

# Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee

## EPC(2) 07-06 (p1) Annex 2

### Report of Committee's Visit to Ireland to Investigate Bovine TB, 30-31 March

#### Purpose

1. The purpose of the report is to present an account of the Committee's visit to Ireland to investigate bovine TB.

#### Introduction

2. The following Members and officials undertook the visit on 30-31 March:

Glyn Davies (Chair)

Elin Jones

Jocelyn Davies

Brynle Williams

Kathryn Jenkins (Committee Clerk)

Angharad Penny Evans (Senior Researcher)

#### Background

3. The Committee published its report on bovine TB in August 2004. It has continued to take an interest in this area and has received regular updates from the Minister. More recently, it has scrutinised the work of the Wales TB Action Group, which was established as a result of a recommendation in the Committee's report. The Committee expressed its concerns at the continuing spread of the disease in Wales, the imminent introduction of pre-movement testing, and the change to an average market price calculation of compensation for those affected. In light of its concerns, the Committee visited Ireland on 30-31 March to ascertain how a significant decline in the number of cases of bovine TB had been achieved.

#### Overview and Objectives

4. The Committee wished to gain as balanced a picture as possible of issues surrounding bovine TB in Ireland in order to influence policy development in Wales. Members therefore requested to meet with

animal welfare interests, representatives of the farming industry and officials of the Irish Government to discuss its policies for eradicating the disease.

## **Meetings**

5. The Committee met with a representative of Badger Watch Ireland. Members were surprised to learn that the pressure group had few members and little influence on policy in Ireland. The representative was keen to emphasise that there was no proven link between badgers and bovine TB and that issues of poor animal husbandry and cattle to cattle transmission had to be borne in mind. He claimed that the Irish Government were using illegal snares and that because of loopholes in testing procedures, it would be possible for cattle to avoid testing throughout their lives.

6. At the Irish Farmers Association headquarters, Members met with Michael O'Keefe, the Animal Health Project Leader and Fintan Conway, Executive Secretary to Animal Health Committee. The number of reactors had fallen from 46,000 in 1998 to 27,000 in 2005. Pre-movement testing had been implemented for 18 years but had had no impact on the number of reactors. Members were informed that there is no indiscriminate culling in Ireland, but that it has to be based on the pathology of lesions. Permits are required to move animals and cattle would not be allowed to enter the food chain without prior testing. The first field trial of badgers in clear areas for TB vaccination would begin in July. Issues around cattle compensation were also discussed; maximum values are set for all animals, including pedigrees.

7. There are 26 departmental veterinary offices in Ireland. Members met with officials in Naas, the area office for County Wicklow. The officials demonstrated a sophisticated IT cattle movement monitoring system, AHCS, the animal health computer system, which registers an animal from birth to death and includes a health record and a TB and brucellosis record. Private veterinary practices carry out testing, based on contracts between vets and farmers. Under the wildlife programme, if a reactor is found, vets would then apply for a licence to undertake an investigation. Survey work would cover an area of 2 kilometres. Snare samples would be used for research purposes and samples would continue to be taken for a five year period. Approximately 7 per cent of the badger population has TB.

## **Visits**

8. Members undertook a farm visit as part of their investigation. At Newtonmountkennedy in County Wicklow, they met with county officials of the Irish Farmers Association and visited the farm of Patrick Nuttall, which had been affected by bovine TB, passed from local herds of deer.

## **Other Contacts**

9. Prior to the visit the Committee Chair met informally with James O'Keefe, Head of the Wildlife Unit in the Irish Government. Mr O'Keefe stressed the importance to Ireland of eradicating the disease, since nine out of 10 cattle are exported. A number of issues were discussed. Compensation to farmers affected

by the disease currently costs 11 million Euros. There has been no pre-movement testing in Ireland since 1996, rather annual testing, which Mr O'Keefe described as "the bedrock of disease control". Pre-movement testing costs 15 Euros per animal, whereas annual testing costs 3 Euros. Measures to reduce the badger population were also discussed, but it was emphasised that the long-term aim was to vaccinate badgers.

10. The Committee met informally with Members of the Dáil's Joint Committee on Agriculture at a lunch hosted by the Committee's Chair Johnny Brady TD. A range of issues of common interest to the Committees' remit and responsibilities was discussed. The Committee then undertook a guided tour of the Houses of the Oireachtas and received the distinguished guests' greeting from the Speaker.

11. In addition to its work on bovine TB, the Committee also met with Liam Kinsella and Dale Crammond, officials in the Irish Government's Department for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, who specialise in monitoring the impact of greenhouse gases and the development of biofuels. Members were informed that Ireland had signed up to the Kyoto Protocol and that dealing with the 27 per cent of greenhouse gases for which agriculture was responsible was an ongoing challenge. The most important aspect of biofuels, they said, was that fuels produced by energy were carbon neutral.

## **Members' Research and Committee Services**

### **April 2006**