

Minutes

Date: Wednesday 5 December 2001
Time: 2.00pm to 4.40pm
Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly Building

In attendance

Members

Glyn Davies, Chair	Mid and West Wales
Lorraine Barrett	Cardiff South and Penarth
Mick Bates	Montgomery
Ron Davies	Caerphilly
Jocelyn Davies	South Wales East
Delyth Evans	Mid and West Wales
Carwyn Jones	Bridgend
Elin Jones	Ceredigion
Peter Rogers	North Wales
Janet Ryder	North Wales

In attendance

Christine Lloyd	Opportunity Wales
Martin Parfett	Opportunity Wales

Officials

Rory O'Sullivan (items 2 and 4)	Agriculture and Fisheries Policy Division
Mike Dunn (item 2)	Food and Farming Development Division
Glyn Perryman (item 4)	Agriculture and Fisheries Policy Division
Huw Jones (item 5)	Countryside Division
Claire Bennett (item 5)	Countryside Division

Secretariat

Adrian Crompton	Committee Clerk
Menna Williams	Committee Assistant

Item 1: Introduction, apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

1.1 Apologies were received from John Griffiths. Lorraine Barrett substituted for him.

1.2 The Chair declared an interest as a partner in a farming business, Peter Rogers as a farmer, Mick Bates as a partner in a farming business.

1.3 The Chair welcomed Ron Davies to his first meeting as a member of the committee.

Item 2: Minister's Report - ARD 18-01(p1)

2.1 The Minister reminded the Committee that DEFRA had now classified Wales as being free from Foot and Mouth. The Commission was expected to approve on the 14th December a recommendation from the Standing Veterinary Committee that exports from all parts of Wales could be resumed.

2.2 The Minister gave clarification of the status of the Welfare Cull Scheme in Wales. The scheme would end at the end of the year and there would be no further need to use landfill disposal sites in Wales.

2.3 The Minister was asked to comment on the confusion reported by farmers on Anglesey over the announcement regarding foot and mouth. Farmers had found it difficult to obtain information about their ability to export following the announcement. This had led to confusion over the slaughter of lambs for the home and export markets.

2.4 The Minister clarified that being declared foot and mouth free was not the same as being allowed to export once again. It was his intention to make the Order to allow export on the same day as the expected announcement from the Commission on 14 December. The Committee noted that technical problems on the day after the announcement had prevented details being made available on the internet. On a specific point regarding the ability of vets to certificate trailers containing animals for export as being satisfactorily cleansed, the Minister offered to consider individual cases if Members provided details.

2.5 In response to a question about the likely timetable for lifting movement restrictions, the Minister said that none had yet been agreed. The matter was not in the hands of the Assembly although he hoped that any new system would be flexible and would not require specific licensing. DEFRA were in the process of negotiating arrangements which, in turn, were connected to EU decisions on clearance to resume trade in live animals and other international export agreements. The Minister confirmed that, should the introduction of a 21 day standstill period be introduced, consultation would take place beforehand.

2.6 In response to a question regarding quota, the Minister said that farmers unable to replenish stock

before the 31 December deadline would not lose quota if the animals in question had been taken for reasons related to the control of foot and mouth.

2.7 The Minister was asked about the Order introduced in November to allow hunting of pests and vermin with dogs on land controlled under foot and mouth restrictions. In particular Members asked about the definition of the word ‘pests’ and the likely timetable for the re-introduction of hunting on Forestry Commission land. The Committee noted that the Order rescinded provisions in a previous Order introducing the ban and that specific animals were identified rather than ‘pests and vermin’. The Minister’s view was that refusing to allow the re-introduction of hunting on Forestry Commission land was not a decision that the Assembly had the power to take. The legal advice he had received suggested that, if it attempted to do so, it would be open to legal challenge. He agreed to report back to the Committee on any steps taken by other Government Departments to re-introduce hunting on Forestry Commission land.

2.8 In discussion of the establishment of a Woodland Development and Biomass Strategy Working Group, the Minister agreed to circulate to the Committee the Group’s remit. Officials were meeting the Chair of the Group to discuss bringing forward the planned date of July 2002 for the publication of its report.

2.9 The Committee welcomed the award by the World Wildlife Fund to the Forestry Commission of the ‘Gift to the Earth’ award. The Chair agreed that he would write to congratulate the Forestry Commission.

2.10 The Minister undertook to provide a paper to the next meeting on 9 January 2002 on the arguments surrounding the use of vaccination to control foot and mouth disease.

2.11 The Chair encouraged Members to let him know of issues they wished to see included in future Ministerial Reports.

Action points

Minister to report back to the Committee on any steps taken by other Government Departments to re-introduce hunting on Forestry Commission land – **Minister, Agriculture Policy Division**

Remit of the Woodland Development and Biomass Strategy Working Group to be circulated to the Committee – **Minister, Food and Farming Development Division**

Chair to write to congratulate the Forestry Commission on the receipt of an award from the WWF – **Chair, Secretariat**

Paper to be provided to the next meeting on 9 January 2002 on the arguments surrounding the use of vaccination to control foot and mouth disease – **Minister, Agriculture Department**

Item 3: Review of rural ICT

3.1 The Chair welcomed Christine Lloyd, Project Director of Opportunity Wales and Martin Parfett from Cardiff University to the meeting. A copy of their presentation on the Opportunity Wales project can be accessed by clicking [here](#).

3.2. They were asked how the project's targets for job creation had been set, how the project would avoid duplication of effort with other initiatives and for their views on the availability of infrastructure. Christine Lloyd told the Committee that the targets were based on previous research and had been approved by Assembly officials as part of the project's business plan. The intended date for achieving the job targets was 6 months after the end of the project in March 2004.

3.3 The business plan also contained an audit carried out to ensure that the project utilised and complemented existing initiatives and structures. As a result, Opportunity Wales worked closely with the WDA, Business Connect and existing enterprise groups.

3.4 In their experience to date, the availability of broadband infrastructure was rarely raised as an issue by companies. Businesses were more concerned with identifying the services they required and letting the most appropriate technological solution follow. Whilst accepting that the need for broadband services would increase in the future, it was not the role of Opportunity Wales to improve ICT infrastructure, rather, the project sought to demonstrate to companies what they could achieve through ICT today and to encourage demand accordingly. The project aimed to offer tailored solutions to small businesses ranging from the most basic training in ICT to more advanced advice and support. Committee Members emphasised the need to be proactive in offering advice to small rural businesses rather than simply reacting to demands from the most sophisticated users.

3.5 Martin Parfett acknowledged the importance of e-business clubs and other methods of encouraging face to face contact between business people. Opportunity Wales was piloting a mentoring scheme to assist in this way.

3.6 Opportunity Wales currently operated only in the Objective 1 area. Plans were being prepared to extend the initiative to other parts of Wales, beginning with the Objective 2 area.

3.7 Christine Lloyd was asked about the experience of other countries which had opted to concentrate on the provision of ICT infrastructure rather than the promotion of demand. Sweden had concentrated its efforts on increasing the availability of broadband infrastructure but was now finding that this had not automatically generated demand.

3.8 Christine and Martin emphasised the importance of emphasising the advantages of e-commerce to small businesses. In particular, it was vital to encourage them to think laterally about the advantages it could bring and not to think of e-commerce as just about selling on-line.

3.9 The Chair thanked Christine Lloyd and Martin Parfett for their presentation.

Item 4: Review of Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries - ARD 18-01(p3)

4.1 The Committee welcomed the revised response to the Review and the recognition now being given to the fisheries sector.

4.2 Members noted that, of the £800,000 grant-in-aid to the Environment Agency in each of the next three years, around £400,000 was intended to implement the recommendations in the report. The remainder would support the Agency's Objective 1 project in support of parts of the Nautilus Study into Inland and Sea Fisheries. The funds would be accompanied by a remit letter, setting out monitoring arrangements for the Agency, to ensure report recommendations were implemented. The Minister agreed to provide a breakdown of how Environment Agency funding would be used to implement the report's recommendations.

4.3 Concern was expressed that the consultation leading to the report had been led from outside Wales. The Minister pointed out that the consultation pre-dated devolution, but that he hoped any similar exercise in the future would be conducted by the Assembly or other organisations based in Wales.

4.4 The Minister said that around £200,000 had been requested under the Rural Recovery Plan by the fisheries sector to assist economic recovery from the effect of foot and mouth disease. He added that the review did not make specific provision for disease control in fish.

Action - Minister to provide a breakdown of how Environment Agency funding would be used to implement the report's recommendations – **Minister, Agriculture Policy Division**

Item 5: GM Release Directive - ARD 18-01(p4)

5.1 The Minister drew the Committee's attention to an article in the *European Voice* newspaper referring to the Assembly's decision to increase separation distances between GM and organic crops. He agreed to circulate a copy of Committee Members.

5.2 The Minister was asked whether he was aware of new research from Mexico suggesting the possibility of GM gene transfer over distances as great as 60 miles. The Minister was aware of the work and felt that the Assembly stance, and the actions it had taken, had opened up the debate on GM issues in Europe.

5.3 The Minister confirmed his intention to organise a European seminar on GM issues in February 2002 if a suitable date could be identified.

5.4 The Minister was asked about the consultation period specified for Part B consents. The Committee noted that the new Directive did not specify a set period but 'a reasonable time' in which consultation should take place. Although the consultation period would have to be agreed with other UK

administrations, the Minister felt that this allowed the flexibility for the Assembly to push for a longer period than before.

5.5 The Minister was asked if there had been any communication between the Assembly and the six EU countries currently adopting a moratorium on new approvals. The Committee noted that six Member States were currently blocking new approvals under Part C. The Assembly alone could not do likewise as it was not a Member State in its own right. Separately, Austria and some other Member States had attempted to prohibit the growing of GM crops by use of Article 16 notifications (of Directive 90/220/EEC). The opinion of the EU Scientific Committee on Plants was that these notifications had not introduced any new scientific evidence and so had not been supported

Action: Copy of article from *European Voice* to be circulated to Members – **Minister, Countryside Division**

Item 6: Minutes of previous meeting - ARD 17-01(min)

6.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 21 November.

Secretariat

December 2001