

Minutes

Date: Wednesday 28 February 2001

Time: 2.00pm to 4.10pm

Venue: Committee Room, National Assembly Building

In attendance

Members

Glyn Davies, Chair	Mid and West Wales
David Davies	Monmouth
Mick Bates	Montgomeryshire
Ieuan Wyn Jones	Ynys Mon
Delyth Evans	Mid and West Wales
John Griffiths	Newport East
Huw Lewis	Merthyr Tydfil and Rhumney
Carwyn Jones	Bridgend
Elin Jones	Ceredigion
Janet Ryder	North Wales

Officials

Huw Brodie (items 2 and 3)	Director, Agriculture Department
Rory O'Sullivan	Agriculture Policy Division
Tony Edwards	Chief Veterinary Officer

Secretariat

Adrian Crompton	Committee Clerk
Menna Williams	Committee Secretariat

Item 1: Apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

1.1 Apologies were received from Jocelyn Davies and Peter Rogers. Ieuan Wyn Jones substituted for Jocelyn Davies and David Davies for Peter Rogers. The Chair declared an interest as a farmer and Mick Bates said that he was a partner in a farming business.

Item 2: Minister's report - ARD 03-01(p1)

2.1 The Minister expanded upon his written report by highlighting the discussion of scrapie and BSE at the EU Agriculture Council. Germany had raised the issue of scrapie at the Council but no other member state felt that any emergency action was required. Member States had differed in their view of required action in respect of BSE.

2.2 In respect of agri-monetary compensation the Minister said that approximately £22 million should be available in Wales. Of this, some £20.5 million was compulsorily payable with the remainder arising from additional funds proposed in respect of the beef and sheep regimes. He stressed that these funds were intended to alleviate the effects of currency fluctuation, not foot and mouth disease.

2.3 The Minister was asked about his meeting with the Rural Partnership and the production of a single document encapsulating a vision for rural Wales. He replied that the Partnership did not wish to produce an all-encompassing document. Rather, it wanted to review its previously produced Rural Statement and to work on ways to promote a better age-balance in the population of rural Wales.

2.4 There then followed an extensive discussion of the foot and mouth outbreak.

2.5 The Minister informed the committee that there had been 3 confirmed cases of foot and mouth in Wales, these were in Felindre, Painscastle and Gaerwen. One suspected case in Ponthir had been found to be clear and there were four new suspected cases, 2 in Radnorshire, 1 in Brecon and 1 in Torfaen.

2.6 Control zones had been put in place to contain these outbreaks and an Order passed to allow local authorities to close off areas of land. The Minister stressed that this Order had been instigated in Wales with England and Scotland following suit. At the end of the week, it was hoped that a licensing system would be introduced to allow limited movement of livestock for slaughter.

2.7 After discussion with the First Minister, Sports Minister and the Irish Government, it had been agreed that the Wales–Ireland rugby match should be postponed to limit the risk of travelling supporters spreading the disease.

2.8 The Minister would be holding press briefings each day at 4.30pm. He appealed to the media to check with officials before running any stories on suspected cases.

2.9 In discussion of the movement ban and licensing, the Minister confirmed that licensing decisions would be taken on an England and Wales basis and that the Assembly was discussing this with MAFF. He recognised the need to ensure that licence dissemination to abattoirs and farmers was as straightforward as possible and not limited to weekdays only. The Minister did not favour issuing licences to allow the return of sheep being tacked on other land as this would risk spreading infection. Although this had implications for feeding and animal welfare, the priority was to limit the spread of the disease. The Minister recognised the animal welfare implications of farmers being unable to move stock within farms because of the presence of a road on their holding and agreed to discuss the issue with

MAFF.

2.10 The Minister was urged to ensure that the suckler cow payment backlog was reduced, and Tir Mynydd payments made promptly, to assist farmers' cash flow. The committee noted that 80% of suckler cow claims had now been processed for payment and it was hoped to increase this to 85% by the end of the following week. The Minister did not anticipate any delay with initial Tir Mynydd payments that should total some £33 million in March.

2.11 Committee members emphasised the importance of providing rapid, accurate and regular information to farmers, abattoirs and other interested parties. The Minister was asked to consider sending a checklist of basic information to all farmers.

2.12 In response, the Minister stressed that the ban currently in force meant that there should be absolutely no movement of livestock. He did not intend to send individual letters to farmers as the situation was changing rapidly and information could be out of date by the time it arrived. A widespread postal delivery could also add to the risk of spreading infection. Information was being disseminated in a variety of ways – through daily briefings with the press and farming unions, guidance to a wide range of organisations and public bodies, animal health officers, vets and the Assembly's telephone helpline. The Minister confirmed that his department had sufficient resources to staff the helpline service, which was busy at peak times but not constantly. He agreed that it would be important to disseminate, widely and quickly, details of further announcements on extensions of the movement ban and licensing arrangements.

2.13 Several questions were asked about the implications for local authorities. What guidance had been issued to them on practical matters such as restricting access to footpaths and areas of land, the effect on schools and other local authority services and precisely which highways were covered by the movement restriction? The Minister was also asked if guidance had been issued to public utility companies such as Welsh Water and for clarification of the powers of local authorities to deal with animal trespass.

2.14 The Minister confirmed that the Order allowed local authorities to close areas except roads open to traffic. Its intention was to allow local authorities to be as restrictive as possible. Officials could provide a more detailed classification of the ways covered by the Order if required. Powys, Carmarthenshire and Anglesey had already implemented the Order, breach of which was punishable by a fine of up to £5,000. The WLGA had advised that local government did not require specific advice and so communication with authorities had been the same as with other relevant bodies. Written guidance had been circulated to a wide range of public bodies and others (including the utility companies), whilst the State Veterinary Service was meeting with local authority representatives to offer advice. Many local authorities also had their own contingency plans for Foot and Mouth in place. It was confirmed that local authorities had the power to round up stray animals.

2.15 The Minister was asked how the coverage of exclusion zones was identified and why the Anglesey zone did not cover the whole island. The Chief Veterinary Officer explained that the responsibility lay

with the State Veterinary Service. A 10 kilometre zone around infected places was required although natural boundaries were also taken into account in order to make the zones more easily understandable. Given the movement limitations on an area the size of Anglesey, he agreed to discuss the definition of the zone with the Chief Veterinary Officer and to ask if it could be extended to cover the whole of the island.

2.16 In response to a question about regional shortages of suitable disinfectant, the committee noted that production had been increased considerably. This increased supply should feed through quickly to address any shortages. Also, the list of approved disinfectants was being extended. Disinfectant was not currently available free of charge. Given the reported problem of vehicles damaging the disinfectant mats on the Anglesey bridges by travelling too quickly, the Minister confirmed that the Assembly and the North Wales Police both had the power to enforce temporary speed limits.

2.17 The Minister was asked about the implications of the outbreak for fodder delivery and the operation of the Over Thirty Months Scheme. He replied that both issues needed to be addressed at a UK level and he had already discussed them with Nick Brown. He was not aware of any reported panic buying of fodder and would be issuing guidance to feed suppliers on deliveries. It was also possible to obtain licenses to permit emergency deliveries of feed. MAFF was aware of the problems faced by farmers with stock reaching 30 months. The Minister hoped that the scheme could be operated as flexibly as possible.

2.18 In response to a question about the time taken to slaughter animals at infected sites, the committee noted that infected animals were slaughtered immediately and others as soon as possible. The State Veterinary Service explained that sheep carried less virus than cows or pigs and so the delay in slaughtering sheep at Gaerwen had not posed a significant additional risk.

2.19 The Minister was asked about milk collection in infected areas and also the issue of working hours for tanker drivers required to disinfect their vehicles. The committee noted that milk produced in restricted areas could be transported out but only under licence (but see the note at annex 1). DETR had been asked to consider relaxing the controls on drivers' working hours to allow time for vehicles to be disinfected and collection rounds to be completed.

2.20 When asked about guidance on the spreading of slurry, the Minister confirmed that spreading was banned on farms where the disease had been confirmed or suspected.

2.21 The Minister confirmed that all new cases could still be traced back to the original outbreak with the exception of the Felindre case where no link had yet been established.

2.22 The committee noted that the role for vaccination against foot and mouth was limited. Foot and mouth free status was of benefit to exporters and a vaccination programme would mean losing that status. Since there were many strains of the disease, and vaccination against one strain offered no protection against another, the benefit of a vaccination programme was limited when the virus was not

endemic.

2.23 In conclusion, the committee thanked the Minister for his contribution to the meeting and for keeping Assembly Members well informed. He said he would consider the need for further statements to the Assembly as the situation developed.

Item 3: Tir Gofal Stocktake - ARD 03-01(p2)

The committee noted the terms of reference for the Tir Gofal stocktake.

Item 4: Diversification Review - ARD 03-01(p4)

The committee approved the draft interim report.

Item 5: Minutes of previous meeting - ARD 02-01(min)

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

Secretariat

March 2001

Annex 1

Foot and Mouth Disease: Movement of milk

At the committee meeting I said that milk could leave an infected area under licence. With apologies for misleading the committee, on checking, I find that milk can leave an infected area **without a licence** but subject to a number of precautions to prevent any infection spreading. These precautions are detailed in the 'Code of Practice for Hauliers and Buyers of Milk' which is available on the [MAFF web site](#).

W A Edwards
ACVO Wales