

26 JUNE 2002 - National Botanic Garden of Wales, Llanarthne.

In addition to my Written Report, I also raised the following items under Agenda Item 2.

South West Wales Economy

I was pleased to note in figures published recently that earnings in South West Wales had increased by 4.8 % in the year to April 2001 compared with an all Wales average of 3.6%. Also, that employment in the area in the year up to February 2002 had increased by 2% whereas it remained about the same level in Wales as a whole.

This morning, I met the South West Wales Economic Forum to discuss their priorities for the area's economy. I offered to help economic development agencies in the area, including the business sector, develop and improve links with Ireland.

Dawn Meats

I was disappointed at the news of probable job losses following the fire at Dawn Meats and yesterday made a statement in Plenary about this. Officials met the company this morning to assess the situation and to see what help Team Wales could provide. I will update the Committee on this as soon as the position becomes clear.

Symposium on economic activity

Earlier today I attended a symposium organised by the Welsh Assembly Government looking at ways of tackling economic inactivity. The Assembly Government attaches great importance to giving everybody the opportunity to contribute to the economy of Wales, and to develop their individual potential. People in work live healthier, fuller lives and have better standards of living. We want that opportunity to be open to all.

Assembly Investment Grant

During a visit to Boomerang TV (Cardiff) yesterday (25 June) I had the pleasure to announce the first awards to SMEs in South East Wales of £411,000 to 9 businesses to create 63 new jobs and safeguard 40 more. Along with Boomerang, other companies to benefit were:

* Davies Colour Ltd, Cardiff

- * Tiltview Engineering Ltd, Hengoed
- * Electroservices (Instruments) Ltd, Cwmbran
- * Cynnovation Ltd, Cardiff
- * Fans First financial Advisers Ltd, Newport
- * Preferred Packaging Services Ltd, Bridgend
- * Meridian Design & print Ltd, Caerphilly
- * Essential Foam & Fibre Limited, Tredegar

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Betws Colliery

The First Minister and I met representatives of Betws and Tower collieries and the NUM last Friday (21 June) to discuss continuation of present UK coal-aid scheme. We have both written to Brian Wilson supporting the continuation of some form of the present UK aid scheme after 23 July. The Welsh Assembly Government believes that the coal industry has a vital role to play in the energy mix in Wales and will continue to do everything in its power to secure its future.