

Date: Wednesday 5 December 2001
Time: 2.00pm to 5.15pm
Venue: Committee Room, National Assembly Building

REPORT OF THE MINISTER FOR RURAL AFFAIRS

FMD Control Regime: Hunting with dogs

1. At the Committee meeting on 21 November 2001, I promised to provide further advice in connection with the introduction (from 19 November) to allow the use of dogs to control pests and vermin on individual farms by a maximum of 3 people authorised by the occupier. The issue raised was whether there was a limit on the number of dogs that might be used for such pest control purposes.
2. The Foot and Mouth Disease (Amendment)(Wales)(No12) Order 2001 gives legal effect to this activity. Article 36(2) of this Order needs to be read in conjunction with Article 3 (1) of the Foot and Mouth Order 1983. The former refers to "any dog". The intention of this form of wording was to make clear that under the Foot and Mouth (Amendment)(Wales)(No12) Order, there was no restriction on what type of dog was involved having regard to the definition of hunting contained in Article 3(1) that refers to the use of "hounds, beagles and other dogs". So if anyone wanted to use a hound or a beagle for pest control purposes (even though these dogs rely on scent) as opposed to a terrier or lurcher (who rely on sight of the quarry), then that would be acceptable.
3. It follows, therefore, that the legislation implies the use of any number of dogs for pest control purposes by up to 3 people. If the intention had been to limit the numbers of dogs, the legislation would have been drafted to have said " a single dog" (or if a specific number, to specify exactly how many). As in all such matters, the test of reasonableness would apply. The people concerned in using dogs would need to be able to demonstrate their ability to control the number of dogs involved.

Winter Fair

4. I will be attending the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society's annual Winter Fair on 4 December. My programme includes, amongst other things, presenting the Welsh Woman Farmer of the Year award to the winner; and attendance at events organised by the Organic Centre Wales and Wales Young Farmers' Clubs.

World Wildlife Fund "Gift to the Earth" Award

5. On 23 November, the Forestry Commission was awarded the prestigious "Gift to the Earth" award by

the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) for progressing independent certification and sustainable forest management. This is WWF's highest award for globally significant conservation achievement and it has made about 70 such awards world-wide in the 40 years of its existence and only a handful (two or three) have been made in the UK.

6. It is particularly encouraging to know that the Assembly Government's woodlands, managed by Forest Enterprise, have been independently certified as being sustainably managed and that our forestry policy, as exemplified through the Wales Woodland Strategy, is driving sustainable forest management in Wales. This is the first time that a state forest anywhere in the world has achieved 100% certification to the standards set by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

Woodland Development & Biomass Strategy Working Group

7. The Woodland Development and Biomass Strategy working group has been set up jointly by the Forestry Commission and the Welsh Assembly Government's Agriculture Department, under the chairmanship of Professor K J Overshott, Principal of the University of Wales College, Newport.

8. The first meeting of the Working Group was held on the 27th November at the Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells. The remit of the group was discussed at the meeting, and it was agreed that three sub-groups would be set up to concentrate on 'Woodland Development', 'Biomass' and 'Advice, Grants and Training'. The feedback from the sub-groups will be fed into the action plan to be attached to the final report, due in July 2002. A timetable for the implementation of the groups' work is being finalised to fit with this reporting date.

Woodland Grant Scheme/ Farm Woodland Premium Scheme

9. At the Welsh Timber Growers Association conference in Llandrindod Wells on 3 December, the Deputy Rural Affairs Minister, Delyth Evans, announced a review of new woodland planting under the Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) and the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme (FWPS). The review is to be managed jointly by the Forestry Commission and the Welsh Assembly Government's Agriculture Department. It will take the form of a detailed evaluation by consultants of the operation of FWPS and the new planting aspects of WGS, the recommendations from which will contribute to the mid-term evaluation and review of the Wales Rural Development Plan. It will also assist in the development of new incentives for woodland planting to meet the objectives of the Wales Woodland Strategy.