

## COMMITTEE ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS EUR 05-01(p.1)

<b>Date</b>	<b>17<sup>th</sup> October 2001</b>
<b>Time</b>	<b>9.00am</b>
<b>Venue</b>	<b>Committee Room</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Chair's Report</b>

### **Purpose**

1. To provide an update on a range of issues arising since the Committee's last meeting.

### **Recommendation**

2. Members to note the contents of the report.

### **Background**

3. The Committee of European Affairs last met on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2001. A number of developments have taken place since then, and are listed below.

### **Visits**

#### European Commission

4. There have been some significant developments falling out of the Minister for Health and Social Services, Jane Hutt's visit to Brussels in June, when she met David Byrne, EU Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection. The European Commission and the World Health Organisation (WHO) remain very interested in the Assembly's development of health impact assessment. The following events, attended by officials

are worthy of note:

- At the European Commission's request a seminar took place in Brussels, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September on the Assembly's use of health impact(s) of other policies. Dr Ruth Hall, Chief Medical Officer, made the presentation on behalf of the Assembly.
- A meeting took place on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> September, as part of the Commission's work to consider how it can utilise health impact assessment, to integrate health across its policy areas. This was attended by Ceri Breeze of Health Services Division
- In conjunction with the European Commission, the World Health Organisation organised

a European development seminar on health impact assessment between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> October inclusive. While the Assembly's attendance was already planned, given its relevance to our development of health impact assessment, the (WHO) asked for a presentation on the Assembly's work. Ceri Breeze of Health Services also covered this event.

- The European Commission DG Enterprise, in partnership with member states has co-funded a number of seminars around Europe to discuss policy issues and disseminate best practice in business support and related measures. Cardiff was the venue for the UK event looking at Top Class Business Support Services on the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> October. Delegations from all member states, as well as several applicant "non-EU member" European countries participated. I was pleased to take part in what was the second "European" event of last week, in that, I also made the opening address at the Business and Environment Conference, which was held on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> October.

### Council of the European Union

1. The Assembly continues to strengthen its participation in Council meetings. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> July, Carwyn Jones AM, Minister for Rural Affairs attended an Agricultural Council meeting in Brussels as part of the UK delegation. Amongst the many items for discussion, our particular interest was in sheepmeat reform.

### Ministerial visits

2. On the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> June, Carwyn Jones, AM, Minister for Rural Affairs attended the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee in Brussels. The Minister and six other Members of the Committee attended a series of meetings with Commission officials,

including Franz Fischler's Chief de Cabinet . Welsh MEPS and also staff from the Wales European Centre. The meetings concentrated on issues of current concern to the Committee – reform of the sheepmeat regime, the impact of the Common Agricultural Policy of future expansion of the Community.

3. Sue Essex, Minister for the Environment, visited Sweden between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> September. Officials accompanied her from the Environment Agency and the Assembly Environment Division. The visit was to meet the Swedish Environment Minister, Kjell Lansson, to discuss their waste strategy and environmental issues in general. Sweden has greatly increased waste recovery and recycling rates over the last decade and reduced the use of landfill, particularly for hazardous wastes. This is directly in line with what is proposed for the emerging waste strategy for Wales. The visit sought lessons that Wales could learn from the Swedish experience.
4. Jane Hutt, Minister for Health and Social Services visited Gastein in Austria on the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> September to speak at the European Health Forum – integrating Health Across Policies meeting. The event was the fourth meeting of the European Health Forum, and acts as a health policy conference, gathering participants from the European Institutions and all relevant societal sectors (patients and consumers, politics, business and Industry, science and academia) of EU member states and beyond. The discussion of international leading actors in health care and public health supports the development of a consensus on key issues in European health policy at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.
5. Andrew Davies, AM, Minister for Assembly Business attended the Tele Region Networks (TRN) conference in Valencia between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> October. There is an advantage to Wales in their participation of the TRN, in that the Commission already thinks highly of what we have done in developing the Information Age Society here and has encouraged a number of other regions to see our approach. The Commission is

also making it clear that they want to work directly with regions on the sorts of issues with which Teleregions is concerned. The Minister as President, is therefore well placed to express directly to the Commission, Wales' as well as TRN's views on information age developments which directly impact on regional development

6. On the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> October, Carwyn Jones AM, Minister for Rural Affairs attended "Anuga" 2001, in Cologne, Germany. Anuga is one of the most important information and ordering trade fairs for the food and drink industry worldwide. The Minister gave his support to the Welsh Development Agency Food Directorate and the twenty Welsh companies who took stands at the prestigious fair.

#### Links with Accession countries

7. I was very pleased to meet with a group of senior officials in July, who were representing 12 of the accession countries. This was during their half day visit to Wales, while on a trip around various parts of the UK to study our regional policy and development. The visit arranged by the Foreign and Commonwealth office, provided the opportunity to study in detail the practicalities and challenges of implementing EU regulations in a Member State country.
8. I have also accepted an invitation from the Marshal of the Silesian Voivodeship, Mr Jan Olbrycht to visit Silesia. My visit fits in well with our Enlargement Strategy in establishing relations with the accession countries,. although a number of links already exist between us. Wales Trade International have links with the region, and a Wales European Funding

Office official took part in a British government initiative, "Action Local Government" to Silesia earlier this year. This was to build lasting working contacts between Polish and British regions, encouraging bilateral co-operation. I hope to visit Silesia in December.

### Committee of the Regions

9. Since the Committee last met, both of the Assembly's representatives to the Committee of the Regions have attended meetings in Brussels. John Griffiths AM attended the plenary session on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> September where the e-learning Action Plan, helping SME's to go digital, and the future of Europe, including a statement by Commission President Romani Prodi, were on the agenda. Mr Prodi and Mr Jos Chabert, the Committee of the Regions President, have jointly issued a declaration on arrangements for co-operation between the two institutions.
10. Elin Jones AM, attended a meeting of the Commission on Agriculture, Rural

Development and Fisheries on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, where the effect of enlargement on agriculture was discussed, with speakers invited from Poland, Hungary and Estonia. Also on the agenda was the future of the Common Fisheries Policy, the issue of food safety following

the BSE crisis, the development of rural areas by means of proactive policy on information and communication technologies, and a call for the simplification of agriculture legislation. These topics were also on the agenda for the Commissions next meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> October.

### State Aids - Foot and Mouth Disease

11. At the last meeting, officials were asked to prepare a paper on the State Aids position regarding Foot and Mouth Disease. The policy responsibility for State Aids in the context of Foot and Mouth rests with the UK Government and the Department for Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is currently considering the position. In its advice to local authorities administering the assistance to businesses affected by Foot and Mouth, the

Assembly has stressed the need to stay within the State Aids rules, notably the £60,000 limit per business over three years under which de minimis rules apply.

## New Initiatives

### Secondments

12. The Assembly officially launched the "Secondments to the European Union Institutions

Scheme" on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> October, which aims to increase the number of people, from Wales, seconded to European Union Institutions. I think this is something, we all support as a Committee. The scheme will be a useful means of enlarging the pool of people from Wales seconded to Europe, and is developed as part of the Assembly's European Strategy to secure greater influence in Europe.

### **Compliance**

13. Standing order 15 covers the Committee's activity. The Assembly Compliance Office has been consulted and is content with the compliance aspects.

### **Financial Implications**

14. There are no additional financial implications for the Assembly arising from the issues covered in this report. However, expenditure incurred this financial year from the "Secondments Scheme" will be accommodated within the 2001-2002 Miscellaneous European Support Services Budget Expenditure line 212. Any expenditure during future financial years will be accommodated within the corresponding budgets approved by the Assembly.

**Yvonne Pope**

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