

Minutes

Date: Wednesday 13 November

Time: 9.15am to 12.15pm

Venue: Committee Room, National Assembly for Wales

In attendance

Members

Glyn Davies, <i>Chair</i>	Mid and West Wales
Christine Chapman	Cynon Valley
Jocelyn Davies	South Wales East
Ron Davies	Caerphilly
Cynog Dafis	Mid and West Wales
Delyth Evans	Mid and West Wales
Mike German, <i>Minister</i>	South Wales East
John Griffiths	Newport East
Peter Rogers	North Wales
Rhodri Glyn Thomas	Carmarthen East and Dinefwr

In attendance

Huw Brodie	Director, Agriculture and Rural Affairs Department
Tony Edwards	Chief Veterinary Officer
Rory O’Sullivan	Agriculture and Fisheries Policy Division
Gareth Jones	CAP Management Division
Mike Dunn	Food & Farming Development Division
Huw Jones	Countryside Division
Huw Davies	Office of the Counsel General
Dafydd Jarrett	NFU Cymru Wales
Rhian Nowell-Phillips	FUW
Sue Evans	CLA

Secretariat

Adrian Crompton

Committee Clerk

Liz Wilkinson

Deputy Committee Clerk

Item 1: Introduction, apologies and substitutions

1.1 The Chair said that he was to give evidence to the Richard Commission on 5 December. The matter would be included for discussion on the agenda of the next meeting.

Item 2: Minister's report: ARD 15-02(p1)

Fisheries quota management

2.1 The Minister explained the background to the most recent scientific advice from the European Advisory Committee on Fisheries Management for next year's Total Allowable Catches. Final decisions on what could be caught in 2003 would be taken at the Council of EU Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers in Brussels on 16-19 December.

2.2 In discussion the following points were made:

- inshore fishing was of particular importance to Wales. It was hoped that the protection of the sector's economic position would be reflected in the Minister's position on quota management;
- the establishment of regional advisory committees was supported in the UK and integral to reform of the Common Fisheries Policy;
- crucial to the impact of cod quota management on Wales would be the degree to which fleets moved away from cod to fish species of more direct relevance to Wales

2.3 Members asked that the latest scientific advice on fish stocks should be circulated. The Minister agreed to write to John Griffiths outlining the most recent position regarding lave net fishing.

Proposed new red meat body

2.4 Members expressed concern about the proposed make-up of the Board of the new body and, in particular, the need to ensure adequate influence for Welsh Lamb and Beef Promotions (WLBP) and other producer interests.

2.5 In response, it was noted that:

- the current proposal was for a Board of seven - five core members from the Meat and Livestock Commission, WDA, NFU, FUW and WLBP plus a representative of the abattoir and processing sector and a Chair elected through open competition. In addition, the Board would be free to co-

- opt up to three further members if it so wished;
- the Board would be free to decide its own practices and procedures;
- the interests of farmers would be represented through the two farming unions and the WLBP;
- EU approval had been given to the proposed structure and an application made for state aids clearance. The new body would not be able to operate until this had been secured, hopefully by around April 2003. It was noted that the current system of financial assistance to the sector would also require EU approval if it were to continue.

Tir Gofal

2.6 Evidence from the most recent application window suggested that the removal of the requirement for five successful applications to be from each CCW area had not led to the exclusion of particular habitat types. Details of the geographical spread of applications would be provided in the next Minister's Report.

Foot and mouth contingency plan

2.7 The Minister confirmed that current interim contingency plans did not assume a policy of vaccination in the event of another outbreak. Once scientific, trade and logistical implications had been satisfactorily resolved, contingency plans would be altered to reflect the recommendation of the Follett inquiry for the use of ring vaccination. To this end, the Committee noted that a diagnostic test that could distinguish between vaccinated and field challenged animals was currently being validated. This would be a key tool if vaccination were to be used to control a future outbreak of FMD.

2.8 The Chair expressed concern at the apparent lack of progress since the foot and mouth outbreak over the transfer of animal health powers, vaccination and relationships with retailers.

2.9 The Minister recognised the particular impact of the 20-day movement standstill on Welsh farmers. He hoped that the regime could be revised in the light of forthcoming reports from DEFRA into the veterinary and scientific aspects of the disease and the effectiveness of import controls.

Agricultural Wages Board

2.10 Members recognised the importance of farm workers for the sustainability of agricultural communities and the role played by the Agricultural Wages Board in this regard.

Sheep Annual Premium

2.11 The Minister intended that Sheep Annual Premium and national envelope top-up payments would be made by the end of November. It was not possible to guarantee that all payments would be made by this time as problems would inevitably arise with individual cases. Payment by the end of November would mean that a higher proportion of the total annual payment would have been made than in previous years. It was hoped that Less Favoured Area supplements would start to be released by December, on an

individual basis as IACS returns were validated. A report detailing progress and an explanation of the problems that had led to payment delay would be provided to the next meeting.

Subordinate legislation

2.12 Members expressed concern that two statutory instruments previously identified for detailed Committee scrutiny were now to be made by Executive Procedure. Officials confirmed that they would be brought to Committee in draft form in good time before being made.

Action points

Copy of latest scientific advice on fish stocks to be circulated to Committee members - **Secretariat**

Minister to write to John Griffiths outlining the most recent position regarding lave net fishing – **Minister, Agriculture and Fisheries Policy Division**

Details of the geographical spread of successful Tir Gofal applications to be provided in the next Minister's Report - **Minister, Food & Farming Development Division**

Report detailing progress on SAP payments and an explanation of the problems that had led to payment delay to be provided to the next meeting - **Minister, CAP Management Division**

Item 3: GMOs: ARD 15-02(p2)

3.1 The Minister confirmed his opposition to farm-scale trials of GMOs in Wales. Details of the Alesbury report and the opinions of the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE) and the Advisory Committee on Novel Foods and Processes (ACNFP) on Chardon LL would be provided to Committee members when available.

3.2 The current draft regulations on deliberate release contained a definition of 'harm' reflecting the language used in the EU Directive from which they flowed. The Directive itself did not include such a definition. The inclusion of a more precise definition was intended to aid clarity and would not affect the Assembly's ability to restrict releases since the Directive would always take legal precedence. The equivalent Order in England contained provisions extending to Wales also. The Assembly was able, though to apply these provisions differently if it so wished.

3.3 In the conduct of the public debate on GM issues, Members stressed the need to make clear the extent and limitations of the Assembly's powers in relation to crop commercialisation. Members also felt that consumers should be given more information about the GM content of foodstuffs through improved labelling. In response to concerns about the funding and structure of the public debate the Minister confirmed that he was prepared to resource enhancements to the process in Wales to ensure that it was meaningful and thorough.

3.4 The Minister and Chair would consider further the Committee's role during the public debate process.

Action point

Details of the Chardon LL inquiry report and advice from ACRE and ACNFP to be provided to Committee members when available – **Minister, Countryside Division**

Minister and Chair to consider further the Committee's role during the public debate - **Minister, Chair, Countryside Division, Secretariat**

Item 4: Committee Inquiry into the Future of Agri-environment Schemes – oral evidence from the NFU, FUW and CLA: ARD 15-02(p 3,4&5)

4.1 All three bodies stressed the need for flexibility, adequate funding and the minimisation of administrative burdens in the design of agri-environment schemes, and the desirability of increasing access. Support was given for the introduction of part-farm schemes and consideration of alternative scoring criteria, such as landscape value, in order to widen access.

4.2 In discussion the following points were made:

- the removal of the points threshold system used in Tir Gofal, with more flexibility for field officers to identify successful applications, would help increase access to agri-environment schemes. It would, though, also increase expectations amongst farmers and pressure on resources. Further work was required to identify the degree to which additional resources could be drawn into Tir Gofal through the use of European funds;
- the NFU supported the introduction of an option to withdraw from agreements after 5, rather than 10 years, to increase flexibility for farmers;
- to minimise administration, a broad and shallow scheme could be based upon existing IACS returns. It was accepted that any scheme would have to deliver positive environmental benefit but this could often be achieved through relatively minor changes to farming practice;
- the use of modulated funds needed to contain an element of redistribution in order to deliver policy priorities.

Item 5: Minutes of the previous meeting: ARD 14-02(min)

5.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the 30 October meeting.

