

Minutes

Date: Wednesday 29 May
Time: 2.00pm to 5.00pm
Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly Building

In attendance

Members

Glyn Davies, <i>Chair</i>	Mid and West Wales
Mick Bates	Montgomery
Ron Davies	Caerphilly
Jocelyn Davies (not items 5 to 8)	South Wales East
Delyth Evans	Mid and West Wales
John Griffiths (not items 5 to 8)	Newport East
Carwyn Jones, <i>Minister (not items 5 to 8)</i>	Bridgend
Peter Rogers	North Wales
Carwyn Jones	Bridgend
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Carmarthen East and Dinefwr

Officials

Mike Dunn	Food & farming Development Division
Rory O’Sullivan	Agriculture & Fisheries Policy Division
Stephen Nicholls	CAP Management Division
Colin Williams	Animal Health Division
Jim Norrie	Animal Health Division
Tony Edwards	Chief Veterinary Officer Wales
Amanda Jones	Office of the Counsel General

Secretariat

Adrian Crompton	Committee Clerk
Liz Wilkinson	Deputy Committee Clerk
Peter Jones	Counsel to Assembly Committees

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

1. Apologies had been received from Cynog Dafis.
2. The following declarations of interests were made:

- The Chair declared that he and his wife were partners in a farming business.
- Peter Rogers declared that he, his wife and son were partners in a farming business.
- Both referred to fuller details available in the Register of Members' Interests.

Item 2: Minister's report: ARD 09-02 (p1)

Gwlad

2.1 Concerns were raised about the effectiveness of *Gwlad* as the primary means for informing farming businesses about changes to regulations. Reports had been received from some farmers about delays in receipt of the publication. It was noted that a survey had indicated widespread support for the publication throughout the industry. The average production cost per issue was £37,600 and the total cost of the publication to date was some £225,800.

2.2 The Minister agreed that future editions of *Gwlad* would be circulated to Committee Members.

FVO Mission

2.3 Feedback would be received on the visit from the Food and Veterinary Office mission following a wash-up meeting scheduled to take place on 28 May.

TSE (Wales) Regulations 2002

2.4 Members expressed disappointment that the Committee had not had the opportunity to consider the Regulations before they were made. The Minister said that they consolidated a number of existing Orders and had been put in place in time for the visit of the FVO Mission. Having initially been scheduled for January 2002, the Regulations had not been made until May reflecting similar delay in the equivalent Order in England

House of Lords Select Committee on the Constitution

2.5 In his evidence to the Select Committee the Minister had highlighted the value of Welsh representation on the UK Council of Ministers, the benefits of having a permanent member of staff in Brussels and the need for animal health issues to be devolved to the National Assembly.

Animal poisoning from agricultural chemicals

2.6 The Minister agreed that a future edition of *Gwlad* would include details of wildlife poisoning involving agricultural chemicals.

Independent Appeals Mechanism

2.7 Information provided as a result of the new appeals mechanism would allow specific trends to be identified for common errors in the completion of IACS forms.

Secondary Legislation

2.8 Members identified forthcoming SIs they wished to consider in more detail in Committee, namely:

- The Prohibition of Fishing with Multiple Trawls Order 2002
- The Undersized Edible Crabs (Wales) Order 2002
- The Prohibition of Keeping or Release of Live Fish (Specified Species) (Amendment) (Wales) Order 2002
- Environmental Impact Assessment (Uncultivated land and semi natural areas) (Wales) Regulations 2002
- Organic Products Regulations
- Tir Gofal (Amendment) Regulations 2002
- The Geographical Indications, Designations of Origin and Certificate of Specific Character
- Welfare of Farmed Animals (Wales) Amendment Regulations 2002
- Livestock Quotas (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2002
- The South Wales Sea Fisheries District (Variation) Order 2002
- The South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee (Levies) Regulations 2002
- Action Programme for Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (Wales) Regulations 2002
- Tir Mynydd Amendments Regulations 2003

2.9 Members requested that any regulatory appraisals be circulated in advance of discussions on these SIs.

2.10 The Minister agreed that the Orders relating to the South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee would come to Committee for consideration before the summer if possible.

Other issues

2.11 The Minister agreed to include in his next written report details of the implications of the statutory registration of tourist lets.

Action points

Future editions of Gwlad to be circulated to ARD Committee Members - **Minister, Agriculture & Fisheries Policy Division**

Future edition of Gwlad to include details of wildlife poisoning involving agricultural chemicals - **Minister, Food & Farming Development Division**

South Wales Sea Fisheries Committee Order to come to committee for consideration before the summer recess - **Minister, Agriculture & Fisheries Policy Division**

Consideration of SIs identified by committee to be included in future agendas in line with agreed protocol - **Secretariat, CAC, Minister, OCG**

Next Minister's Report to include details of the implications of the statutory registration of tourist lets - **Minister, Economic Policy Division**

Item 3: Rural Development Plan: ARD 09-02(p2)

3.1 The following issues were raised in discussion:

- the need for qualitative evaluation of the environmental benefits of Tir Gofal to inform subsequent changes to the scheme;
- the use of funds from modulation and progress made on agreeing an appropriate future level of modulation with the UK government and other devolved administrations;
- the number of modifications to the Rural Development Plan (RDP) permitted annually;
- the need for flexibility regarding the type of activities supported under the training measure, including an extension beyond vocational training to include advice and guidance issued under Farming Connect;
- the need for the annual report on the Rural Development Plan to take account of the detrimental effect of Foot and Mouth Disease on farm incomes.

3.2 In response the Minister said that:

- a paper could be provided by the 3 July meeting on the environmental and access benefits delivered by Tir Gofal and progress on the development of a broad and shallow agri-environmental scheme;

- agreement on the rate of modulation was required at a UK level and further negotiations would be necessary. Before further modulation was considered as a viable option for Wales, a commitment to match funding was required from the Treasury;
- modulation had begun in 2001 and funds raised were required to be spent within two years. Modulation receipts could only be spent after non-modulated funds had been allocated;
- representations had been made to the European Commission, via the UK Government, to increase flexibility regarding annual modifications to the RDP. The modification for Wales was due to be discussed at the European Commission's STAR Committee at its 29 May 2002 meeting;
- the Minister agreed to provide details of the bio-diversity benefits delivered by organic farming.

Action points

Meeting on 3 July to include paper on evaluation of the environmental and access benefits delivered by Tir Gofal and progress on the development of a broad and shallow agri-environmental scheme -

Minister, Food & Farming Development Division

Minister to provide details of the biodiversity benefits delivered by organic farming - **Minister, Food & Farming Development Division**

Item 4: Bovine TB: ARD 09-02(p3)

4.1 The following issues were raised in discussion:

- the length of time taken to remove reactors off-farm;
- the need to provide compensation for consequential losses to farming businesses adversely affected by movement restrictions on cattle as a result of TB testing;
- the feasibility of arranging collection centres to facilitate the removal of infected cattle;
- the funding implications of the proposed wider application of 'severe interpretation';
- the implementation of, and resources for the enhanced testing programme to address the backlog of overdue TB tests;
- the adequacy of the current testing regime and the feasibility of introducing mandatory TB tests for animals moving from known hotspots to help prevent the spread of the disease.

4.2 In response the Minister made the following points:

- the existing target for removal of reactor herds was 14 days, reflecting the need to make practical and administrative arrangements. Details of any cases missing this target should be forwarded to officials;
- he did not support the idea of paying consequential losses to affected businesses and had neither the funding nor the powers to do so without European approval;
- the outcome was awaited of recent representations made to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs regarding additional resources for the SVS in Wales;
- at present the onus was on individual farmers to ensure testing of animals moved from areas where TB was present. Current arrangements sought to utilise existing testing capacity as efficiently as possible;
- the Minister agreed to provide details of scale of testing for TB in wildlife.

Action point

Minister to provide details of scale of testing for TB in wildlife - **Minister, Animal Health Division, Chief Veterinary Officer**

Item 5: Committee's policy review of organic farming: ARD 09-02(p4)

5.1 Simon Brenman, Head of National and Regional Development at the Soil Association, highlighted the key points in the paper.

5.2 Members asked him to clarify the Soil Association's position on the following:

- the extent to which fragmentation in the supply chain affected local procurement;
- the conclusions to be drawn from evidence of the differences in terms of food safety, nutritional content, and nutritional value between organic and conventionally produced food;
- the strength of evidence of the environmental benefits of organic farming, in particular its effect on biodiversity;
- current inadequacies in the management of the organic sector and the extent to which the National Assembly could help overcome these;
- the potential for agriculture in Wales to benefit economically from organic farming given its reliance on small producers with high stocking densities

5.3 In response Simon Brenman made the following points:

- supply chain difficulties existed in Wales but were far from insurmountable, especially for major organic products;
- when assessing policy support options for the organic sector, it was important to recognise the additional production costs involved and its contribution to environmental and social, as well as

economic, goals;

- the Soil Association's report 'Biodiversity benefits of organic farming' included further details of the environmental benefits of organic systems. A copy of the report would be made available to Committee Members;
- continued co-operation and collaboration was required, particularly among small producers within the sector, to improve management and optimise opportunities within the market;
- consideration should be given to the introduction of an on-going support scheme for producers after conversion.

Item 6: Committee's policy review of organic farming: ARD 09-02(p5)

6.1 Richard Harding, Head of Food Chain Strategy, reiterated the Food Standard Association's (FSA) position that, on the basis of current evidence, organic food was not significantly different in terms of food safety and nutrition from food produced conventionally.

6.2 Members drew attention to research conducted at the Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research (IGER), which suggested that organic meat provided additional health benefits to that produced conventionally. The FSA took account of all available evidence when assessing its position and would welcome new research that added to the evidence base.

6.3 Richard Harding said that the FSA supported the minimisation of pesticide residue from both organic and conventional production. However, he stressed that existing statutory limits on the pesticide and veterinary medicine residues were such that the effect of consumption was inconsequential. He emphasised that the Agency's advice on toxicity was not dependent on the presence or absence of pesticides, but on the dose consumed. The FSA was currently investigating the so-called 'cocktail effect', but emphasised that research had been initiated following consumer concerns rather than those of the Agency over food safety.

Item 7: ICT report: ARD 09-02(p6)

7.1 The Secretariat was asked to liaise with Members over the wording of paragraph 12 and recommendation (b), before circulating a revised draft for approval.

Item 8: Minutes of the previous meeting: ARD 08-02(min)

8.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the 15 May meeting.

Committee Secretariat - May 2002