

# **Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee – 26 October 2006**

## **EPC(2) 14-06(p1)**

### **Report from the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside (EPC)**

#### **A. Actions from Previous Meetings**

##### **1. Oil and Gas Licensing Round Applications in Cardigan Bay**

I previously agreed to provide the Committee with updates on the above.

As you are aware, the 24<sup>th</sup> Licensing Round was launched in March, inviting applications to be submitted before 16<sup>th</sup> June 2006.

Before approving licences the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) has been undertaking a ‘plan level’ appropriate assessment of the round, having determined that this was likely to have a significant effect on European sites.

This assessment is not yet complete, but DTI expect it to reach a conclusion later this autumn.

I will keep you informed of progress.

##### **2. Sheep Scab Update**

At the 28<sup>th</sup> September meeting I was asked to update the Committee on the levels of sheep scab reported in Wales.

Farmers are not required to report the incidence of sheep scab although they are required by law to treat it. The figures in Table 1 from the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) provide a diagnosis of suspect sheep scab samples.

The table illustrates the number of farms where farmers have been required by local authorities to treat sheep scab under the Sheep Scab Order 1997.

#### **Table 1**

**Sheep Scab Order (1997): Number of Positive Farms 2001 – 2005.**

Year	England	Wales	Scotland	Total
2001	11 (39%)	7 (25%)	10 (36%)	28
2002	6 (40%)	5 (33%)	4 (27%)	15
2003	12 (50%)	5 (21%)	7 (29%)	24
2004	12 (43%)	3 (11%)	13 (46%)	28
2005	5 (19%)	12 (46%)	9 (35%)	26
Total	46 (38%)	32 (26%)	43 (36%)	121

Table 2 shows the number of positive cases of sheep scab recorded by the VLA from 1993 to the present day. These figures are the result of voluntary submissions of samples where the owners have suspected there is something wrong with their sheep and have sought veterinary advice.

**Table 2**

Sheep Scab data as recorded in VLA regional laboratories				
Number of Diagnoses				
YEAR	England	Unknown	Wales	Grand Total
1993	91		43	134
1994	126		52	178
1995	118		89	207
1996	105		57	162
1997	71		64	135
1998	71		61	132
1999	85		100	185
2000	147		147	294
2001	92		70	162
2002	58		82	140
2003	75		88	163
2004	110		117	227
2005	75	2	117	194

2006	49		51	100
Grand Total	1273	2	1138	2413

I would also like to make you aware of the VLA Free Sheep Ectoparasite Testing Initiative. In 2002, VLA Regional Laboratories offered free ectoparasite testing for a 3 month period from August until October. The initiative was also offered again from December 2003 to February 2004 and was timed to coincide more closely with the likely higher incidence of sheep scab/louse infestation in flocks. The initiative was advertised through a letter submitted to the Veterinary Record, a Defra press release resulting in short articles in the farming press and through the Welsh farming magazine 'Gwlad'.

Approximately 60% of submissions were from counties in Wales. This may reflect the relative density of sheep in Wales, successful advertising through the 'Gwlad' magazine, or a relatively higher incidence of both louse and sheep scab infestation in flocks in Wales. Conversely between 1973 (when sheep scab reoccurred in Great Britain after being eradicated) and 1992 (when sheep scab was removed from the list of notifiable diseases) only 13% of all cases originated in Wales.

As part of their initiative to eradicate sheep scab, the sheep industry led by the National Sheep Association (NSA) has distributed a leaflet on sheep scab to all sheep farmers in Great Britain. This gives advice to farmers on how to plan their sheep scab control strategy as part of flock health planning. The NSA has also confirmed that it will participate in three Assembly organised sheep scab awareness meetings in January 2007.

### **3) Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) Status for Welsh Lamb**

I have recently received correspondence on this matter from the Chairman of Hybu Cig Cymru (HCC).

The general industry consensus is not to push for PDO status at this time, due mainly to not being able to maintain PDO status for Welsh lamb due to the current lack of processing facilities within Wales - which PDO status would require.

It was also felt that a PDO status would negatively affect opportunities to export Welsh lamb given the lack of adequate further processing facilities.

The new Rural Development Plan could well change Wales' ability in terms of improving further processing opportunities and with this in mind I have requested that HCC keep this matter under regular review.

## **B. Other Issues**

### **4. Cross Sector Climate Change Group**

The Environment Strategy for Wales, makes it clear that climate change is one of the most important challenges facing the world today and that Wales must play its part by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the impacts of the changes already underway.

In the Action Plan which accompanied the Environment Strategy, I made a commitment to establish a cross sector group to provide advice on climate change action in Wales.

A climate change conference will be held at the Wales Millennium Centre on the 25<sup>th</sup> October 2006 to launch the group and at which the first meeting of the group will take place.

The aim of the Cross Sector Climate Change Group will be to contribute to the mitigation of climate change and adaptation to its impacts by advising the Welsh Assembly Government on what action is needed and supporting the delivery of those actions.

I anticipate that the full group will meet annually but the detailed work will be undertaken in thematic groups focused on key areas. A small steering group, representing the wider Group, will meet quarterly to oversee progress.

Members will be drawn from the key parts of the statutory, voluntary, business and academic sectors with an interest in climate change. It will play a high level strategic role in guiding the development of the climate change action in Wales.

## **5. Wales Audit Office value for money on public access to the countryside**

The Wales Audit Office initiated a value for money study into public access to the countryside last autumn. A key objective of the study has been to examine how effectively the Welsh public service has worked collaboratively to increase responsible public access to the countryside - and additionally to consider what lessons might be learned for the future implementation of extending access to the coast.

The report is due to be published on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2006. As the next step, the Assembly's Audit Committee will consider the Report and the Welsh Assembly Government will then formally respond to the Committee's views on the report.

## **6. Commons Act 2006**

The Commons Act received Royal Assent on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2006. It was scrutinised by the Committee last year when in Bill form. The new Act contains important provisions on the updating of Common Land Registers; allows for the creation of Commons Councils to promote the sustainable management of commons; and streamlines the procedures for authorising works on common land.

As a first step in implementing the Acts' provisions, the Welsh Assembly Government has recently issued a consultation paper on the proposed content of new regulations on the issue of severance. The Act prohibits the severance of rights of common but allows some exceptions including the temporary

letting or leasing of rights in circumstances to be prescribed in secondary legislation.

The Welsh Assembly Government's consultation paper makes two main proposals concerning temporary severance -

- The temporary severance of rights of common to graze animals from the land to which they are attached, by enabling the leasing or licensing of the rights to a third party for a period of no more than two years.
- For owners of land with common rights to lease or license the land but to retain the common rights for their own benefit.

The consultation paper is on the website at : <http://new.wales.gov.uk/consultations/currentconsultation/envandcouncurrcons/?lang=en>

The consultation ends on 24<sup>th</sup> of November 2006. Any views which the Committee might like to offer would be welcomed.

## **7. Local Development Plans (LDPs)**

I mentioned at the 13<sup>th</sup> July Committee meeting that I would update the Committee of any further local orders prepared.

To date, local orders for Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority and Pembrokeshire County Council are being prepared and will be issued shortly for their separate LDPs.

## **8. 2006 Single Payment Scheme**

Members may wish to note that:

- Around 18,000 Single Application Forms (SAFs) have been received for the 2006 scheme year.
- Over 9,000 Welsh farmers have been asked to provide additional information to or clarification of the information provided on their 2006 SAF forms. Officials are working hard to validate claims.
- We are aiming to commence payments on 1 December 2006.

I would very much like to replicate the success in 2005 but this will only be possible if farmers respond quickly to officials' enquiries regarding their 2006 Single Payment Scheme applications. Failure to do so will delay payments.