

**We are all guilty of it; some more so than others, whether from the crippling inertia of not knowing exactly what to say or do or more likely from an overwhelmingly busy schedule.**

Whatever the reason or excuse, lack of communication is debilitating. It seems to me that the public sector fails to communicate for the former while the private sector suffers a similar fate for the latter. It is nearly a year since the Comprehensive Spending Review burst the HLS bubble, among many others. Waiting for the impending announcement due this month on the future shape of the CAP could have easily led to a slip in to the kind of malaise that hampers decision making. However with commodity markets buoyant and the prospect of a bright future for commercial farming there has been plenty for the enterprising farmer to busy themselves with without having time to stop and worry about when Defra and its agencies will stop navel gazing and finally confirm how they would like to spend their budget.

With one side buoyed by a bright commercial future and the other seemingly in shellshock from budget and staff cuts neither have been particularly good at communicating with themselves never mind each other. And so after getting on for a year of very little clarity in particular concerning the future support for HLS, we found ourselves with less than a month to present Natural England (NE) with reasoned cases for why people with expiring ESA and CSS agreements should be given HLS agreements in the 2012/13 financial year. NE have run a number of "clinics" for farmers and agents interested in establishing their chances of obtaining support from the scheme. For those who have been through this "clinic" process the future of their agri-environment support is now marginally clearer. However, since there had been little communication about this process until the eleventh hour there are undoubtedly people who will have missed



## Quango managers have their work cut out

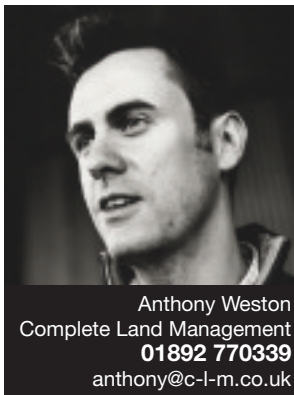
the boat for 2012/13 and many more will simply have no idea that such a process had been put in place.

With the prospect of having to re-establish entitlements for the "son of SPS" in the 2013/14 financial year and everything that goes with that process it is highly likely that

the farmers will struggle to find the time or inclination to take up the challenge of promoting their land for agri-environment. However it need not necessarily have been this way. Instead of "greening" pillar one and undermining the purpose and funding of pillar two, a much bolder approach could have resulted in a CAP truly fit for purpose; stimulating modern agriculture not stifling it. It is clear that the regulation of

agriculture is here to stay, the review of red tape did exactly that, reviewed it but will not result in a reduced burden. This month we will have a clearer picture of CAP in the next financial perspective but we will have to wait and see whether the elevation of the European Waste Paper Mountain is increased in the same way it was post-2005 and whether your local postman will have to go on a new round of heavy lifting courses just to deliver you SPS booklets.

While we hope (perhaps naively) CAP reform clarity is imminent, the CSR has cast a long shadow. The regions have been abolished, and more public servants will yet lose their jobs. This has not helped with the public sectors difficulty in deciding what to do; "HLS is open for business", say their political masters "we are providing more money than ever," they say but this matters not when they are fighting for their own survival. Simply removing regions in itself has been enough to put the quangos into a tailspin. Restructuring obviously ensued but in order to actually start delivering money on the ground rather than on redundancies the super region has now appeared. No longer should this publication be known as South East Farmer but as Ealse Farmer! E(ast) A(nglia) L(ondon) and S(outh) E(ast) is the new super region and it pits farmers with very different natural resources against each other in terms of payment for public goods. With landscapes as diverse as the Norfolk Broads to the South Downs from Romney Marsh to the New Forest the quango managers of this "non-region" certainly have their work cut out in deciding how to deploy their troops and their budget. There will certainly be fewer people and yet fewer agencies, whether this means they will be able to deliver more effectively remains to be seen, but they will have less time to communicate and we will have less time to listen.



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