

# **Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee**

## **EPC(2) 12-06 (p12) Annex A**

### **Report of Committee's Visit to Brussels 12-14 September 2006**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of the report is to present an account of the Committee's visit to Brussels.

#### **Introduction**

The following Members and officials undertook the visit on 12-14 September 2006:

Glyn Davies (Chair)

Lorraine Barrett

Kathryn Jenkins (Committee Clerk)

Angharad Penny Evans (Researcher)

Anna Daniel (APS Brussels Office)

Ross McCalden (APS Brussels Office)

#### **Background**

Standing Order 9.8 states that "Each Subject Committee shall also, within the relevant fields and areas of responsibility, (i) advise on proposed primary, secondary and European legislation affecting Wales, including performing its functions under Standing Order 24." In light of this fact and the significance of European legislation governing the EPC portfolio, the Committee undertook a fact finding visit to Brussels.

#### **Overview and Objectives**

The Committee sought further information on the priorities and policies emanating from the European Commission that would have a particular impact on Wales. In addition the role of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and UK Government representatives, UK Parliament and devolved administration representatives and UK lobby groups was explored.

#### **Meetings**

Officials of WAG Brussels office provided the latest information on current issues relating to agriculture and the environment. The rejection of the European Parliament's Agricultural Committee of the Commission proposal on Voluntary Modulation was highlighted, as were the related issues of franchising (cap on the total farm payments), match funding and regional differentiation. The forthcoming health check of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was also seen as a major issue. Significant environmental issues included climate change, biodiversity and the review of the Sixth Environmental Action Programme.

A presentation on the reform of the CAP was received from the UK's Permanent Representation to the EU (UKREP). The current headline environmental issue was climate change and the recent review of the Sustainable Development Strategy. Developments were also afoot on Phase II of the Emissions Trading Scheme and the possibility of introducing aviation emissions.

The Welsh Local Government Association highlighted a waste landfill project in Innsbruck, Austria as an example of best practice.

Representatives of the UK National Parliament Office summarised their role as the "eyes and ears" of the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee and the House of Lords European Union Committee giving early warning on issues of particular interest or importance and supplying information on European legislation and other matters which may not be readily available in London. The Scottish Parliament European based official explained that he undertook a similar role and outlined how European based officials were key in identifying where and when to influence European policy.

The Committee were formally introduced to the European Parliament Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety where they heard Mrs Hyssala (Finnish Minister for Health) outline her priorities for the current Finnish Presidency.

A Commission official briefed the Committee on the forthcoming Green Paper on Adaptation to Climate Change which will look at the consequences of climate change. The implications of flooding and coastal erosion are likely to be the major issues in Wales.

Jonathon Evans (MEP) gave an overview of the involvement of the Welsh MEPs in the many European Parliament Committees and working groups. He also touched on how significant compromise between different political parties was in reaching consensual decisions on European policies.

The Committee met with senior members of relevant Commissioner Cabinets including DG Environment, DG Maritime Affairs, DG Agriculture and DG SANCO.

The environment priorities would focus less on further legislation but more on better implementation of existing instruments. With regards to the "Communication on Halting the loss of Biodiversity by 2010 – and Beyond", climate change, pollution, invasive alien species, land use (i.e. urban sprawl) and overexploitation were seen as the main drivers.

The recently published Green Paper on EU Maritime Policy was the main focus of discussions with the Cabinet of Commissioner Borg. The main themes included sustainable maritime development, quality of life in coastal regions, providing the tools necessary to manage relations with the ocean, maritime governance and maritime heritage and identity. The Cabinet welcomed the proposed joint meeting between the Environment, Planning and Countryside and Enterprise, Innovation and Networks committees to scrutinise the paper, stating that cross portfolio working was key, and that they looked forward to receiving contributions to the consultation.

The Deputy Head of the Cabinet of Commissioner Fischer Boel summarised the likely content of the CAP Health Check. Areas that will be examined include set aside land, simplification of administration, compulsory modulation, capping of total payments to farms and cross compliance. The Commission would prefer to see increased compulsory modulation, as voluntary modulation was the wrong policy tool. Post 2013 a need for a clear deal was imperative and historical payments were not sustainable. On the single common market organisation, the first step in the simplification procedure would be the removal of redundant provisions. A technical phase would follow comprising of a 24 measure action plan with the aim of producing a single and more transparent system. Policy decisions relating to cost/burden issues would ensue.

With regard to the EU's animal welfare action plan 2006-2010, the Commission could only go as far as their competence outlined in the treaties allowed. Their objectives were to clearly define EU action on animal welfare; continue to promote high standards; provide greater coordination of resource; support research and promote alternatives to animal testing; and to ensure the coherence and coordination of all EU policies on animal welfare. The Commission would continue to promote animal welfare standards within international fora such as the International Office of Epizootics (IOE). Rigorous inspections of animal welfare conditions in third countries and ensuing EU imports were in place, and provisions to deal with an outbreak of Avian Influenza were also established.

Issues that the NFU office in Brussels were currently involved with included pesticides, the Water Framework Directive, tallow, soil, animal welfare, animal diseases, possible extension of IPPC (integrated pollution prevention and control) to cattle, and the CAP health check.

The CBI informed the Committee that REACH, ETS and air quality were the current environmental issues with which their members were most concerned.

## **Members' Research and Committee Services September 2006**