

Minutes

Date: Wednesday 16 May 2001
Time: 2.00pm to 4.50pm
Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly Building

In attendance

Members

Glyn Davies, Chair	Mid and West Wales
Eleanor Burnham	North Wales
John Griffiths	Newport East
Jocelyn Davies	South Wales East
Delyth Evans	Mid and West Wales
Carwyn Jones	Bridgend
Elin Jones	Ceredigion
Huw Lewis	Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney
Peter Rogers	North Wales
Janet Ryder	North Wales

Officials

Gareth Jones	Head of Foot and Mouth Operations
Rory O'Sullivan	Agriculture Policy Division
Tony Edwards	Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales
Glyn Perryman	Agriculture Policy Division

Secretariat

Adrian Crompton	Committee Clerk
Howell Rees	Deputy Committee Clerk

Item 1: Apologies, substitutions and declarations of interest

1.1 The Chair welcomed Eleanor Burnham, who was substituting for Mick Bates. The Chair declared an interest as a farmer and said that his farm was subject to a Form D notice.

Item 2: Minister's report - ARD 09-01(p1)

2.1 The Minister said the number of confirmed foot and mouth cases in Wales was now 90. Tests on two slaughter on suspicion cases on Anglesey had been negative.

2.2 A prohibition notice had been published the day before setting statutory separation distances between GM and neighbouring crops. The separation distances were based on scientific advice from the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE). Between GM maize and organic crops the separation distance was 200 metres and for conventional forage maize, 80 metres. The main benefit was that the notice would trigger notification to the European Commission under Article 16 of the GM release Directive 90/220 EEC and so offered an opportunity to highlight the incompatibility between the current European GM and Organic regimes.

2.3 On the issue of GM crops the following points were raised:

- the Minister confirmed that the separation distances applied to the whole of Wales;
- what view did the other UK countries take of the introduction of separation distances in Wales and what were the next steps with Europe? The Minister said the notice would be discussed with the other UK countries and Europe. It was important for Wales to lobby to make its views known;

- would the separation distances be effective in maintaining organic status? The Minister said that the Soil Association wanted a separation distance of 6 miles. ACRE's advice was that 200 metres provided adequate protection against contamination. A part C consent issued by any member state allowed a GM crop to be grown anywhere in Europe unless there was a trial regime in place. A statutory separation distance would allow the Assembly to challenge planting and highlight conflicts between the GM and organic regimes;
- where did liability lie if a grower's organic status was affected? The Minister said that no liability would fall on the Assembly or central government;
- it was important for the GM issue to be raised in the public forum of the Committee as well as the GM strategy group.

2.4 Discussion turned to foot and mouth disease. A number of questions relating to the movement of livestock were raised:

- movement restrictions continued to cause problems for farmers on Anglesey. Farmers were receiving poor prices for animals taken for slaughter and were being forced to enter other stock for the welfare cull. It was important that a strategy and guidance for lifting the restrictions were developed as quickly as possible. Tony Edwards said that blood tests were being done and if the results were clear the infected area on Anglesey could be lifted;
- when would restrictions on the movement of livestock be further eased in areas that were free of disease such as the former county of Dyfed? The Minister said Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire and Ceredigion were regarded as provisionally free. The movement regime was being assessed but it remained important to balance easement against the risk of further disease;
- because of the local pattern of agriculture many farmers in north Ceredigion and south Meirionnydd held land in both areas. What could be done to allow stock movement from the latter area to Ceredigion? Tony Edwards said he was drawing up proposals for MAFF to consider that would involve reassessing North Wales as a provisionally free area;
- the Minister was asked what could be done to speed up the process of lifting of Form D notices. The Minister warned against the use of the Genesis test which was not proven. Tony Edwards explained that each epidemiological group of sheep had to be sampled. He said he would provide an outline timetable but the sampling process was complex and it could be indicative only.

2.5 It was claimed that the Caernarfon Divisional Office was understaffed and it was taking up to eight days to process movement licences. The Minister disagreed. The average time taken to process licences at the Caernarfon Office was two days. The Committee noted that 26,500 licences had been issued in Wales and each divisional office was processing an average of 135 licences every day. If problems arose with individual cases they should be brought to officials' attention so that checks could be made and systems altered if necessary.

2.6 Farmers whose stock had been culled had still not received compensation. The Minister said that he had made strong representations to the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF) to deal with the backlog.

2.7 The Minister was asked about the establishment of collection centres. It appeared that difficulties in establishing centres in England were holding up the process in Wales. The Minister said the issue was being taken up with MAFF, who were responsible for collection centres on an England and Wales basis. The existing proposals for collection centres were that they would be used for animals going for slaughter for human consumption. It was not possible to trade livestock yet because of the need to control the disease. Officials would continue to press MAFF for action on collection centres.

2.8 The Minister was asked for an update on the backlog on the welfare cull and what was being done to tackle it. The Minister said that he had received assurances from the Intervention Board that all livestock entered for the welfare cull could be accommodated but officials were discussing the problem with the Board. The Assembly had offered the Board resources to help with the scheme.

2.9 Reference was made to new evidence about the spread of the disease which seemed to indicate that a more targeted approach should replace the contiguous cull. The Minister said the contiguous cull had been effective in reducing the number of confirmed cases. Changes introduced in April meant cattle were no longer automatically culled but kept under observation.

2.10 Attention turned to developing strategies to help the rural economy recover:

- the Minister was asked about the make up of the Farming Futures Group and why workers in the agriculture or food processing industries were not represented. The Transport and General Workers Union had indicated that it was keen to participate. The Minister said that the Farming Futures Group had a narrow remit and was due to hold its final meeting in June. He said it would be more appropriate for union representatives to join the Task and Finish Group of the Rural Partnership;
- would an integrated and holistic plan be drawn up for the rural economy? How much money would be available from Westminster and would help be targeted on the areas hardest hit by the disease? The Minister said that a recovery plan would be drawn up by the Task and Finish Group. The Rural Development Plan provided a holistic and integrated vision for the rural economy.

2.11 The Chair said he was keen for the Committee to be involved in the recovery planning process for agriculture and the wider rural

economy. The Chair of the Economic Development Committee had suggested that the two committees should hold a joint meeting, possibly in rural Wales, to discuss the recovery of the rural economy. The Chair also proposed that, as soon as the Farming Futures Group had published its recommendations, the Committee should begin a discussion with the main farming unions on the future direction for farming.

2.12 It was suggested that a radical look at farming practices was needed to allay public concerns arising from the outbreak of foot and mouth. There was general support for these proposals and it was felt that the process should be started as soon as possible.

2.13 The Minister was asked if the Committee would have the opportunity to examine details of proposed secondary legislation that would feature in his future reports to the Committee. He said that where time allowed it might be possible for the Committee to see legislative proposals in draft. The Minister explained that most of the Assembly's foot and mouth disease legislation was necessarily made through the executive procedure.

Action points

2.14 Timetable for process leading to the lifting of Form D notices to be provided. (A copy of the note provided is at annex 1). – **Tony Edwards**

Item 3: Fisheries - ARD 09-01(p2); ARD 09-01(p3); ARD 09-01(p4)

3.1 The Minister proposed that the Committee take each paper in turn. The **Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review** was the Assembly's draft response to an England and Wales review which looked at existing policy and legislation concerning freshwater fisheries. The Committee was asked to support the introduction of new salmon and freshwater primary legislation in line with the recommendations in the report.

3.2 The Minister was asked about status the response and whether it would be discussed in Plenary. The Review made 195 recommendations. This was the Assembly's draft response and it took a similar line to that of MAFF except in respect of mixed stock netting where further consultation was necessary. The Committee's views would be taken into account in the final response.

3.3 The Committee noted that most of the recommendations could be implemented through secondary legislation by the Assembly although some primary enabling legislation was required. Parliamentary time for that was tight and the timing was unclear.

3.4 Discussion turned to the traditional coracle net fisheries and a number of points were raised:

- the general view was that these traditional fisheries were important in cultural and tourism terms and should be protected;
- the draft response indicated that the Assembly would consult fully with those involved before taking a view on netting although the nature of the consultation had not yet been decided. The Minister said he was not persuaded that there was a case for net buy outs in Wales. The buy outs in England were directed at the North East offshore net fisheries which were mixed stock fisheries and there were no such fisheries in Wales. He had met coracle fishermen's representatives and would continue the dialogue. Only two people made a full time living in this way and it was necessary to look at the balance between conservation and tradition. Those consulted would include the Environment Agency and bodies representing the fishermen. The Minister agreed to report back to the Committee on the consultation process.

3.5 Points of detail were raised on some of the proposed responses:

- why was the recommendation on the development and promotion of angling in urban areas and for disabled and young people (recommendation 10 on page 29) being accepted only in part? The Minister said he saw no reason why it should not be accepted in full;
- the Minister was asked if it was possible to introduce close season on fishing to protect rare nesting birds. Recommendation 100 on page 30 related to this and needed to be reconsidered. The Minister agreed to do so.

3.6 Issues concerning fisheries management and enforcement were raised:

- in view of possible conflicts of interest between farming and fishing and the significant economic contribution from fishing tourism, was MAFF the right organisation to be responsible for fishing matters? The Minister said that where primary legislation was required MAFF's input was necessary;
- the Minister was asked if he was confident that implementation of the recommendations would not put pressure on the Environment

Agency's budget. He said he understood that it could be managed within the Agency's existing budget

- should salmon caught on Welsh rivers be tagged to enable tracing of legally taken fish? The Minister said this issue needed to be discussed with the Environment Agency as the body responsible for fisheries protection and enforcement.

3.7 The Committee noted that the Environment Agency and the Wales Tourist Board had issued a joint strategy document called "Fishing Wales" to promote fishing in Wales.

3.8 The Minister introduced the paper on the **Study into Inland and Sea Fisheries in Wales** which had been carried out by Nautilus Consultants. The Report's conclusions had been generally welcomed during the public consultation.

3.9 A number of issues were raised about the nature of the proposed Sea Food Wales and Angling Fishing Wales committees:

- the Minister was asked how the committees would fit in with existing bodies and what their remit was. The Committee noted that membership would be drawn from the Objective 1 Monitoring Committee and relevant interests from commercial and leisure fishing and tourism sectors. The precise remit of each committee had not yet been decided. The Agri-Food Partnership had also agreed to establish a fisheries group;
- concern was expressed that angling clubs and tourism interests should be represented. The Minister agreed it was important to balance commercial and leisure interests.

3.10 Discussion turned to the sea fisheries committees and the following points were raised:

- did the sea fisheries committees receive adequate funding? The Minister said that the Association of Sea Fisheries Committees had produced a consultation paper which addressed the issue of funding. Funding for the committees was the responsibility of local authorities. The Committee noted that when the Assembly passed an order on funding for the South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee in March it was responding to the wishes of local authorities;
- what consideration was being given to the establishment of a single sea fisheries committee for Wales? The Minister said that this was a matter for the local authorities involved;
- were all local authorities represented on sea fisheries committees or only those with a coastline? The Minister said that membership too was a matter for individual authorities.

3.11 The Chair said that the Committee's forward work programme included developing proposals to take forward the Nautilus review of salmon and fresh water fisheries in Wales. It was agreed that the Committee would give further consideration to the Nautilus review and the issue of sea fisheries committees after the Minister had met the Association of Sea Fisheries Committees.

3.12 The Minister introduced the **Welsh Fishing Vessel Decommissioning Scheme** paper. He believed it was not appropriate to introduce a scheme because most of the money would go out of Wales. The money available under Objective 1 should instead be invested in processing and other facilities.

3.13 The Chair noted that there were potential legal difficulties if Wales took a different line from the rest of the UK. The Minister confirmed that the Office of the Counsel General was considering this. The Committee noted that it had been necessary to include a decommissioning scheme in the Objective 1 Single Programming European Commission because of an obligation to reduce the size of the UK fishing fleet but its use was optional.

3.14 A few points of detail were raised:

- the Minister was asked if the quota of decommissioned boats could be redistributed. He said that depended on the scheme detail but options included redistribution or the owners being allowed to sell or lease their quota. If it was redistributed there was no guarantee that Welsh boats would benefit;
- the Minister was asked for his views on the Cabinet Office report which indicated that decommissioning scheme did not represent value for money. He said that the Assembly had been party to the report. He agreed there was a danger that older vessels would be scrapped and replaced with modern ones.

Item 4: Minutes of previous meeting - ARD 07-01(min); ARD 08-01(min)

The Committee approved the minutes of the meetings held on 24 April and 2 May 2001.

LIFTING OF RESTRICTIONS ON FORM D PREMISES - PROCEDURES AND TIMETABLE

1. Background

1.1 All premises within a 3km radius of a confirmed outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease i.e. within the so called 'Protection Zone', are placed under a Form D restriction. A statistical sample of all sheep (and goats) on these premises has to be subjected to blood sampling and serological testing with negative results before these restrictions can be lifted. Depending on the circumstances of the infected premise (IP), this testing begins from twenty one days after the preliminary cleansing and disinfection has been carried out on the IP.

1.2 Where the IP is the only one in an area, the testing should begin as soon as possible after the 21 day period. Negative results will not only result in the lifting of the IP but also the Infected Area restrictions. Where a group of IPs is in close geographical proximity to each other, subject to the preliminary cleansing and disinfection, the testing should start 21 days after the last outbreak. Where a large number of IPs exist within an infected area, the timetable remains the same but the pattern of testing will vary according to the geography. For instance if the IPs are in a line or a similar pattern then the testing will start at one end and work down the line. As the testing for each individual zone is completed, provided the results for that zone are all negative, then the Forms D that are not also in an adjacent Protection Zone can be lifted. This pattern will continue until all the restrictions have been lifted. If the outbreaks are in a group, then normally testing will begin on the outside and work inwards. The same pattern of lifting restrictions will obtain as before. The Infected Area restrictions will be lifted as soon as all the Forms D have been removed.

2. Timetable

The following table shows the work in hand and the attached map shows the location of the Infected Premises in Wales:

Location	Progress	Remarks
Anglesey (13 IPs)	Sampling complete - final test results awaited	Some sero-positives found but position resolved. If no further problems uncovered, the Forms D and Infected Area will be lifted shortly.
Mid Powys (Builth Wells) (3 IPs)	Sampling complete - final test results awaited	Some re-bleeding necessary owing to equivocal results.
Llanidloes area (2 IPs)	Sampling complete - awaiting results	
Meifod (1 IP)	Sampling underway	
North Usk (3 IPs)	Sampling complete - awaiting results	
Chepstow (4 IPs)	Sampling to be completed 25 May	
Skewen, Swansea (1 IP)	Sampling to be completed 25 May	
Nelson/Abercynon (3 IPs)	Sampling to be completed 25 May	

3. Future plans

Sampling around the 3 Newport IPs will commence shortly. If this area proves free together with the others in South Wales then these Infected Areas can be reduced or lifted altogether. Similarly, if the mid Powys area is all clear then the IA in that area will be reviewed with a view to reducing it as soon as possible. The next major areas to be addressed will be those around Berriew/Churchstoke and Grosmont. Because of the proximity to the border with England the plans here will need to be co-ordinated with colleagues in Shropshire.

infected map.jpg (1575833 bytes)

W A Edwards
Chief Veterinary Officer, Wales
24 May 2001