

**Minutes**

**Date:** Wednesday 17 April  
**Time:** 2.00pm to 5.10pm  
**Venue:** Committee Room 1, National Assembly Building

In attendance

*Members*

Glyn Davies, <i>Chair</i>	Mid and West Wales
Mick Bates	Montgomery
Cynog Dafis	Mid and West Wales
Jocelyn Davies	South Wales East
Ron Davies	Caerphilly
Delyth Evans	Mid and West Wales
John Griffiths	Newport East
Carwyn Jones, <i>Minister</i>	Bridgend
Peter Rogers	North Wales
Carwyn Jones	Bridgend
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Carmarthen East and Dinefwr

*Officials*

Huw Brodie	Director, Agriculture & Rural Affairs Dept.
Fiona Adams-Jones (item 2)	Food & Farming Development Division
Peter McAllen (item 2)	Food & Farming Development Division
Rory O’Sullivan (items 2 & 4)	Agriculture & Fisheries Policy Division
Kirstie Kirk (item 2)	Veterinary Advisor
Jim Norrie (item 2)	Animal Health Division
Gareth Jones (item 5)	FMD Operations
Huw Davies	Office of the Counsel General

*Secretariat*

Adrian Crompton	Committee Clerk
Liz Wilkinson	Deputy Committee Clerk

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

1. The following declarations of interests were made:

- The Chair declared that he and his wife were partners in a farming business and that he was a member of Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions;
- Peter Rogers declared that he, his wife and son were partners in a farming business and that he was a member of Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions.
- Mick Bates declared that he and his wife were partners in a farming business and that he was a member of Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions.
- All three referred to fuller details available in the Register of Members' Interests.

## **Item 2: Minister's report: ARD 06-02 (p1)**

### ***Bovine TB***

2.1 The Minister explained that, unlike other areas of animal health, responsibility for the control of TB was a devolved matter. This reflected differences in the drafting of the relevant primary legislation.

2.2 Concern was expressed about the number of overdue tuberculosis tests and consequent movement restrictions on herds. The State Veterinary Service (SVS) was giving priority to dealing with the backlog, which had grown during the foot and mouth outbreak. Additional SVS staff had been allocated to reduce the backlog and the Minister had written to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to highlight the need for further resources for the SVS in Wales.

2.3 Members noted that use of the gamma interferon test could help to identify infected cattle in herds with confirmed TB. It should be seen, though, as a complement, rather than an alternative, to existing testing methods.

2.4 Members expressed disappointment that the Krebs study did not include areas in Wales with a high incidence of bovine TB and suggested that further research was needed into the clustering seen in Wales. As the results of the Krebs trials would not be available until 2004, an interim strategy was required. The Minister said that a proposed strategy was being developed in conjunction with DEFRA and SVS and should be available later next month. He agreed to report back to Committee on the interim strategy and, if time permitted, to allow Committee consideration of consequent policy.

2.5 The Committee noted that an effective vaccine against bovine TB was unlikely to be available for at least 10 years and that the existence of TB in other wildlife meant that the UK was not complying with all EU Directives, which assumed a policy of complete eradication.

## ***Illegal Meat Imports***

2.6 In view of the UK's recent experience with foot and mouth and the successful operation of controls in other countries, Members felt it was imperative to implement stricter measures to combat illegal meat imports. The Committee noted that the Minister had written to Welsh ports and airlines using Welsh airports to remind them of their responsibilities to minimise the risk of importation of illegal meat.

## ***Farming Connect update***

2.7 Concerns were expressed about the high cost of consultant farm visits and waiting times between initial contact and the first visit. The Committee noted that delays had arisen as a result of farmers requesting the more popular or better known business consultants. The issue was being addressed but it was important not to sacrifice the quality of advice provided. The Minister emphasised the need for consultants to visit farms in order to gain an insight into individual businesses. The rates being charged were below those available in the private sector, which suggested that consultants were not being overpaid. The Minister agreed to circulate to Committee Members figures on the average cost of farm consultant visits under Farming Connect.

2.8 Some farmers had incurred financial costs during the review process, for example, as result of submitting planning applications, only to be advised later that their business was unviable. Members noted the intention to offer an initial business viability assessment to avoid such incidents.

2.9 The Minister agreed to report back to Committee on the scope for using processing and marketing grants to compensate for different rates of grant support between Objective 1 and 2 areas.

2.10 The Minister agreed to report back to Committee to clarify the rules governing farm partners aged under 40 working off-farm and their eligibility for grant assistance.

## ***Secondary Legislation***

2.11 The Committee agreed that scrutiny of the Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated Land and Semi-natural Areas) (Wales) Regulations 2002 should be included in the agenda for the 1 May meeting.

2.12 The Committee noted that greater notice would be required to undertake formal scrutiny of statutory instruments (SIs) in the manner envisaged by Standing Orders. Members agreed to contact the Chair with suggestions of SIs that they wished to consider in Committee.

2.13 The Minister agreed to include proposals for the revised Tir Mynydd scheme on a future agenda.

2.14 The Committee noted that consideration of the material submitted to its investigation into the effect of hunting with dogs was preliminarily set for 19 June.

## **Other issues**

2.15 Members drew the Minister's attention to educational packs from the European Council for Young Farmers designed to increase awareness of agriculture among primary school children. The Minister pointed out that use of the packs in Wales would require translation into Welsh and alignment with the national curriculum.

2.16 The Minister had written to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs asking her to press for the payment of agri-monetary compensation. He agreed that he would contact his counterparts in Scotland and Northern Ireland suggesting that they do the same.

## **Action points**

The Minister to report back to Committee on the forthcoming interim strategy on TB and to allow Committee consideration of consequent policy changes if possible – **Minister, Animal Health Division**

The Minister to circulate to Committee Members figures on the average cost of consultancy farm visits under Farming Connect – **Minister, Food & Farming Development Division**

The Minister to report back to Committee on scope for the use of processing and marketing grants to compensate for different rates on grant support between Objective 1 and 2 areas – **Minister, Food & Farming Development Division**

The Minister to report back to Committee to clarify operation rules governing farm partners aged under 40 and also working off-farm – **Minister, Food & Farming Development Division**

Scrutiny of the Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated Land and Semi-natural Areas) (Wales) Regulations 2002 to be included in the agenda for the 1 May meeting – **Minister, Food & Farming Development Division, Secretariat**

Proposals for Tir Mynydd 2 to be included as a future agenda item – **Minister, Agriculture & Fisheries Policy Division, Secretariat**

## **Item 3: Antur Cig Cymru: ARD 06-02 (p.2)**

3.1 During discussion, Committee members expressed the following concerns:

- It was questionable that the proposal to establish Antur Cig Cymru (ACC) would meet its aim of streamlining marketing and promotional activity for the red meat sector as it created an additional body on top of three currently involved.

- It would be difficult to address the conflicting concerns raised in the consultation regarding the structure of the new body, in particular Board membership. A balance would need to be reached to give the Board an appropriate mix of skills and representation without it becoming large and unwieldy.
- The role of the new body would have to be clearly defined and take into account the difference between its promotion and marketing responsibilities. Members emphasised the need to build on the strengths of bodies currently involved in meat promotion and marketing.
- It was important to clarify the effect of the proposed structure on the individual members of Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions.
- There had, to date, been no meeting held between the WLBP, Welsh Development Agency (WDA) and the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) to discuss the implementation of the proposal.

3.2 In response to these concerns the Minister said that the structure of the new body, including Board representation, was a matter for WLBP, WDA and MLC but the consultation document had indicated that the Board should contain representatives from along the supply chain. The Committee noted that the first meeting between the three bodies would be held on 24 April. The Minister felt that the development of a single strategic body would serve to strengthen existing marketing and promotional activities and enable Wales to successfully compete in European and worldwide markets.

#### **Item 4: Farming for the Future: ARD 06-02 (p3)**

4.1 The Chair welcomed the opportunity to discuss the progress of Farming for the Future in Committee.

4.2 The use of bird populations as a performance indicator was welcomed. It was suggested that further work should be undertaken in conjunction with the British Trust for Ornithology and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds to improve the relevance and data quality of the chosen measures. In particular, comparative data prior to 1994 should be extrapolated to identify longer term trends. The Minister agreed to include in the July progress report improved data on farmland birds.

4.3 The following points were raised in respect of the document's action points:

##### *Action point 5:*

The Minister confirmed the permanent appointment in Brussels of a member of staff from the Assembly's Agriculture and Rural Affairs Department

##### *Action points 6 and 7:*

The needs of organic producers in Wales should be addressed in dealings with supermarkets and major retailers. The Minister said that the possibility of permanent payments to the organic sector following conversion was currently being examined.

The dairy sector had recently experienced falling prices from supermarkets. Members called on the Minister to push for an increase in the price of milk offered to farmers and for agri-monetary compensation for the dairy sector. The Minister pointed out that the price of milk reflected market conditions and referred to his earlier comments on agri-monetary compensation.

*Action point 8:*

Members expressed concern about the continued 20 day restriction on livestock movement. The Committee noted that this was not a devolved matter. However, the Minister had made representations to the UK Government and the issue would be reviewed following the lambing season.

*Action point 10:*

The Assembly-led working group on scrapie eradication had met several times. EU approval was required for the proposed package before any further announcement could be made.

*Action point 25:*

Members expressed disappointment that the latest round of CAP reforms had not included a provision to allow biomass projects to benefit from funds released as a result of decoupling subsidies from production. The Minister said it was likely that decoupling would be addressed in the context of the mid-term CAP review, proposals for which would be published at the end of June.

*Action points 32,33,34 and 35:*

The Committee emphasised the need to introduce appropriate measures to assist young farmers. It was noted that consideration was being given to ring-fencing sheep and cow quota to give priority to young farmers in the 2003 quota year.

*Action point 40:*

The Chair informed the Committee that a progress report on the Independent Appeals system had been scheduled for the 15 May meeting.

*Action point 44:*

In response to a question on the implementation of the Small Farmers scheme to simplify CAP

payments, the Minister agreed to include details of the operation of the scheme in his next written report.

### **Action points**

The Minister to include in the July progress report improved data on farmland birds – **Minister, Agriculture & Fisheries Policy Division, Secretariat**

Details of the operation on the EU Small Farmers Scheme to be included in the next Minister's Report - **Minister, Agriculture & Fisheries Policy Division**

### **Item 5: The handling of the foot and mouth outbreak in Wales: ARD 06-02 (p4)**

5.1 Members asked that the report include reference to animal welfare issues. In addition, minor amendments to the sections on contingency planning and vaccination were suggested.

5.2 The Chair agreed that the revised draft of the report would be circulated to Members for approval. The final report would be forwarded to the Anderson, Follett and European Parliament inquiries, and to those who submitted evidence to inform the inquiry.

### **Action points**

Revised draft of the report on the Committee's inquiry into the handling of the foot and mouth outbreak to be circulated to Members for approval - **Secretariat**

Final report to be forwarded to the Anderson, Follett and European Parliament inquiries, and to those who submitted evidence to inform the inquiry - **Secretariat**

### **Item 6: Committee's review of organic farming: ARD 06-02 (p5)**

6.1 Subject to a minor amendment the terms of reference for the policy review were agreed. Members asked that the review encompass the payment of ongoing support for organic production and experience elsewhere in Europe.

**Committee Secretariat**

**April 2002**