

Agriculture & Rural Development Committee ARD 03-02(min)

Minutes

Date: Wednesday 6 February 2002

Time: 2.00pm to 4.50pm

Venue: Committee Room 1, National Assembly Building

In attendance

Members

Glyn Davies, Chair	Mid and West Wales
Mick Bates	Montgomery
Jocelyn Davies	South Wales East
Ron Davies	Caerphilly
Delyth Evans	Mid and West Wales
John Griffiths	Newport East
Elin Jones	Ceredigion

Apologies

Peter Rogers	North Wales
Janet Ryder	North Wales
Carwyn Jones	Bridgend

In attendance

Patrick Sullivan (item 4) WDA

Robin Beckmann (item 4) ELWa

Kim Colebrook (item 4) WTB

Officials (item 2)

Rory O'Sullivan Agriculture & Fisheries Policy Division

Mike Dunn Food and Farming Development Division

Simon Hewitt Forestry Commission

Jim Norrie Animal Health Division

Huw Jones Countryside Division

Secretariat

Adrian Crompton Committee Clerk

Menna Williams Committee Assistant

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

1.1 The Chair and Mick Bates declared interests as partners in farming businesses.

1.2 Apologies were received from Carwyn Jones, Peter Rogers and Janet Ryder.

1.3 In response to a request from Members at the previous meeting, the Chair outlined how the Committee might become more actively engaged in the scrutiny of statutory instruments (SIs). He proposed that:

- The current practice of receiving a monthly report of forthcoming statutory instruments (SIs) should continue;
- The text describing the intention of each piece of legislation should be expanded; and
- The report should indicate the scope within each Order for the Assembly to introduce distinctive Welsh policy.

1.4 The Committee supported the proposal. The Chair urged Members to use the information provided to indicate which SIs and policy areas they wished to consider in more detail and agreed to take a lead in this regard.

Item 2: Minister's Report - ARD 03-02(p1)

Antur Cig Cymru (ACC)

2.1 In the light of concerns expressed by Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions (WLBP) about the timing of the announcement on ACC, Members urged the Deputy Minister to ensure that the current consultation exercise was genuinely inclusive.

2.2 Members expressed doubt that the proposal would meet its aim of streamlining marketing and promotional activity for the red meat sector as it created an additional body (ACC) on top of three currently involved. The Committee noted that the proposals were aimed at reducing duplication (for example, the Board of ACC would subsume the work of the MLC's Welsh Council and the Lamb & Beef Strategy Group of the Agri-Food Partnership).

2.3 Members were concerned that the creation of ACC would undermine the existence of WLBP whose continued role was unclear. It was important that any new structure was dynamic rather than bureaucratic and that the strength of WLBP as a co-operative venture was not lost.

2.4 The Chair repeated the point he had made at the previous meeting that the timing of the consultation exercise, coupled with the Committee's commitment to two Foot and Mouth scrutiny sessions, meant that this was the only opportunity for the Committee to discuss the ACC proposal. Members expressed dissatisfaction with this arrangement. They felt that the issue should be included as a substantive item on a future agenda once the consultation period had closed. The Committee agreed that the Chair should write to the Minister for Rural Affairs asking him not to reach a conclusion on ACC until the Committee had discussed the matter in full.

Policy Commission on the future of farming in England

2.5 The Committee noted that no discussions had taken place between the Welsh Assembly Government and the authors of the report. The Commission's report was addressed to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the bulk of its recommendations related to England only. The recommendation for an increase in modulation of production subsidies to 10% from 2004 called for the UK Government to move forward in conjunction with the devolved administrations. The Committee noted that the Policy Commission recommended modulation with full match funding from the Exchequer. The

Deputy Minister said that modulation was likely to form part of the discussions between the four UK agriculture Ministers on the mid-term review of the CAP.

Visit by Lord Whitty

2.6 The Committee noted that Lord Whitty had been invited to visit Wales to gain an insight into the distinctive nature of Welsh agriculture. With regard to Lord Whitty's announcement on the re-opening of livestock markets, the Committee noted that farmers would be permitted to attend markets subject to certain bio-security measures. Some Members felt that priority should be given to ensuring that bio-security requirements did not make the re-opening of markets impracticable. Others stressed the importance of ensuring the strictest levels of bio-security to prevent any re-emergence of Foot and Mouth disease. The Deputy Minister agreed to circulate to Committee members details of the bio-security measures required. The Committee also noted that guidance to those organising shows would be published in a special edition of *Gwlad*.

Illegal meat imports – penalties

2.7 The Deputy Minister agreed to provide details of the number of people prosecuted in Wales for attempting to illegally import meat products. It was pointed out that such figures would be meaningless in terms of the overall enforcement of import restrictions across the UK. Most foodstuffs entering Wales came from other parts of the UK and there were no port of entry checks on material imported from other EU Member States. The Chair agreed to consider a proposal that DEFRA, HM Customs and Excise, the Food Standards Agency and other relevant departments should be invited to give a presentation to the Committee on the steps being taken to prevent illegal imports of meat products.

Woodland Development and Biomass Strategy Group

2.8 The Committee noted that the co-ordination of structural funding in relation to biomass would be addressed by all of the sub-groups established at the first meeting of the Woodland Development and Biomass Strategy Group.

Wildlife poisoning

2.9 Some doubt was expressed over the accuracy of the figures provided in the Minister's Report on the number of poisoning incidents involving Peregrine falcons, particularly the low number recorded in 2001. Members noted that the figures had been checked and represented the total number of alleged wildlife poisoning incidents reported to NAWAD; that there were a number of other causes contributing to the high proportion of peregrine nests interfered with; and that foot and mouth restrictions had had a significant impact on the collection of data in 2001.

Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations

2.10 Subject to timing restrictions, the Chair indicated that he hoped the Committee would have the opportunity to discuss the proposed *Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated land and semi-natural areas) (Wales) Regulations*.

Foot and Mouth

2.11 The Chair was asked how the Committee's scrutiny of Ministerial handling of foot and mouth in Wales related to the European Parliament and UK-led inquiries into the disease. The Chair said that the Committee was free to engage with these exercises as Members saw fit.

Action Points

Chair to write to the Minister for Rural Affairs, on behalf of the Committee, asking him to delay any decision on Antur Cig Cymru until after the Committee has the opportunity to discuss the matter in detail - **Chair/Secretariat**

Guidance to farmers on bio-security measures required in livestock markets to be circulated to Members - **Minister, Animal Health Division**

Statistics on the number of people prosecuted in Wales for the illegal import of meat products to be circulated to Members - **Minister, Animal Health Division**

Consideration to be given to future presentation from other government departments and agencies on the steps being taken to prevent illegal imports of meat to the UK - **Chair/Secretariat**

Subject to timing restrictions, the *Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated land and semi-natural areas) (Wales) Regulations* to be discussed at a future meeting – **Secretariat/ Food and Farming Development Division**

Item 3: Strategic Forward Work Programme

3.1 The Committee agreed to add Tir Gofal to the list of topics for its policy development reviews.

3.2 Members also agreed that the mid-term review of the CAP should be discussed once proposals emerged from the European Commission in the summer.

3.3 Subject to these amendments, the Committee approved the work programme.

Action Point

Strategic Forward Work Programme to be revised to include a review of the operation of Tir Gofal and discussion of the mid-term review of the CAP - **Secretariat**

Item 4: Review of rural ICT

4.1 The Committee received presentations from the Wales Tourist Board (WTB) on its *Visit Wales* initiative and from the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) and Education and Learning Wales (ELWa) on the steps each was taking to support the use of ICT in rural areas. Copies can be seen by clicking [here](#).

4.2 In discussion with Patrick Sullivan of the WDA:

- In advocating a technology-neutral approach, it was important for strategic development plans to be sufficiently flexible to cater for the different needs and communities across rural Wales – from relatively low-level community-led initiatives to the most advanced ICT capability in some business clusters;
- An ICT implementation plan going to the WDA Board the following day aimed for such flexibility and to match broadband availability with the plans of the Agency and local authorities to develop certain sites. It also sought to address the issue of the high cost of provision in rural areas and consequent market failure;
- The potential for satellite delivery was being examined and Patrick Sullivan was hopeful that, provided the necessary funds could be identified, Wales would take part in a pilot scheme along with Northern Ireland, Scotland and the South West of England.

4.3 In discussion with Robin Beckmann, of ELWa:

- He explained that ELWa hoped to open up access to the Superjanet network mentioned in his presentation, to schools and communities across Wales. ELWa saw the provision of ICT learning and training through schools as a key route to wider access amongst rural communities;
- Although ELWa did not provide proactive financial assistance to companies looking to access ICT training, they did provide bespoke training and learning programmes. Robin Beckmann and Patrick Sullivan agreed that the initial cost of hardware was often a barrier to ICT take-up amongst SMEs and communities and there was role for public intervention to overcome this;
- The e-communities programme looked to provide ICT mentoring and support to the most deprived communities. Although it would broadly align with the communities

identified by the index of multiple deprivation underlying the Communities First programme, it would also take account of other factors not included in the index but important in the context of rural deprivation.

4.4 Kim Colebrook of the WTB stressed the importance of ICT as a marketing tool for the tourism sector. The WTB sought to help the industry develop integrated marketing solutions that ensured that information on Wales as a tourist destination was consistently offered to those looking to book and arrange holidays online. The WTB worked closely with the WDA and other agencies to try to match the provision of ICT services with the needs of the tourism sector.

Item 5: Minutes of the last meeting

5.1 The Minutes of the previous meeting on 23 January were approved. Details of an outstanding action point, on the Brecon Jazz Festival Rural Recovery Plan application and reasons for refusal, would be provided as soon as possible.