

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

## **REPORT OF THE MINISTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS**

### **Foot and Mouth Disease**

1. As at 09:00 hours on 14 May 2001, there were a total of 89 confirmed cases in Wales: 52 in Powys; 13 in Anglesey; 18 in Monmouthshire; 3 in Newport; and one each in Caerphilly, Neath Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taff. In addition, there were 9 slaughter on suspicion cases: 5 in Powys; 2 in Anglesey and one each in Newport and Monmouthshire.
2. As at 13 May, a total of 322,424 animals had been slaughtered in Wales under the disease control measures – 31,881 cattle; 283,595 sheep; 6899 pigs; and 49 goats.
3. A total of 398,422 animals from Wales have been registered with the Intervention Board (IB) under the Livestock Welfare Disposal Scheme as at 12 May: 361,553 sheep; 7,085 pigs; 29,601 cattle; and 183 goats/deer. Some 17,236 animals have since been withdrawn from the scheme by the applicants. At the time of writing, applications in respect of 193,876 animals had been processed; registrations in respect of a further 187,310 animals were still outstanding. A dedicated IB team has been set up in Reading to deal with Welsh cases and a unit has been established within the Operational Control Centre in Cardiff to set up reporting mechanisms with IB for planned and actual cull, movement and disposal of stock.
4. 22,830 movement licences for welfare purposes have been issued in Wales to date. These include 8760 occupational licences; 8270 local licences; and 5800 licences under the longer distance movement scheme.

### **Rural Task and Finish Group**

5. The Committee is aware that this Group has been tasked to prepare a plan to help relaunch the rural economy when the foot and mouth disease abates. The Group first met on 23 March. A Joint Secretariat drawn from National Assembly officials, the WDA, WCVA and WLGA, including senior officers from Anglesey and Powys County Councils, has been meeting regularly to consider action taken in respect of the disease and to commission contributions to the recovery plan for consideration by the Task and Finish Group. The next meeting of the Task and Finish Group has been convened for 14 June. This will consider the first draft of a report.

## **Farming Futures Group**

6. The Farming Futures Group, which I chair, had made good progress on defining a long-term direction for Welsh agriculture at the time of its last meeting in February. In my statement to the National Assembly on 1 May, I indicated my desire for the Group to meet again to take stock of the issues highlighted in the last couple of months and to press forward with this important work. Arrangements are in hand for the Group to meet on either 11 or 15 June.

## **Quinquennial Review of Forest Enterprise**

7. I recently consulted Ministers in Westminster and the Scottish Parliament over our joint responsibility for the Quinquennial Review of the Forestry Commission's Forest Enterprise Agency. We concluded that Forest Enterprise should retain its status as an executive agency of the Forestry Commission. The Agency has successfully involved communities and other stakeholders in its decision taking and has responded successfully to change - particularly devolution. I intend to review the options for further decentralisation of the handling of forestry policy and management in the future.

8. The report of the first stage of the review is available on the Forestry Commission's website ([www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)). The first stage of the review considers the best organisational structure for the Agency; the remainder of the review considers how its performance can be improved.

## **Cydcoed**

9. The Wales European Funding Office has approved *Cydcoed – Woods for All*, a social forestry grant scheme funded through Objective 1. The scheme will be administered through the Forestry Commission's Woodland Grant Scheme and match funded by the National Assembly (subject to a resolution of the Forestry Commission financing). Total expenditure under the programme will be approximately £4.5 million and the scheme is due to run until the end of 2003. It is aimed at those communities in Wales who are shown on the National Assembly's Index of Deprivation as 'most deprived' together with communities who have no access to community woodlands. The funds can be used for a wide range of activities and developments.

## **Legislation**

10. The Committee will recall that I have agreed to provide a list of secondary legislation in the pipeline. This is expected to be ready in time for the next meeting on 6 June.