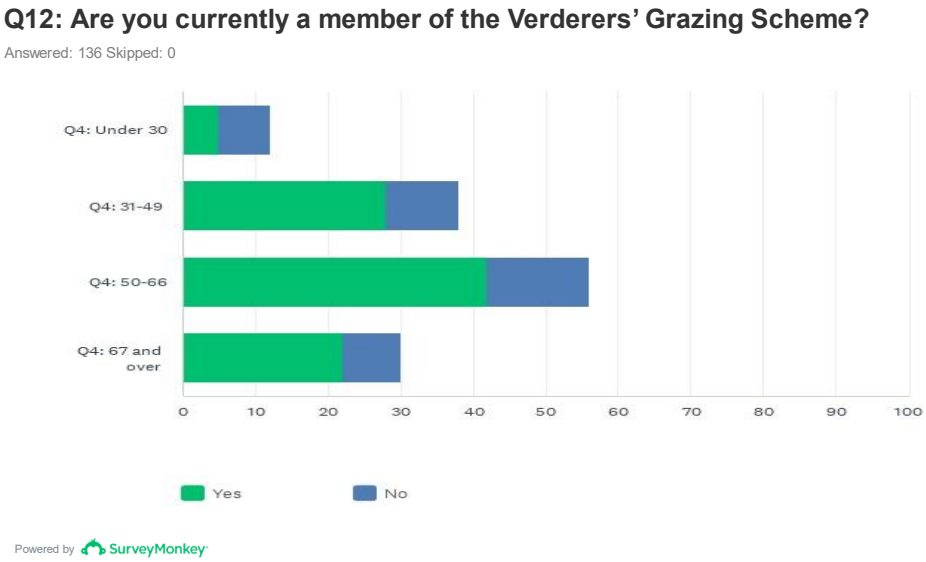


Figure 21: Graph showing membership of the VGS filtered by age

	VGS (Forest)	VGS (Adj commons)
Registered ponies	3777	203
Other equines	678	227
Total equines	4455	430
Cattle	2356	386
Pigs	287	93
TOTAL	7098	909

Table 5: Table showing animals entered into VGS 2024.

4.5.3. 71% of respondents are members of the VGS. Of those who were not members several were unable to join the scheme due to a three-year probation period, or said they were unaware of the scheme. Others chose not to join as they did not have qualifying animals, e.g. geldings or unregistered ponies. Whilst under-30s are less likely to be claiming VGS there was less of an age correlation than with BPS, with 73%-75% of over 30s claiming VGS and 42% of under 30s.

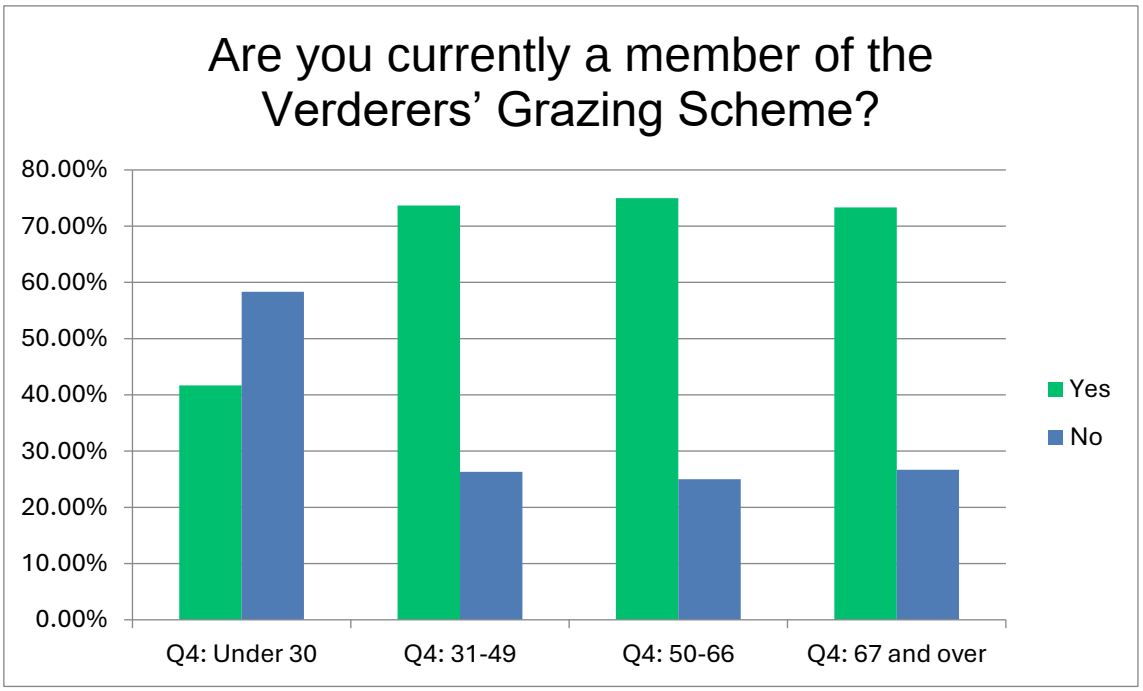


Figure 22: Graph showing age profile of VGS claimant

4.6. NFCDA Membership

4.6.1. Respondents were asked whether they were a member of the NFCDA to help us understand to what extent the association represented the commoning community. 72% of respondents to our survey are members of the NFCDA.

4.6.2. 10% of non-members said they hadn't considered joining the CDA and 7% had forgotten to renew.

4.6.3. A number of consultees made comments advising that they felt that the complexity of the joining process prevented them from becoming a member. It is thought that respondents were referring to the requirement to receive nominations from two existing members. Others commented that they felt that the organisation had been too aggressive or political historically. A number of respondents stated that they felt the association did not cater for their needs as new or hobby commoners.

4.6.4. Age is a significant factor in whether commoners were members of the CDA. The graph below shows that 83% of rights holders who were over 67 years old were members, and only 42% of the under-30s.

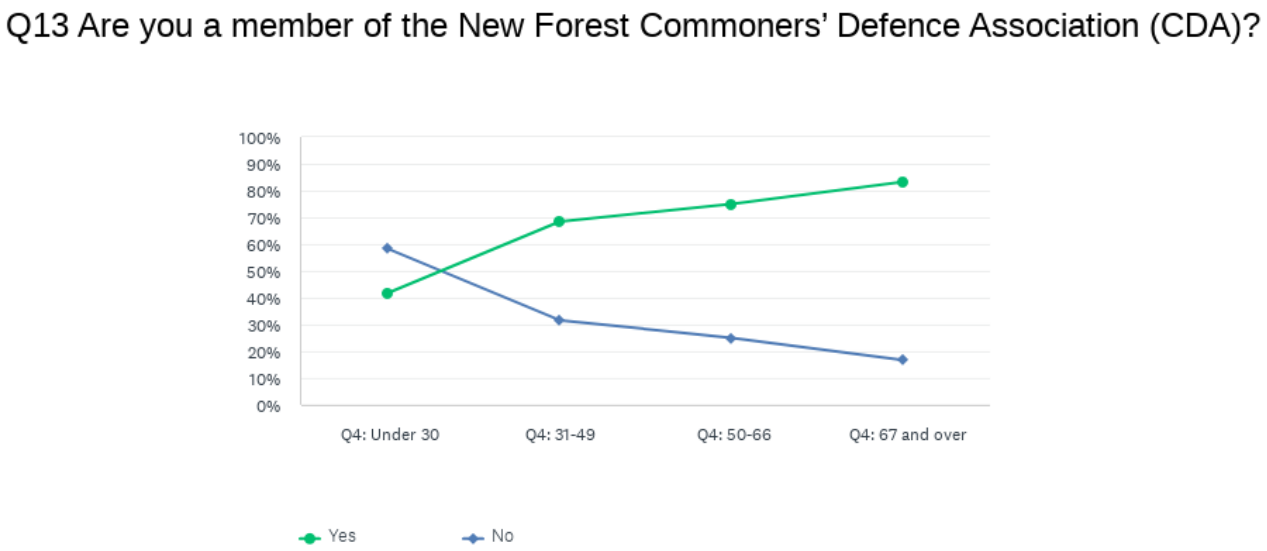


Figure 23: Graph showing CDA membership compared by age

4.7. Future scheme governance

4.7.1. Respondents were asked questions relating to what length of agreement they would be prepared to sign up to. 71% of survey respondents said they would not sign up to a 30-year agreement at this time.

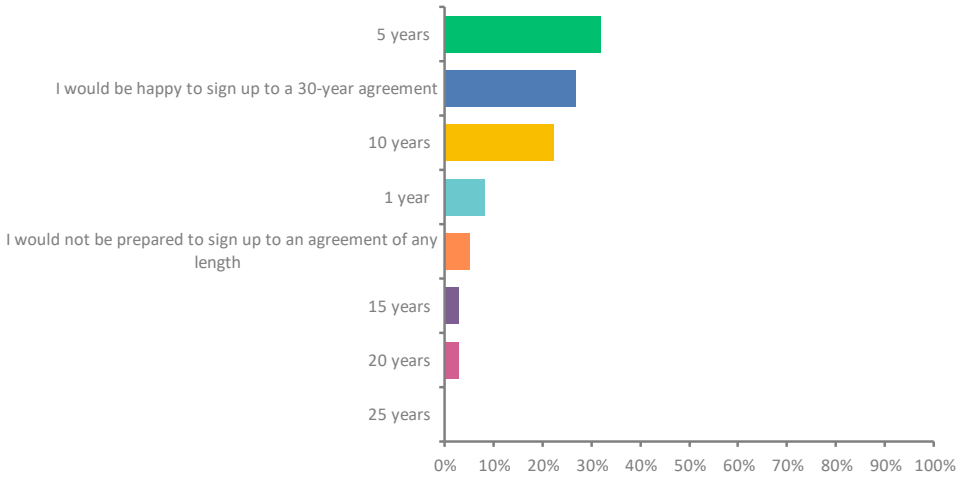
4.7.2. 5 years was the most popular length of time for a scheme commitment, with 32% of respondents favouring this option. 30 years was the second most popular length of commitment with 27% and 10 years was the third most popular length with 22% of respondents favouring this option.

The current 1-year sign up required by the VGS was surprisingly unpopular amongst respondents. This signifies a desire by scheme members for longer-term security.

4.7.3. When filtered, Northern Commons right holders favour longer-term agreements than Forest commoners. This may also reflect the uncertainty of being out of scheme for longer than the Crown-owned common land.

Q16: If you answered "No" to Q15 above, please state the maximum length of agreement to which you would be prepared to sign up. Please explain your reasons.

Answered: 135 Skipped: 1



Powered by SurveyMonkey

Figure 24: Graph showing maximum length of agreement right holders would be prepared to sign up to at this time.

4.7.4. The options proposed in the consultation to incentivise sign-up to a longer agreement were broadly supported. However, when filtered there were some interesting findings:

i. Break clauses were universally seen as an incentive for membership of a longer agreement.
ii. Increased payment rates were favoured by larger commoners, whilst some commoners with small herds of fewer than 5 ponies saw this as a disincentive.
iii. Regular scheme reviews were viewed as an incentive by most respondents, larger herd owners and owners of one or two animals were more likely to strongly agree to this incentive.
iv. Larger herd owners said they would be more likely to sign up to a longer agreement if they had a greater involvement in the decision-making processes and if there was flexibility in the scheme rules.
v. A number of rights holders said they would be incentivised to sign up for longer term agreements if all of the options proposed were included in the scheme design.
vi. Rights holders under the age of 50 preferred the option of an annual consultation, whilst over-50s preferred only to be consulted when there were significant changes to the scheme rules.
vii. 88% of respondents thought commoners should be rewarded financially for the conservation grazing that their animals deliver. There was a correlation with age in relation to this question. 83% of under-30s thought commoners should be rewarded financially along with 86% of 31-49 year olds, 89% of 50-66 year olds and 90% of over 67s.

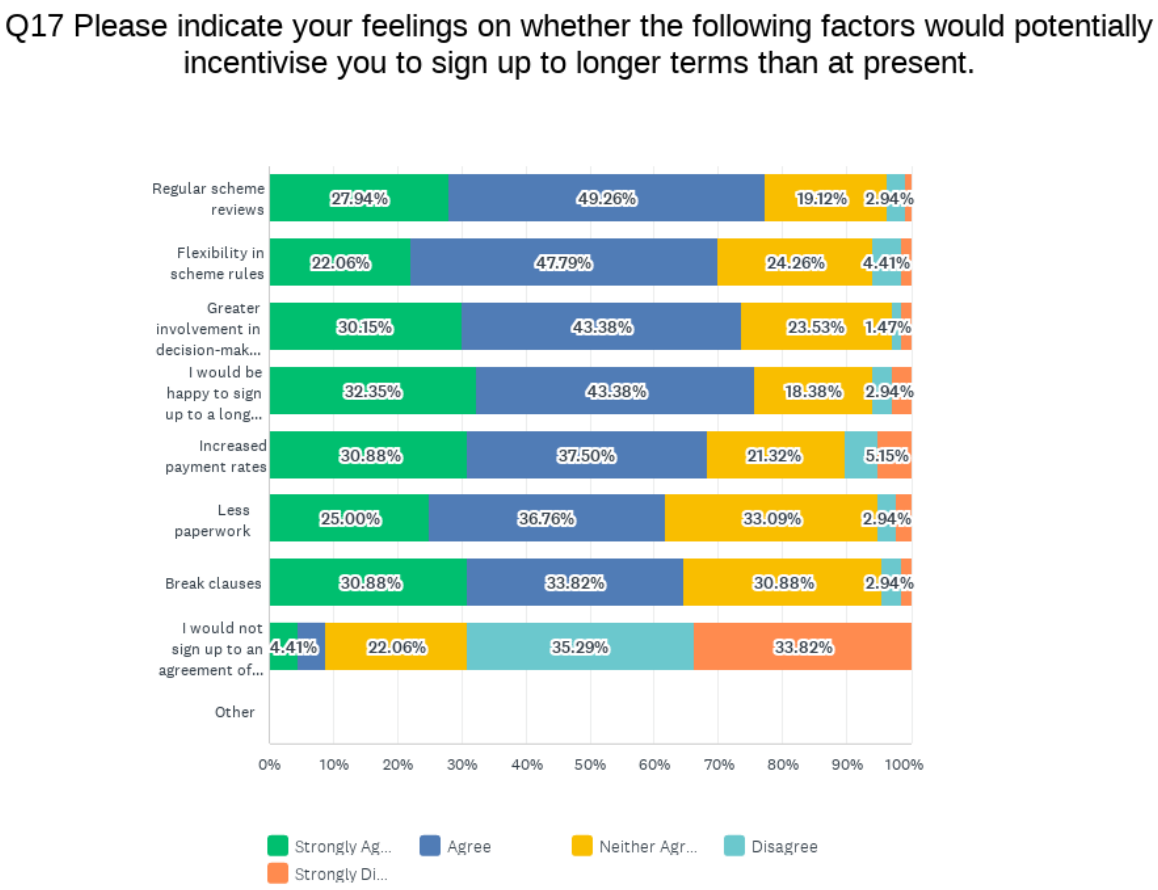


Figure 25: Graph showing popularity of different incentives for participation in longer-term schemes

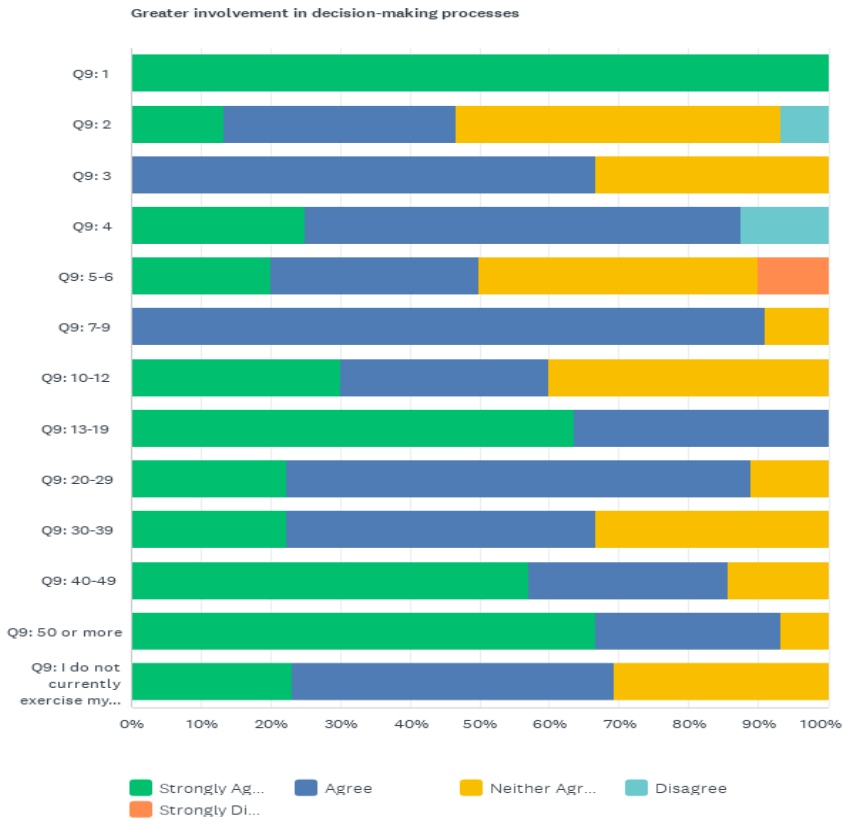


Figure 26: Graph analysing the incentive for more involvement in the decision-making processes compared by herd size

Q17: Please indicate your feelings on whether the following factors would potentially incentivise you to sign up to longer terms than at present.

Answered: 136 Skipped: 0

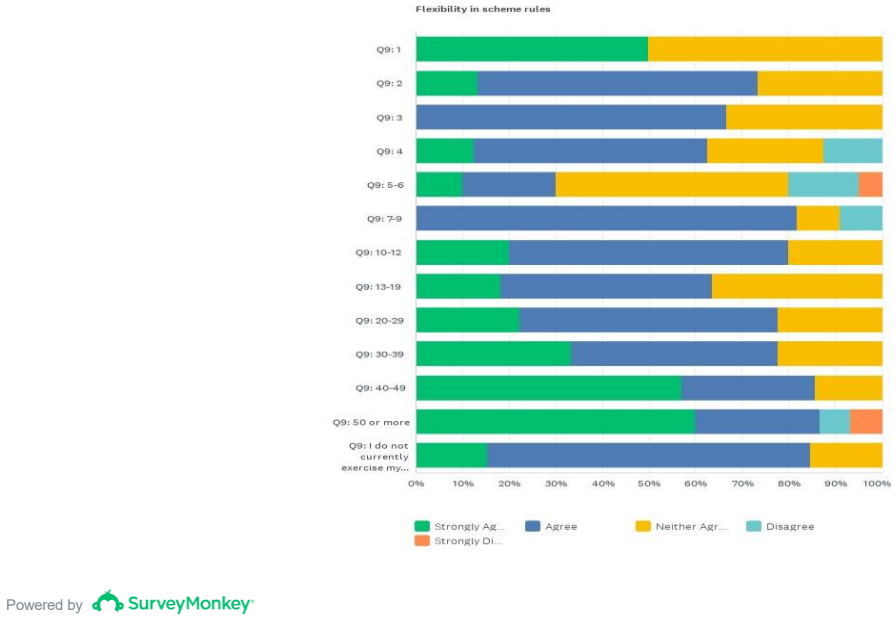


Figure 27: Graph analysing the incentive of flexibility of scheme rules compared by herd size

4.8. Understanding the impact of removing financial support from active graziers

4.8.1. Young commoners and new commoners appear to be less likely to be in receipt of BPS and/or VGS payments. These individuals are likely to be in the process of trying to grow their herds.

4.8.2. Commoners turning out herds of more than 7 animals appear to be more likely to reduce their herds a small amount, whilst herds larger than 40 head are most likely to reduce their herd sizes. Larger herds (greater than 30 head) are more likely to contain a broader range of animal types (including stallions). These larger herds account for 26% of ponies marked and 41% of cattle marked.

4.8.3. When looking at the age of respondents, we can see that younger commoners are less likely to reduce their stocking numbers if financial support were to be completely removed, however when compared by herd size we see a more significant trend with larger herds more likely to reduce, impacting the 26% of ponies and 41% of cattle marked.

4.8.4. 50% of active Forest commoners would continue to turn out the same number of animals, whilst 49% would reduce to some extent if financial support were removed. In comparison, 67% of Northern Commons commoners would continue to turn out at the current stocking level with 33% reducing to some extent if financial support were removed. The impact of removing financial support would appear to have the greatest impact on the Western Commons with only 21% of commoners continuing to graze at the current levels and 79% saying they would reduce their herds to some extent. The large percentage of smaller commoners is likely to be influencing these results. The actions of the larger commoners will have the greatest impact on the numbers of animals being marked and depastured.

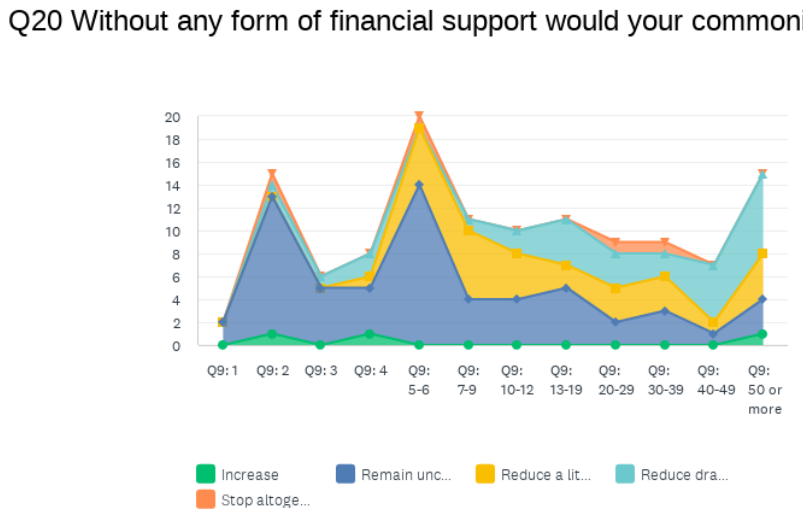


Figure 28: Graph showing impact of removing financial support compared by herd size

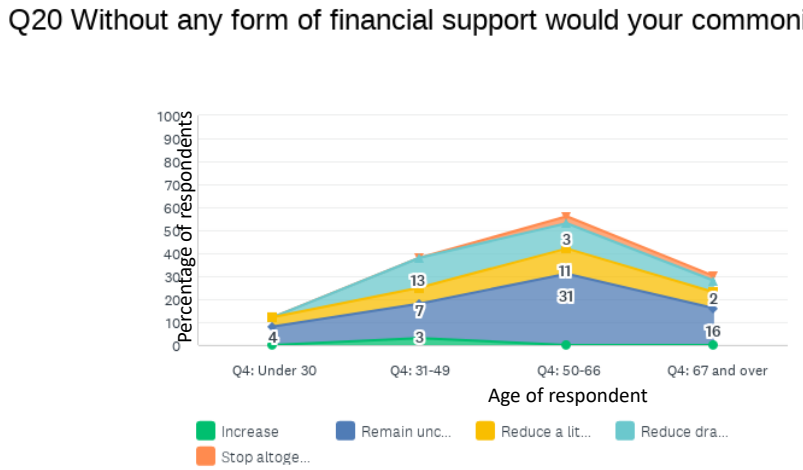


Figure 29: Graph showing impact of removing financial support compared by age of commoner.

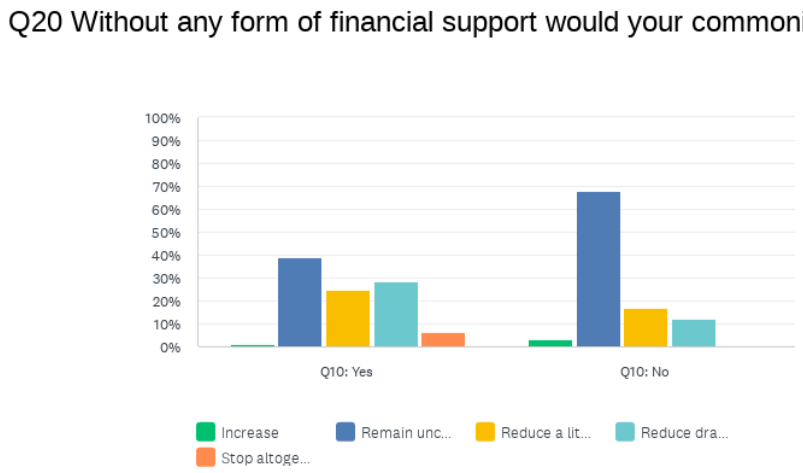


Figure 30: Graph showing impact of removing financial support compared by BPS claimants

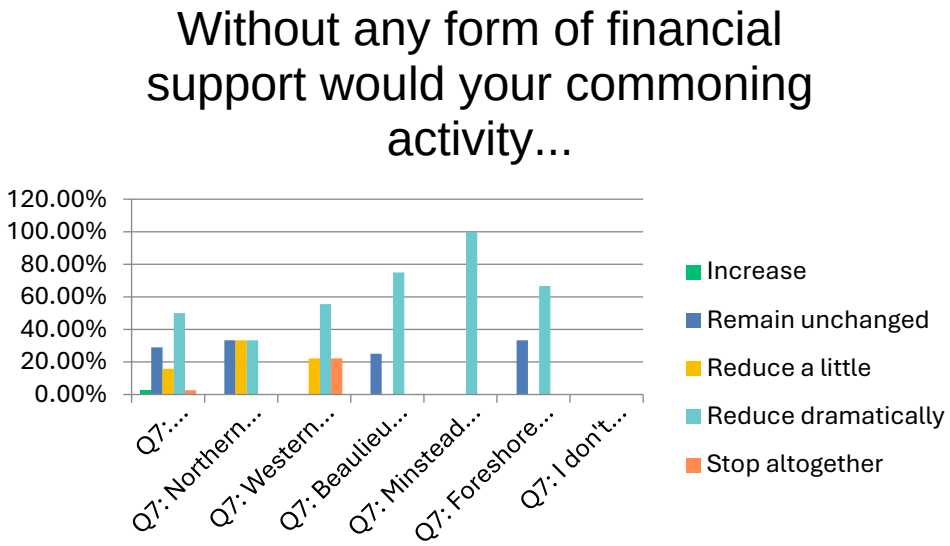


Figure 31: Graph showing the impact of removing financial support from cattle keepers on the Northern and Western commons

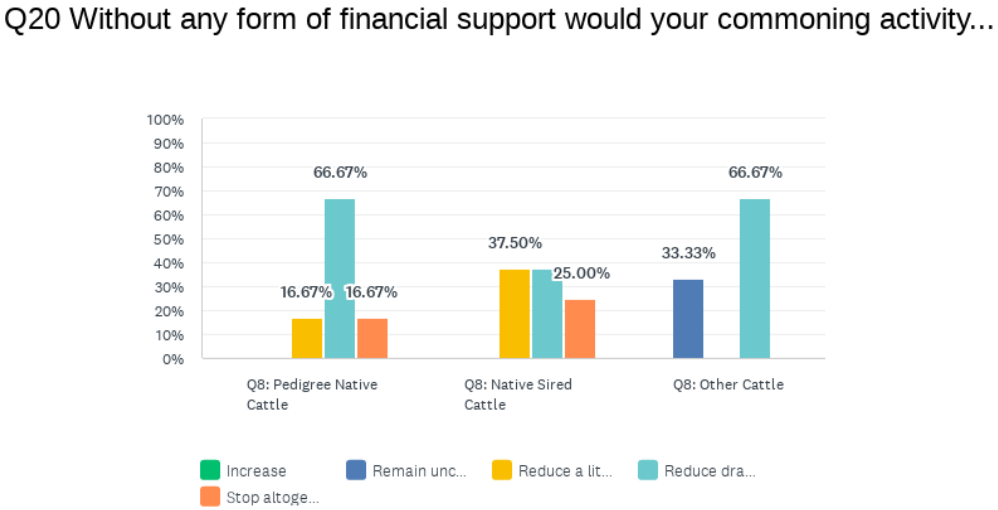


Figure 32: Graph showing the impact of removing financial support from cattle keepers on the Northern and Western commons

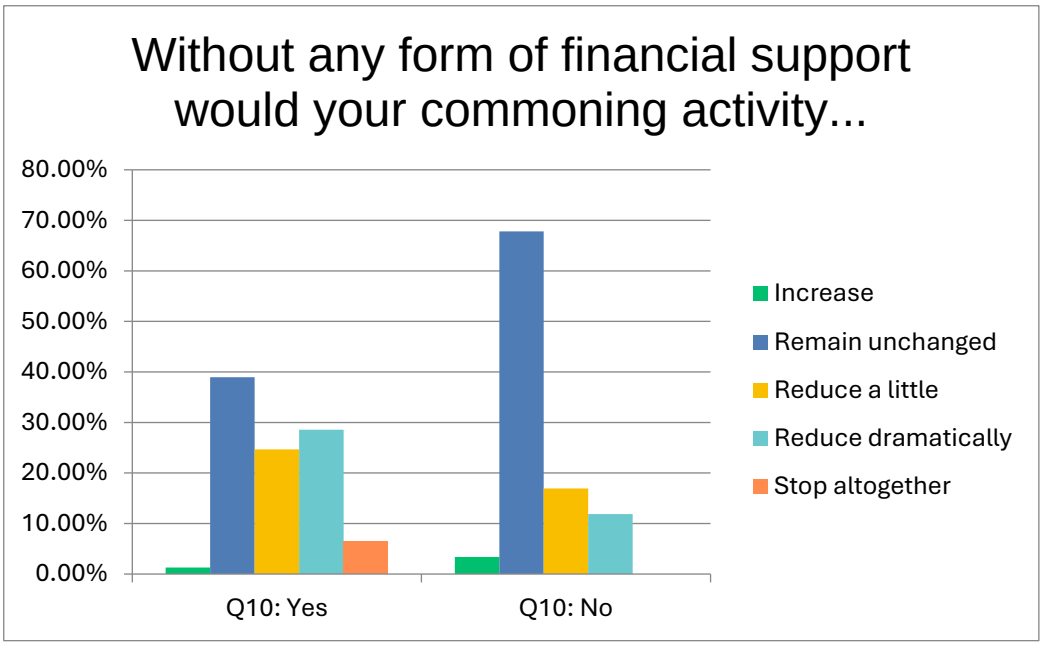


Figure 33: Graph showing the impact on commoning activity if financial support was removed (Filtered by answers to Q10 – Have you claimed BPS?)

4.8.5. When filtering respondent data by whether of not they claimed BPS, we can see that those that claimed BPS are more likely to alter their activity as a result of support payments. This is illustrated at figure 33 above.

4.8.6. Drone surveys were the least popular option for assessing when and where livestock are grazing. Whilst online reporting was the most popular option, however this option did receive a number of concerns, with some citing a lack of online access as a barrier to reporting. When analysed by age, commoners under 50 were very supportive of this option, those over 67 were far less likely to support this option. It was also raised that new passport legislation for ponies will require movement data to be recorded and this may offer a way of doing this. There was strong support for enhanced actions by the Verderers to ensure animal records were accurate as well as strong feeling that the marking fee register is not an accurate representation of the number of animals depastured. Below are two of the responses:

> *"make marking fee register more transparent and open to scrutiny and make an app recording contractual so a very clear legal undertaking."*

> *"Recording of habitual location is likely to be mandatory under next round of [equine] passport legislation"*

4.9. Commoners' representation in a future agreement

4.9.1. The graph below shows that respondents to the consultation would prefer the Elected Verderers to represent commoners in the development and administration of a future scheme, with 77% agreeing and 7% disagreeing with this option. There was also relatively strong support for the NFCDA to represent commoners, with 68% agreeing and 20% in disagreement. Comments in this section of the survey included a request for a young commoner representative as an alternative or additional option. The graph below combines the "agree" and "strongly agree" data and the "disagree" and "strongly disagree" data.

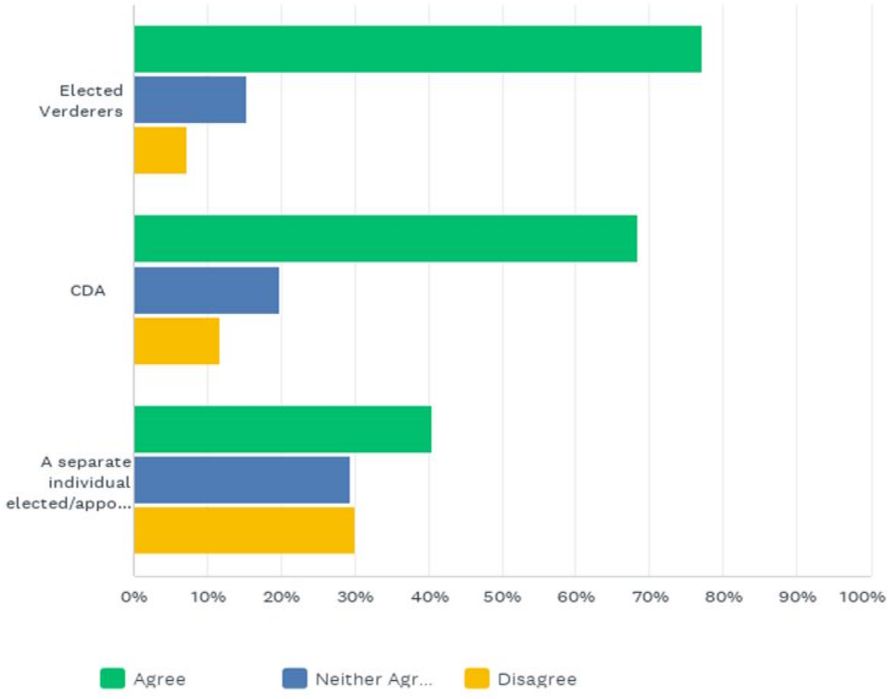


Figure 34: Graph showing commoners' preferred representation

4.9.2. Commoners who attended the open meeting in September were also asked, by way of placing votes into ballot-style boxes, to vote for who they would like to represent them in a future agreement. The results of this in-person vote concur with the above survey findings, with 23 votes for the CDA, 40 for the Elected Verderers and 12 for an elected individual (there were 75 respondents on the night).

Preferred representative:	No. of votes received:
NFCDA	23
Elected Verderers	40
Other elected individual or organisation	12

Table 6: Results of ballot held at open meeting regarding representation

4.10. Commoners' Back-Up Land

4.10.1. Respondents were asked questions about the location and use of their back-up land (enclosed land used to support their commoning activity).

4.10.2. The graph below shows the location of respondents back-up land. This does not vary significantly when filtered by age of respondent, animal type or by common grazed.

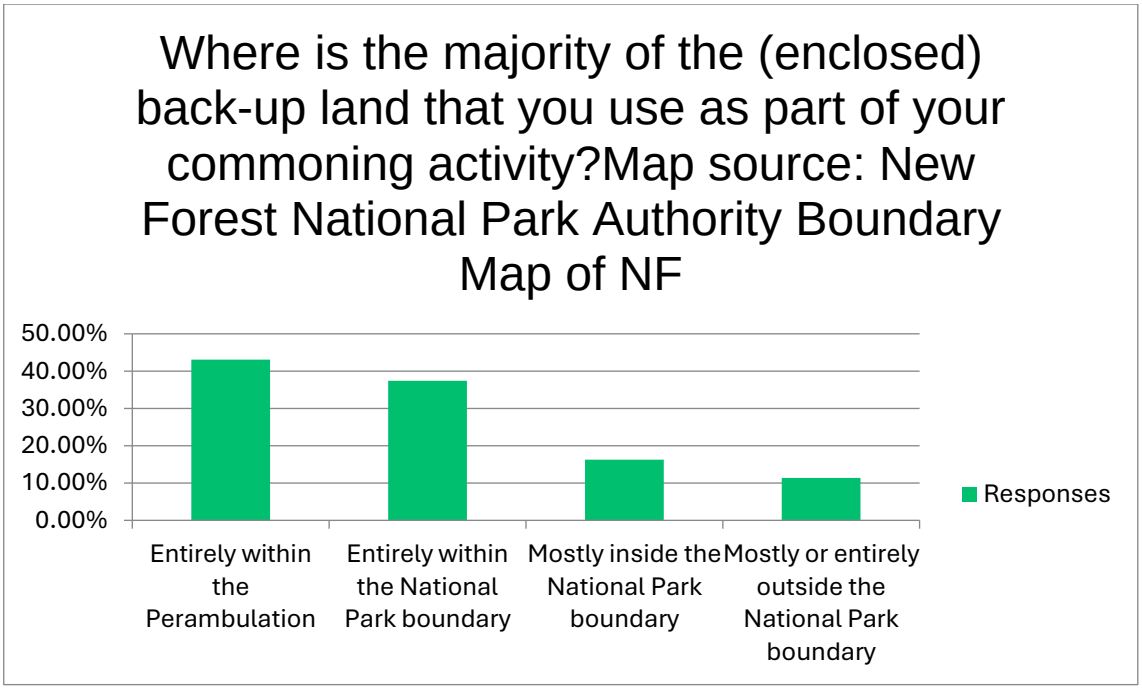


Figure 35: Graph showing the distribution of back-up land in and around the New Forest

4.10.3. 43% of respondents' land used as back-up land by right holders who responded to the survey is within the perambulation. 37% of respondents have land entirely within the National Park, 16% have land mostly within the National Park and only 11% have land mostly outside the National Park. This does not vary significantly when filtered by age of respondent, animal type or by common grazed.

4.10.4. 123 respondents provided their land data via the survey. This provided data on the current use and tenure under which commoners occupy the land. 5,207 acres were recorded, but some land was used for multiple purposes resulting in some double counting.

4.10.5. The chart below compares the land tenure for different age groups of commoners, whether land is in an agri-environment scheme and whether they claimed BPS.

	owned	%	5yr+ agree	%	1-5 year agree	%	Up to 12 month agree	%	Informal agree	%	Total acreage
ALL	992	19	1459	28	930	17.9	1048	20.1	778	14.9	5207
Under 30s	4	2	4	2	18	9.5	34	18	129	68.3	189
30-49	157	6	1389	53.4	257	9.9	525	20.2	272	10.5	2600
50-66	479	27.5	54	3.1	547	31.4	395	22.7	265	15.2	1740
67+	352	51.9	12	1.8	108	15.9	94	13.9	112	16.5	678
Land in AES	110	3.9	1162	41.2	663	23.5	555	19.7	327	11.6	2817
Not in AES*	729	41	284	16	143	8	273	15.4	348	19.6	1777
Yes BPS	819	8	1363	31.5	761	17.6	830	19.2	551	12.7	4324

**Land not recorded as Yes or No = Agri-environment scheme status unknown*

Table 7: Showing land tenure in comparison to the age of respondents

4.10.6. Only 20% of respondents have confirmed that their back-up land is entered into an agri-environment scheme. This varied significantly by common as can be seen in the graph below. 25% of respondents who are under 50 have land in agri-environment schemes, compared with 16% of 50-66 year olds and 18% of those over 67. Those with native sired cattle as well as and other cattle are more likely to have land in an agri-environment scheme (30%).

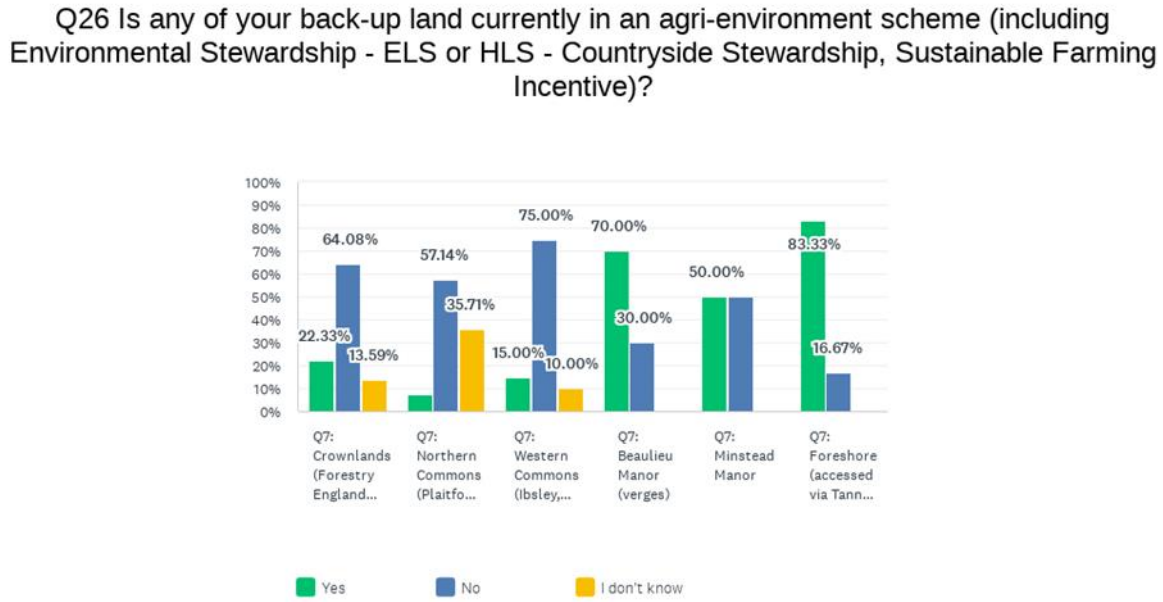


Figure 36: Graph showing percentage of respondents with land in agri-environment schemes

4.10.7. Whilst many of the survey respondents recognised the value of their back-up land in the delivery of public goods, 41% advised that they did not know which public goods their land provided.

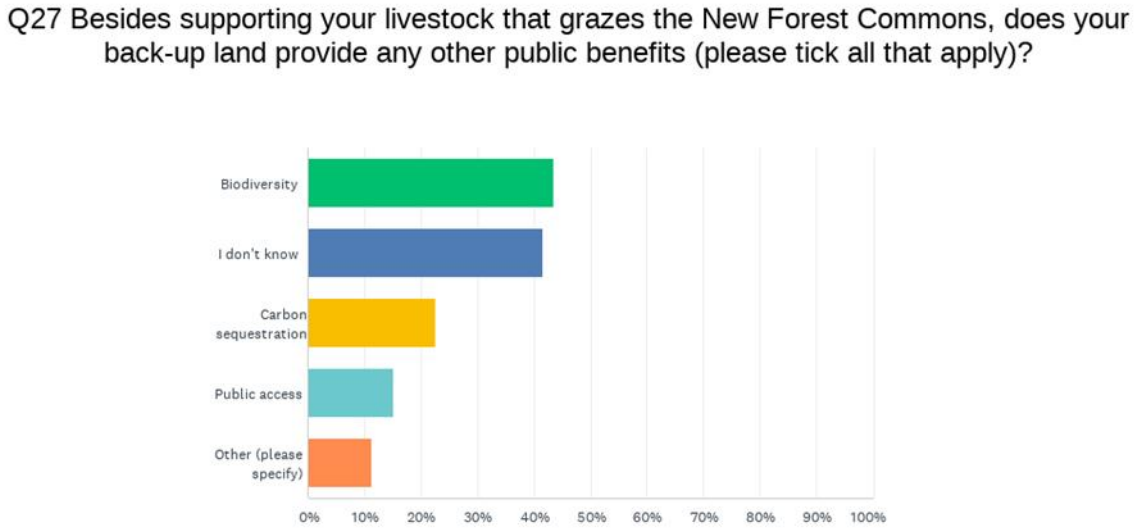


Figure 37: Graph showing public benefits that respondents recognise their back-up land provides

4.10.8. 24% of respondents felt the current schemes adequately rewarded them for the public goods they provide, 39% did not feel the schemes provided adequately and 36% didn't know. When this data is filtered, it is clear that cattle owners particularly do not feel the current schemes reward them adequately. Note in figure 35 that only one respondent depastured sheep.

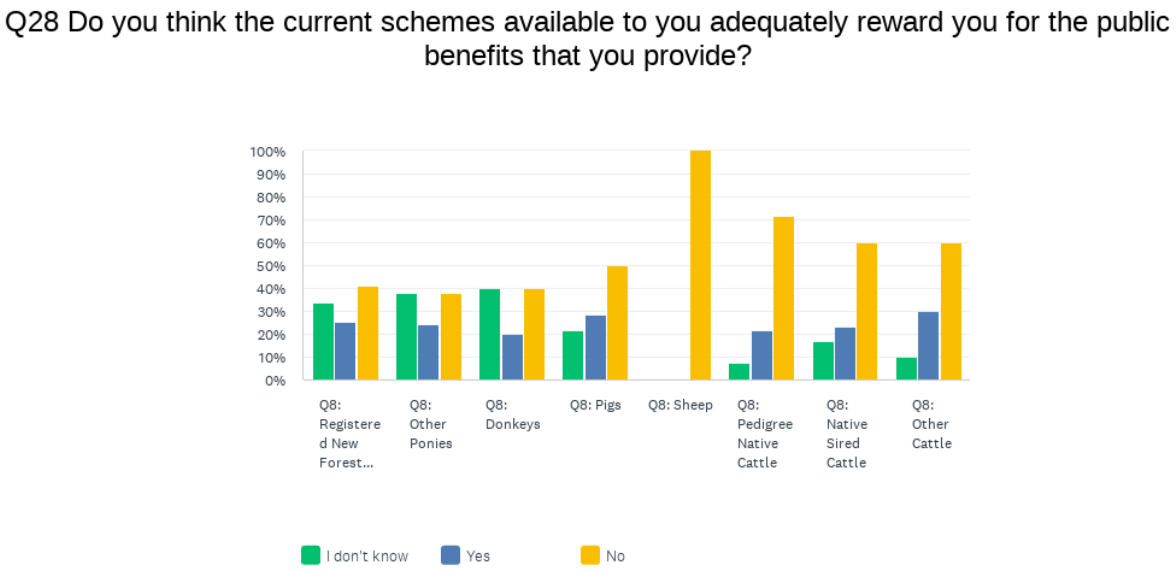


Figure 38: Graph showing whether commoners feel they are adequately rewarded for the public benefits they provide compared by animal type

4.11. Sustainability of commoning in the New Forest

4.11.1. The majority of respondents say their commoning practice is not financially sustainable. Very few, however, reported that they had introduced diversification in order to make their commoning practice more resilient. Owners of the larger herds and of those made up of a variety of animals (cattle, pigs and sheep) were more likely to have diversified to support their commoning.

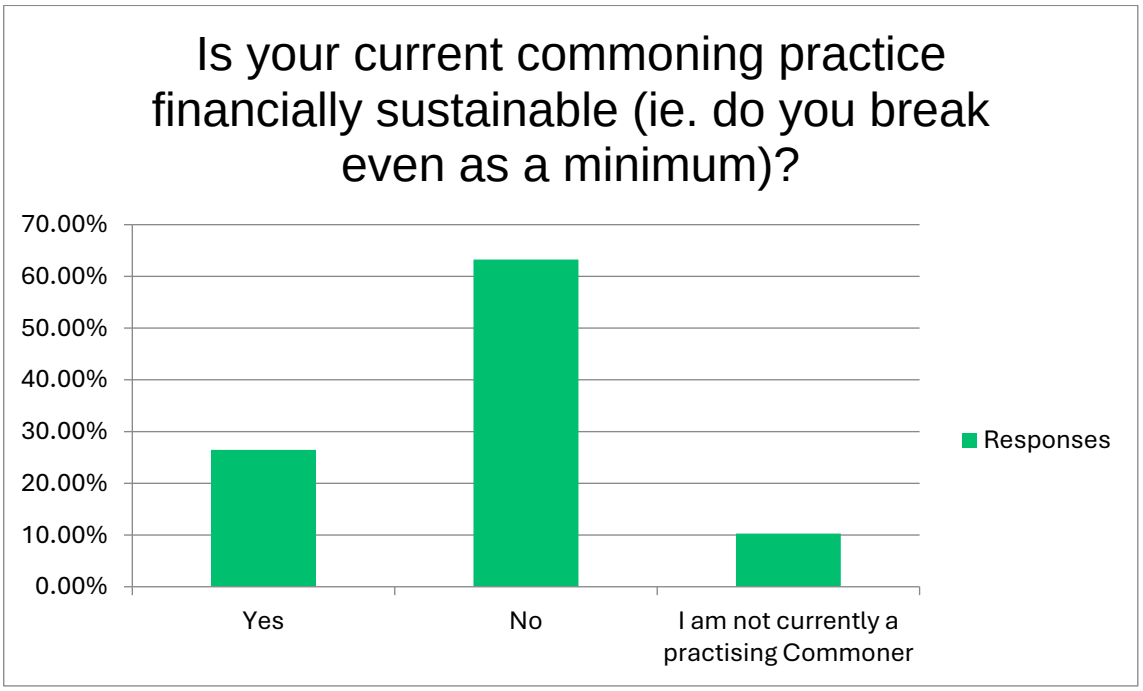


Figure 39: Graph showing whether respondents' current commoning practice is financially sustainable

4.11.2. 65% of respondents have not carried out any farm diversification initiatives or actions. However, it was noted that commoners have made efforts to improve the value of their ponies by handling and halter breaking them before selling either privately and in online sales. Some commoners are certified New Forest Marque and use this to help market their produce and attract a premium. During our follow up interviews some people raised the fact that diversification is not possible for the majority of commoners due to constraints on both their time and land. It was also mentioned that planning permission is thought to be a barrier for most on farm diversifications, such as camping, due to the National Park's planning policies.

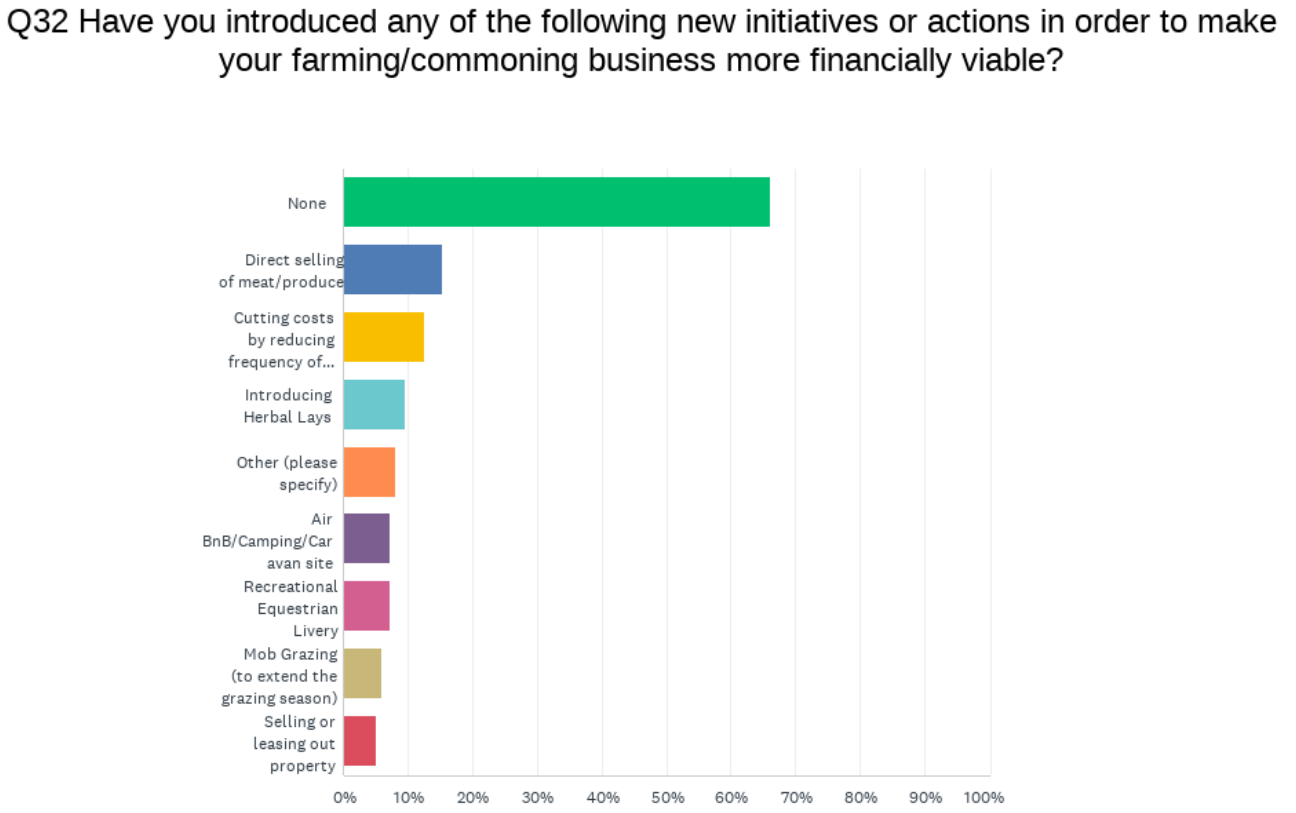


Figure 40: Graph showing diversification initiatives and actions

4.11.3. Respondents were able to leave any further comments in response to the last question. The following Word Cloud shows the most commonly used words in the final comments section of the questionnaire:



Figure 41: Word Cloud created from comments left at Q33 (Any Other Comments)

5. Summary of Findings

5.1.1. From comparisons against the marking fee register, we can see that the survey has reached a good cross-section of the commoning community. A broad range of respondent age, livestock type, herd size and areas where livestock are depastured are represented. We note that only one respondent currently depasture sheep, but only 8 commoners paid marking fees for sheep in the New Forest in 2024.

5.1.2. The elected Verderers received the strongest support when respondents were asked who they would like to represent them in the development of a future scheme. The NFCDA also received strong support. Right holders who were not currently active graziers favoured an independent person or organisation selected specifically for the role.

5.1.3. A significant number of respondents advised that they would not sign up to a 30-year scheme. This is significant in relation to a possible Landscape Recovery scheme application. From comments made in the survey, it is possible that this is because respondents did not feel confident in their understanding of the scheme, their obligations and what would happen should their circumstances change (move house, lose herd as a result of a disease outbreak or physically not be able fulfil the requirements due to personal ill health). Provisions such as break clauses, regular reviews and rule flexibility were found to give commoners greater confidence in signing up to a longer agreement.

5.1.4. The survey data suggests a pattern of four distinct brackets of herd size. The survey results also highlight that the current stocking density of the New Forest common land is significantly impacted by a relatively small number of commoners. Commoners with larger herds are more likely to have the greatest impact on land in the vicinity of where they are depasturing, or 'turning out' their livestock. Commoners with larger herds were also found to be more likely to keep a variety of animal types including cattle, pigs and stallions.

5.1.5. The data suggests that different age groups have differing views on matters such as the length of scheme they would sign up to and the importance of keeping pedigree animals. Younger generations of commoner also appear to be less affected by reducing financial support. This is likely to be because they have not had the benefit of historic payment schemes, and also because their herd sizes are typically smaller. Understanding the motivations of the different age groups could help improve the ability of a future support scheme to influence behaviour.

5.1.6. The consultation established that whilst most back-up land is within the perambulation, younger and smaller commoners rely heavily on land beyond the perambulation and in certain cases, beyond the National Park boundary. This is likely to be due to the affordability and availability of land.

5.1.7. Only 20% of commoners were able to confirm that their back-up land is part of an agri-environment scheme. The apparent low take-up of such schemes is possibly through a combination of 1) commoners not knowing what schemes are available to them, 2) the high reliance on short-term, informal tenure agreements, and 3) the fact that land used for winter grazing is unlikely to qualify for any of the grassland management actions currently available. This is in contrast to the large number of commoners that entered their back-up land into the Basic Payment Scheme, which obliged commoners to comply with the cross-compliance rules. Time will tell if this change results in back-up land being maintained to a reduced standard.

5.1.8. Scheme rule flexibility was raised a number of times. Some survey respondents and interviewees raised concern over headage-based payments. This is likely to be as a result of the way that the Basic Payment scheme was historically applied to the New Forest.

5.1.9. An increased dependence by commoners on the agisters (who are employed by the Verderers to monitor livestock welfare whilst livestock are depastured) was noted in one interview. This could be a result of the age demographics (63% of respondents were over the age of 50 and 22% over the age of 67). It also could be due to the large number of individuals that keep a very small number of animals (typically ponies) who might not have the resources, facilities, time or skills to manage their animals when they are on the common.

Appendix 1
Open Meeting Presentation Slides

New Forest Commoners Funding Update and Consultation

9th September 2024

NEW PARK CONSULTANCY

New Park Consultancy - What do we do?





Agenda

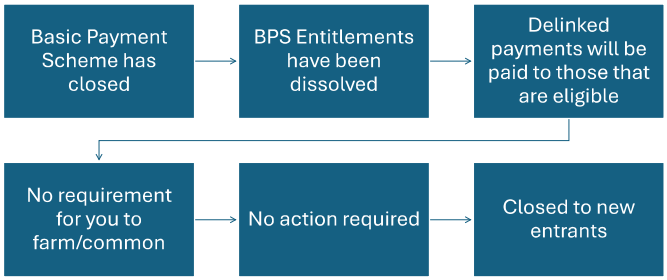
- Funding available for commoners (what's currently on offer) - OC
- Cost of Commoning - LS
- Timeline of events & where we are now – OC (with contributions from APN and LS)
- The Feasibility Study (PA2) - OC
- The Commoners consultation – OC & LS

What grants are currently available for Commoners?

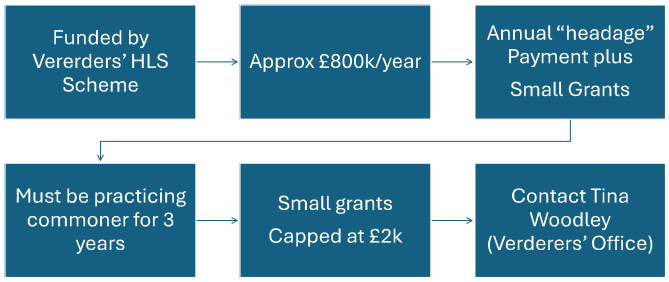
Some of the funding currently available

Delinked Payments Scheme
Verderers Grazing Scheme (VGS)
Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) – ("the expanded offer")
Countryside Stewardship – Higher Tier
Countryside Stewardship - Capital grants
Landscape Recovery
Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL)
Species Survival Fund
Farming Investment Fund

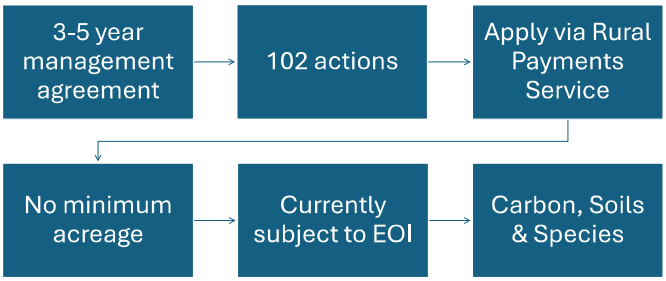
Delinked Payments Scheme



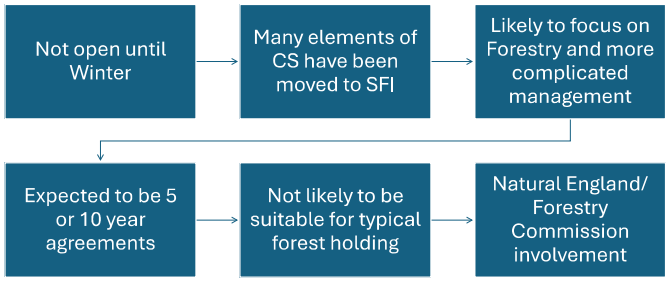
Verderers' Grazing Scheme (VGS)



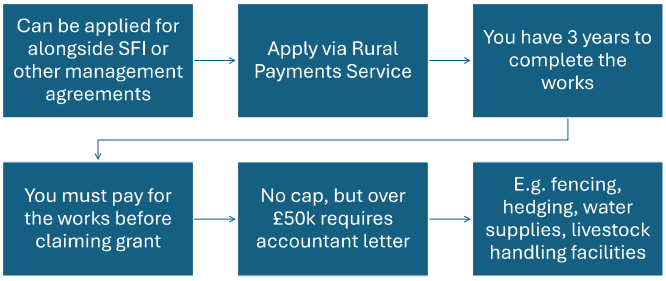
Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI)



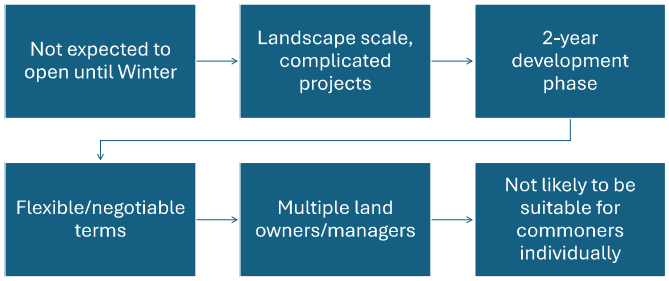
Countryside Stewardship CS – Higher Tier



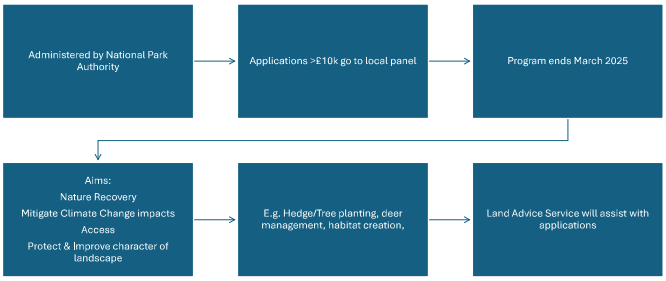
Countryside Stewardship – Capital works



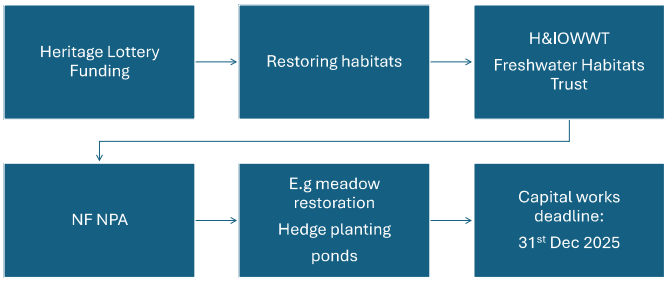
Landscape Recovery (LR)



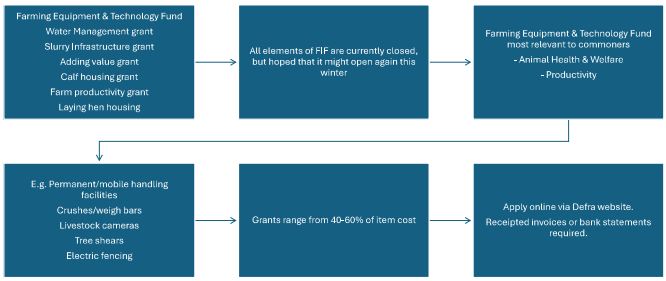
Farming in Protected Landscapes



Species Survival Fund

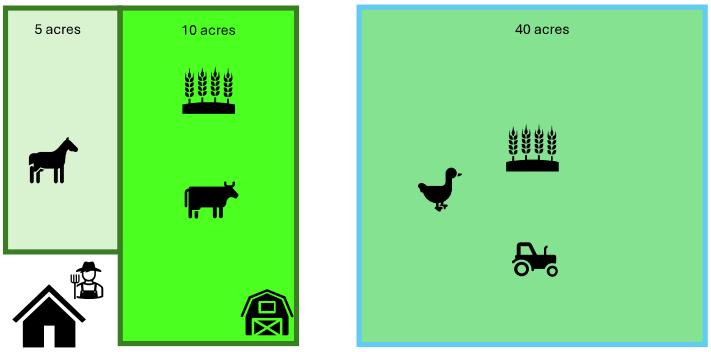


Farming Investment Fund (FIF)



A case study for a "hypothetical" commoner

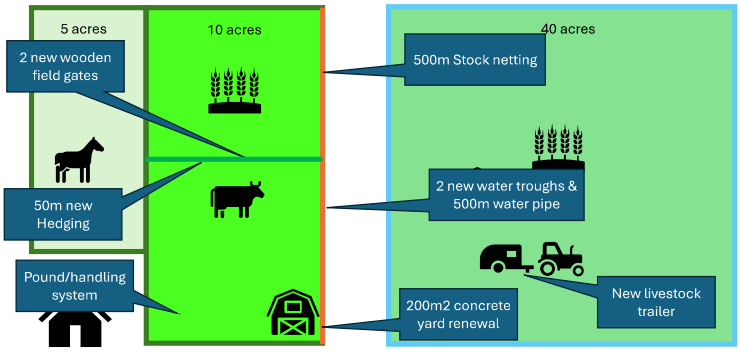
- Commoning family living in the National Park
- Access to 55 acres
- 2 Horses
- 10 Forest run mares/fillies
- 20 Suckler cows
- Currently receiving no grant funding



Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI)

- 5 acres – generally grazed heavily. Little or no clover or grass diversity and supplementary feeding required in winter.
  - No options
- 10 acres. Cut for silage. Some clover and sainfoin present
  - CNUM2 - Legumes on improved grassland (£102/ha)
  - CSAM3 - herbal ley (£382/ha)
- 40 acres of hay meadows
  - CLIG1 - Low Input Grassland (£151/ha) plus
  - GRH7 – Haymaking supplement (£157/ha)
- 1,000m Hedgerows
  - HRW2 – Manage hedgerows (£0.13/m)
- Management Payment £1,000 per annum
- ~~Total £6,528/year.~~ (40 acres turns out to be on informal annual agreement so not eligible)
- Total £1,542/year

Capital works identified



CS Capital

- Fencing 500m of stream to exclude cattle from drinking - £3,735
- Two new water troughs and 500m of water pipe - £1,960
- 2 new wooden fields gates - £978
- 50m hedging reinstating an old field boundary - £1,148
- 200m2 Concrete yard renewal - £6,728 (subject to CSF approval)

Farming in Protected Landscapes

- Permanent Handling System/Wooden Pound - £5k (80% of cost)

Verderers Grazing Scheme (VGS)

- Annual payment for:
  - 10 ponies (full New Forest) - £950
  - 20 cattle - £1,900
  - Cattle Supplement £2,000
- Small grants claim for purchasing new livestock trailer - £2,000

(Based on 2023 payment rates)

Summary of Grant Income

- SFI - £1,542 (per annum)
- CS capital - £14,550
- FiPL - £5,000
- VGS - £4,850
- **Total - £25,943**

Expenditure?

- Fencing - £5,000
- Troughs & Pipe – £2,500
- Hedge planting - £1,500
- Gates - £1,000
- Concrete - £7,000
- Pound - £6,250
- Marking Fees - £810
- Trailer - £6,000

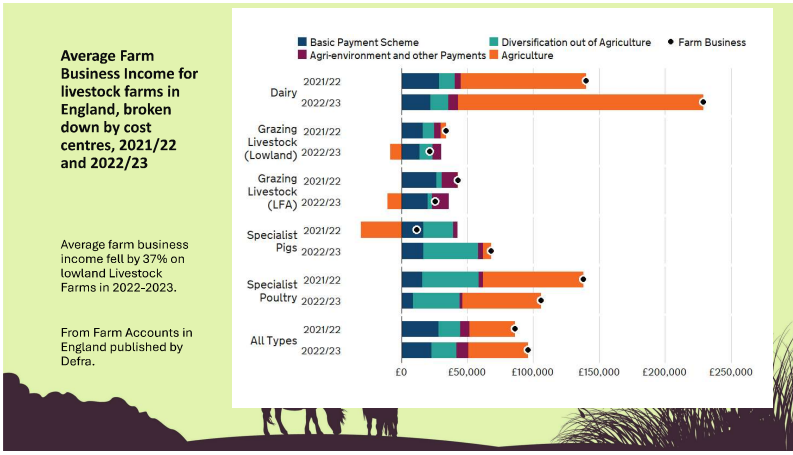
Total £30,060 (£5k net cost in cash terms)
Other costs on top (feed, rent, vet, fuel, electricity.....)

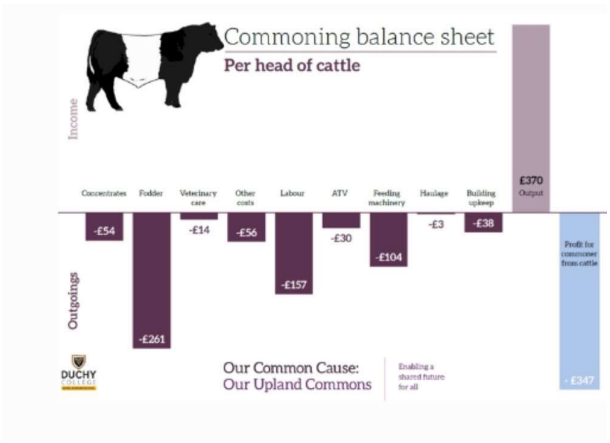
The Cost of Commoning

The cost of commoning in the New Forest

- Every commoner who returned the data recorded a loss at all points of calculation
- All commoners recorded a loss before accounting for labour costs
- With cattle, at best income accounted for 65% of costs excluding labour
- BPS and HLS support at best made up for 60% of loss
- All cattle commoners were also employed off of their holdings
- There was no correlation between herd size and direct costs (whilst economies of scale would predict this correlation it was not seen)

(a small test exercise carried out using 2021/2022 farm accounts from 13 smallholdings/farms of differing types and sizes in the New Forest)



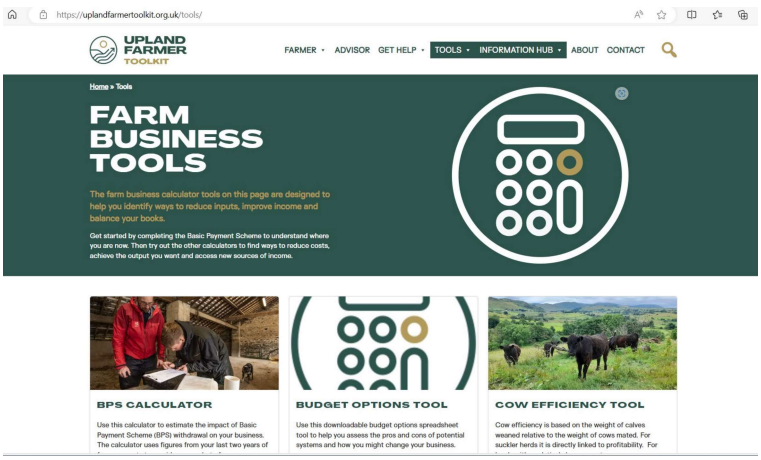


Foundation for Common Land

Have a look at our website...

Our Upland Commons

Tools - Upland Farmer Toolkit



A new scheme for the Forest

Timeline of Events

2010 – Verderers' Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Scheme
2015 – Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)
2016 – Brexit Referendum
2017 – Forest Farming Group Established

Forest Farming Group (FFG)

Andrew Parry-Norton (Chair)

Timeline of events

2010 – Verderers' Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Scheme
2015 – Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)
2016 – Brexit Referendum
2017 – Forest Farming Group established
2020 – Agriculture Act 2020
2020 – Verderer HLS extended
2021 – The Environment Act 2021
2022 – Foundation for Common Land's Test & Trial

FCL's Test & Trial

Lyndsey Stride

FCL Tests and trials

- 1. Co designing a Delivery Model for ELM
- 2. How can we deliver multiple outcomes at landscape scale on lowland commons?
- 3. SFI Moorland T&T and App development

Background

Who did we work with?

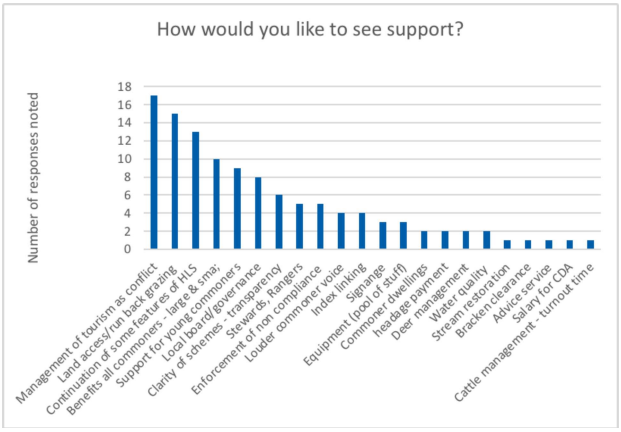
- Commoners in current HLS/CS schemes on common land in the New Forest National Park and the Malvern Hills AONB
- Common land owners including private owners, Forestry England and the National Trust
- Landowners and farmers of land adjacent to the common
- Statutory bodies including The Malvern Hills Trust, Malvern Hills AONB, Verderers of the New Forest and New Forest National Park Authority
- Legal experts on common land
- Commons Associations and groups

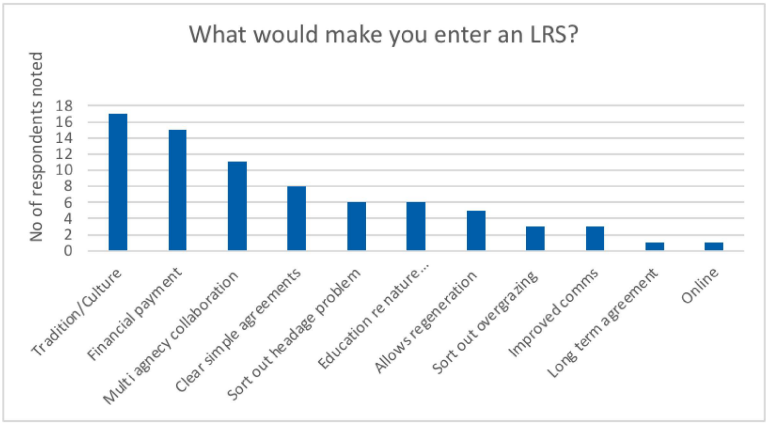
Policy Questions

Phase 1: How to to incentivise land manager participation in Landscape Recovery Projects (and landscape scale schemes) and determine appropriate payment mechanisms.

Phase 2: How to construct agreements for commons

Phase 3: How to construct long-term agreements (30+ years) potentially incorporating conservation covenants to safeguard investment in land use change and associated environmental outcomes.





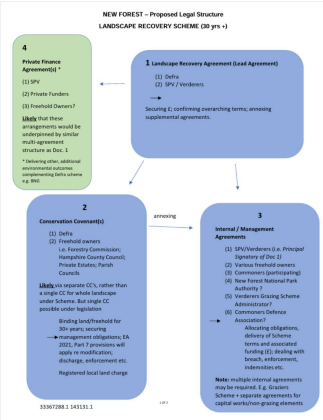
How to construct long term agreements for commons

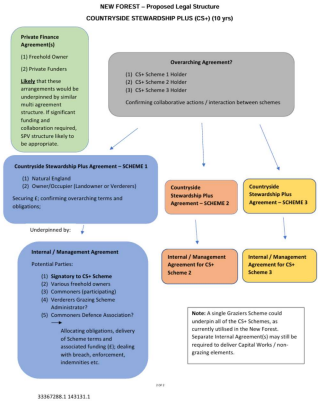
Findings

A special purpose vehicle (SPV) would provide an appropriate structure, if underpinned by an equitable and transparent governance structure, to receive multiple funding streams including private finance on commons in our two case study areas.

Solutions

All ELM agreements on Commons must have internal agreements that bind the legal interests that could upset the ELM agreement for the duration of the agreement. Owners signing up without the active commoners or commoners signing up without an actively managing owner, can cause significant risks to delivery as well as being inequitable.





Internal/Management Agreement

- Under the Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme it is mandatory for all commons comply with the RPA's CS Common Land and Shared Grazing supplement to the CS handbook.
- In addition to the mandatory requirements there are a number of other matters that the internal/management agreement should cover:
  - Parties
    - Either lead organisation as signatory or joint venture with multiple organisations forming a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)
    - Voting arrangements; the default is one member one vote but it may be that there are classes of members e.g. graziers only vote on grazing issues, commoners need to agree on who will represent them *Q 22 in the consultation*
  - Management Plan- who will deliver what and when
  - Capital Works
  - Review Dates – Question 18 in the consultation
  - Payments
    - Payment dates, terms and processes
  - Monitoring responsibilities
    - Who will and how will the management plan be monitored?

- Dispute resolution
- Breach enforcement
- Agreement Termination Rights
- Private Finance
  - Parties
  - Heads of Terms
  - Details of proposals
- Conservation Covenant
- Tax – tax advice on proposals
- How money is reclaimed from members in the event of a reclaim by the RPA
- Rules for sign up to grazing scheme, probation periods, review frequency, length of sign up. *(Q16,17,18,19 in consultation)*
- Who is responsible for distributing funds
- Grazing scheme structure including membership, probation periods, officers, voting, frequency of meetings



How to construct long-term agreements (30+) years potentially incorporating conservation covenants to safeguard investments in land

Findings

- A right of common is a form of profit a prendre, not a freehold or leasehold estate. This prevents commoners from signing or being bound by a Conservation Covenant.
- It is unclear whether Conservation Covenants provide above and beyond the current protections afforded to common land and other designated sites such as SSSIs. (21% of all SSSIs are on common land)

Solutions

- On commons consider if entering a Conservation Covenant is the optimum structure. There are substantial costs and a conservation covenant will not provide the necessary assurances to either public or private funders as rights of common are not subject to the covenant.

Consultation questions 15 and 16: how long would you be prepared to sign up for? Do you want to continue with annual sign up or would you be prepared to sign up for longer? What are the risks and benefits attached to each option?

Outputs

- Common Land Toolkit — Foundation for Common Land
- https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_jJdlMkOMAe0-kHngcdUHg

Timeline of events

2010 – Verderer' Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) Scheme
2015 – Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)
2016 – Brexit referendum
2017 – Forest Farming Group Established
2020 – Agriculture Act 2020
2020 – Verderer HLS extended
2021 – The Environment Act 2021
2022 – Foundation for Common Land's Test & Trial
2023 – Verderers HLS extended (5 years)
2023 – Basic Payment Scheme replaced with Direct Payments
2024 – FFG commissioned a Feasibility Study
2024 – Change of Government
2027 – Delinked Payments end
2028 – Verderers HLS expires (February)

ELMS Feasibility Study

The Feasibility Study

- Who?
  - Oliver Cook - New Park Consultancy
  - Lyndsey Stride – Foundation of Common Land
  - Jane Smith - Corylus Environmental
  - Michelmores Solicitors
- What?
  - Key Features / Special qualities
  - Possible scheme boundaries
  - How the special qualities should be managed
  - Grazing system
  - Defra policy/ schemes available
  - Governance Structures

When?

1st April 2024 – 31st March 2025

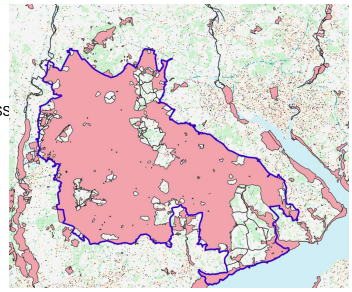
Feasibility Study

What we have established so far

The New Forest is one of the most important sites for wildlife in the UK and is widely recognised as being of exceptional importance for nature conservation on a European and International level.

- New Forest Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- New Forest Special Protection Area (SPA)
- New Forest RAMSAR
- New Forest Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSS
- National Nature Reserve (NNR)
- Local Nature Reserve (LNR)

Over 80% of the NF Perambulation is designated for its nature conservation interest



The New Forest supports a range of important, rare and unique habitats including:

Acid & neutral grassland (Lawns)
Pasture Woodland
Lowland heath
Mires (Fens, marsh & swamps)
Rivers and Streams
Ponds

These habitats support a vast range of notable and rare species.



The Forest habitats are known to support thousands of species, many of which are rare, of Conservation Concern or National importance

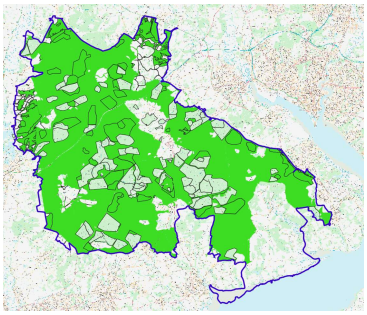


- 39 Bird species of conservation concern
- 18 mammal species of conservation concern
- +20 species of fish
- Most species of UK amphibians
- All 6 species of UK reptiles
- 33 out of 57 species of UK butterflies
- 1,455 moth species
- 27 of the 41 species of Odonata (dragonflies & damesflies)
- 4000 species of beetle
- At least 718 lichen species & 326 moss & liverwort species (over 30% o the British & Irish flora)
- 2,500 of fungi
- Hundreds of wasp, bee, spider and bug species



If the habitats are in good condition and more resilient species populations will be maintained, recover or thrive

Much of the NF perambulation is open to grazing livestock



Further Inclosures are due to be thrown open by Forestry England through delivery of the Forest Plan

Grazing by cattle and ponies is critical for maintaining and restoring NF habitats









A number of valuable habitats & biodiversity features can be found on Commoner holding's & backup grazing land

- Unimproved meadows
- High quality semi-improved meadows.
- Hedgerows
- Veteran & Ancient Trees
- Streams
- Fens & wet flushes
- Ponds



As well as adding to the biodiversity resource these habitats can provide valuable linkages and connectivity to the open forest

The New Forest's historic environment

- 310 listed buildings
- 196 Scheduled Ancient Monuments
- 1 Registered Park and garden
- 15 Conservation areas
- Thousands of undesignated features

Its important we know where these features are and how they should be managed



Commoners Consultation

- We need you to help!
- In order to get a new scheme, the forest must act as one
- How commoners are to be represented?
- Can we sign up to an agreement of more than one year ?
- Back up land – can this be added into the mix?

Commoners Questionnaire

- Available online (Survey Monkey)
- Closes 30th September 2024
- All New Forest Commoners
- 15-20 minutes to complete

The Questions

- Section 1 – About you and your commoning
  - Anonymous
  - Livestock
  - Age
  - Current schemes
- Section 2 – Future agreements
  - Length of agreement
- Section 3 – Your representation
  - CDA
  - Elected Verderers
  - Separate elected person/body
- Section 4 – Backup Land
  - How you use it
  - How do you occupy it
- Section 5 – Commoning sustainability
  - Diversification

Refreshments & Workshops

Appendix 2
Copy of the Online Survey

New Forest Commoners' Consultation 2024

Executive Summary

1. This consultation is aimed at anyone who occupies land or property which gives them rights of common in the New Forest, whether or not they practise those rights, hereinafter referred to as “Commoners”. The consultation forms part of a Feasibility Study investigating how a future Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) might operate in the New Forest.

2. The Consultation seeks to consult Commoners on the following:
a. how they would like to be represented in future decision-making and scheme applications;
b. what factors would influence the length of commitment that Commoners are prepared to sign up to, and;
c. how they feel current and previous schemes have supported commoning
d. the current location and use of back up land to help establish how this might interact with a future scheme.

3. The consultation will run from 1st September 2024 until midnight on 30th September 2024.

4. This consultation is being co-ordinated by Oliver Cook of New Park Consultancy Limited on behalf of the Forest Farming Group.

Background

1. The Forest Farming Group (FFG) was established shortly after the 2016 referendum as a vehicle to help prepare the New Forest's farming business for a post Brexit world. Its membership includes the Verderers of the New Forest, Forestry England, The New Forest National Park Authority, Natural England, The New Forest Commoners' Defence Association and the National Farmers Union. Since then, the group has maintained communication with DEFRA and responded to public consultations.

2. In April 2024 the FFG instructed New Park Consultancy Ltd to conduct a Feasibility Study investigating how DEFRA's emerging policy on ELMS might best be implemented in the New Forest.

3. The purpose of the Study is to establish:
a. What is considered special about the New Forest in relation to its environmental designations.
b. What area of land is required to protect and support the Forest.
c. How that land should be managed in order to protect and enhance the special qualities of the New Forest.
d. How does the current grazing system play a role in preserving these special qualities and how the system can best be supported.
e. Which agri-environment scheme, or combination of schemes, would be most appropriate for the New Forest?
f. What governance structure will best support one or more future schemes?
g. What further research or studies are required?

4. The Study is being conducted in the context of reducing amounts of public funding being available to New Forest Commoners each year. The Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) ended in 2023 and its successor, "Delinked Payments", will see those that benefited from BPS receive diminishing payments until 2027, which will be the last year of direct payments from DEFRA to Commoners. The Verderer's Higher Level Stewardship Scheme operates over the Crown-owned common land in the New Forest. This agreement will expire in February 2028.

5. It is highly likely that any future agri-environment scheme for the New Forest will require there to be an "internal agreement". This is the document that will capture the relationship between the various stakeholders, allowing there to be a single applicant/organisation which can sign a management agreement with DEFRA. The internal agreement will need to establish how decisions can be taken in a way that represents all that have a legal interest in management of the scheme area. This includes those with rights of common in the New Forest.

6. This consultation follows on from and builds on the work carried out by the Foundation of Common Land (FCL) as part of their Landscape Recovery Test and Trial.

The Consultation Process

Phase 1: Small workshop with commoning representatives on 28th August 2024.

Phase 2: Open meeting for all rights holders and active Commoners to be held on 9th September 2024 at Lyndhurst Community Centre.

Online Consultation: 1st – 30th September 2024.

This Consultation is directed at New Forest Commoners, being anyone who owns or rents property within the New Forest with rights of common attached. (This includes those who are not currently exercising their rights but could potentially do so in the future).

The online consultation responses are to be completed by midnight on 30th September 2024.

If completing a paper copy, please post it by the same date to: New Park Consultancy, Little New Park, Lyndhurst Road, Brockenhurst, Hampshire, SO42 7QH.

Data Protection and Privacy

It is important for us to be able to check that everyone completing this questionnaire is a genuine New Forest Commoner in order that the data we gain from it can be regarded as real and relevant. For this reason alone we will be asking for your full name at the beginning of this questionnaire, but this will not be tied to your responses in any way. Please be assured that your answers will, therefore, be treated as anonymous.

We will not keep any contact details linked with your response. The data will be held in accordance with New Park Consultancy's Privacy Policy, which can be viewed at www.newparkconsultancy.com/privacy-policy

PLEASE NOTE THAT QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES CAN ONLY BE SUBMITTED ONCE FROM EACH EMAIL ADDRESS. If you have been asked to submit answers on behalf of others as well as yourself, each response will either need to be sent from a different email address OR you will need to email info@newparkconsultancy.com and request a fresh link to the survey.

SECTION 1

Please tell us about you as a Commoner and your Commoning activities
This is important as it will establish whether we have a representative cross-section of Commoners included in the Consultation.

1. Please enter your full name (this allows us to verify your commoning status should we need to do so, but will NOT be linked to your answers - see Data protection section above.)

First Name

Surname

* 2. Please confirm whether you hold rights of common in relation to the New Forest. (ie. Do you personally own or rent property in the New Forest with rights of common attached?)

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

* 3. Do you currently exercise your rights of common in the New Forest?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

* 4. Please indicate your age.

- [ ] Under 30
- [ ] 31-49
- [ ] 50-66
- [ ] 67 and over

* 5. In which Agister's area do you pay your marking fees? This is determined by where you live. (Please select only one)

- [ ] Jonathan Gerrelli
- [ ] Robert Maton
- [ ] Mike Lovel
- [ ] Michael Maton
- [ ] Peter Rix
- [ ] No marking fees currently payable

* 6. Which rights do you currently exercise? (Please tick all that apply)

- [ ] Pasture (cattle/ponies/donkeys)
- [ ] Sheep
- [ ] Mast (pigs)
- [ ] Estovers (firewood)
- [ ] I do not currently exercise my rights of common

* 7. In which areas does your livestock normally run? (Please tick all that apply)

- [ ] Crownlands (Forestry England managed land)
- [ ] Northern Commons (Plaitford, Penn, Bramshaw, Cadnam, Canada & Wellow Commons)
- [ ] Western Commons (Ibsley, Rockford, Mockbeggar, Hyde, Waterslade)
- [ ] Beaulieu Manor (verges)
- [ ] Minstead Manor
- [ ] Foreshore (accessed via Tanners Lane)
- [ ] I don't currently turn out any livestock

* 8. What livestock do you turn out? (Please tick all that apply)

- [ ] Registered New Forest Ponies
- [ ] Other Ponies
- [ ] Stallion/s
- [ ] Donkeys
- [ ] Pigs
- [ ] Sheep
- [ ] Pedigree Native Cattle
- [ ] Native Sired Cattle
- [ ] Other Cattle
- [ ] I do not currently turn out any livestock

* 9. Under your rights of common, how many head of livestock do you expect to be depasturing (turning out) on the New Forest Common Land in 2024?

- [ ] 1
- [ ] 2
- [ ] 3
- [ ] 4
- [ ] 5-6
- [ ] 7-9
- [ ] 10-12
- [ ] 13-19
- [ ] 20-29
- [ ] 30-39
- [ ] 40-49
- [ ] 50 or more
- [ ] I do not currently exercise my rights of common

* 10. Have you previously claimed the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS)?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

* 11. Have you reduced the number of livestock that you mark in recent years as a result of reduced BPS payments?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] I have never claimed BPS
- [ ] I have never turned livestock out on the Forest

* 12. Are you currently a member of the Verderers' Grazing Scheme?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

If no, please give your reasons.

* 13. Are you a member of the New Forest Commoners' Defence Association (CDA)?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

If not, what might encourage you to join?

* 14. If you are not currently a member of the CDA, please explain why.

- [ ] I am a member
- [ ] I haven't considered it
- [ ] I forgot to renew
- [ ] I don't see the benefit
- [ ] Other (please specify)

SECTION 2

Future Agreements

The Verderers Higher Level Stewardship scheme (HLS) supports Commoners through the Verderers' Grazing Scheme (VGS). At present, Commoners only have to sign up to the VGS rules for a 12-month period. A future scheme may require longer-term commitment by Commoners (practising and non-practising) in order to ensure the scheme's objectives can be met.

* 15. Would you be prepared to sign up to a 30-year agreement?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

* 16. If you answered "No" to Q15 above, please state the maximum length of agreement to which you would be prepared to sign up. Please explain your reasons.

- [ ] I would not be prepared to sign up to an agreement of any length
- [ ] 1 year
- [ ] 5 years
- [ ] 10 years
- [ ] 15 years
- [ ] 20 years
- [ ] 25 years
- [ ] I would be happy to sign up to a 30-year agreement

Reasons for your choice:

* 17. Please indicate your feelings on whether the following factors would potentially incentivise you to sign up to longer terms than at present.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Break clauses	○	○	○	○	○
Increased payment rates	○	○	○	○	○
Regular scheme reviews	○	○	○	○	○
Greater involvement in decision-making processes	○	○	○	○	○
Flexibility in scheme rules	○	○	○	○	○
Less paperwork	○	○	○	○	○
I would not sign up to an agreement of more than one year under any circumstances	○	○	○	○	○
I would be happy to sign up to a longer agreement subject to appropriate terms such as those above.	○	○	○	○	○

Other Factors (please specify)

* 18. What is the ideal frequency at which you would you like to be consulted on the scheme rules?

- [ ] Annually
- [ ] Every 5 years
- [ ] When there is a significant change
- [ ] Other (please specify)

* 19. Do you think Commoners should be financially rewarded for the conservation grazing their livestock delivers on the New Forest common land?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

* 20. Without any form of financial support would your commoning activity...

- [ ] Increase
- [ ] Remain unchanged
- [ ] Reduce a little
- [ ] Reduce dramatically
- [ ] Stop altogether

* 21. A future agri-environment scheme might require a record of the New Forest's stocking density. Whether or not you currently turn out livestock, which of the following methods of estimating livestock numbers would you support? Please rank in order of preference, 1 being your most favoured option, 4 being your least.

	1	2	3	4
Online app for Commoners to record and submit their own real-time movement data	○	○	○	○
Annual Return and Declaration by Commoners	○	○	○	○
Conducting a regular census (eg. drone thermal imaging survey)	○	○	○	○
Marking Fee Register	○	○	○	○

Other suggestions (please specify)

SECTION 3

Commoners' Representation in a Future Agreement

Previous work conducted under a Test & Trial project identified a possible governance structure for delivering a future environmental agreement. This structure would bind all of the relevant parties into a single contract. Commoners would need to ‘sign up’ to confirm that they will collectively ensure that the desired level of grazing pressure is maintained.

* 22. Which individual/s or organisation/s would you like to represent Commoners in the development and administration of a future scheme?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Elected Verderers	○	○	○	○	○
CDA	○	○	○	○	○
A separate individual elected/appointed for this role	○	○	○	○	○

Other (please specify)

SECTION 4

Understanding Commoners' Back-Up Land

We know that back-up grazing and forage is essential for the commoning system in the New Forest. We will need to better understand where this land is and how it is managed in order to establish how a future scheme might be best able to support Commoners.

If you are a practising Commoner please complete all the questions in Section 4.

If you are not a practising Commoner, please proceed to Section 5.

23. Where is the majority of the (enclosed) back-up land that you use as part of your commoning activity?

Map source: New Forest National Park Authority



- [ ] Entirely within the Perambulation
- [ ] Entirely within the National Park boundary
- [ ] Mostly inside the National Park boundary
- [ ] Mostly or entirely outside the National Park boundary

24. Approximately how many acres of back-up land that you currently use in connection with your commoning fall into each of the following categories of tenure? **Please enter the number of acres in each box and enter a zero against any option which doesn't relate to your own occupation of back-up land.** (Please complete all options which apply):

Own	
Rent on written agreement/s of 5 years or more	
Rent on agreement/s between 1 and 5 years	
Occupy under short-term licences and leases for up to 12 months at a time	
Occupy under an informal agreement, including using land owned/occupied by family	

25. How many acres of land do you use for the following purposes - some land may be used for more than one purpose. Please state the number of acres in each box and enter any comments in the 'Other' box.
(Please enter a zero against any option which does not apply.)

Hay making	
Silage making	
Conservation grazing	
Winter grazing	
Summer grazing	
Other (please specify)	

26. Is any of your back-up land currently in an agri-environment scheme (including Environmental Stewardship - ELS or HLS - Countryside Stewardship, Sustainable Farming Incentive)?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] I don't know

27. Besides supporting your livestock that grazes the New Forest Commons, does your back-up land provide any other public benefits (please tick all that apply)?

- [ ] Biodiversity
- [ ] Carbon sequestration
- [ ] Public access
- [ ] I don't know
- [ ] Other (please specify)

28. Do you think the current schemes available to you adequately reward you for the public benefits that you provide?

- [ ] I don't know
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

If no, please explain why.

SECTION 5

Sustainability of your Commoning Activities

All Commoners please respond to the questions in this section - whether or not you are practising.

29. Please indicate below how you would describe your income from commoning.

- ◯ My income from commoning represents all my income
- ◯ My income from commoning represents a significant part of my income
- ◯ My income from commoning represents a useful but not essential part of my income
- ◯ I do not receive any income from commoning

* 30. Is your current commoning practice financially sustainable (ie. do you break even as a minimum)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I am not currently a practising Commoner

* 31. Do you need advice from a specialist advisor to help to improve the financial sustainability of your farming/commoning business?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I am not currently a practising Commoner

* 32. Have you introduced any of the following new initiatives or actions in order to make your farming/commoning business more financially viable?

- [ ] Direct selling of meat/produce
- [ ] Air BnB/Camping/Caravan site
- [ ] Recreational Equestrian Livery
- [ ] Mob Grazing (to extend the grazing season)
- [ ] Introducing Herbal Lays
- [ ] Cutting costs by reducing frequency of various activities (eg. hedge cutting)
- [ ] Selling or leasing out property
- [ ] None
- [ ] Other (please specify)

SECTION 6

We would welcome your input on any other issues relating to commoning in the New Forest which are not already covered by this questionnaire.

33. Please briefly note any other comments you have in the box below.

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