

**Minutes**

**Date:** Wednesday 11 December  
**Time:** 9.15am to 12.15pm  
**Venue:** Committee Room, National Assembly for Wales

In attendance

*Members*

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
Colin Williams	Animal Health Division
Gareth Jones	CAP Management Division
Mike Dunn	Food and Farming Development Division
Rory O'Sullivan	Agriculture & Fisheries Policy Division
Simon Hewitt	Forestry Commission
Jasper Roberts	Rural Policy Division
Dr Tony Prater	RSPB Cymru
Richard Lewis Davies	RSPB Cymru

*Secretariat*

Adrian Crompton	Committee Clerk
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### **Item 1: Introduction, apologies and substitutions**

1.1 Apologies were received from Glyn Davies. Ron Davies was elected temporary chair, in Glyn Davies' absence from the Assembly.

### **Item 2: Minister's Report: ARD 17-02(p1)**

2.1 In addition to the information in his written report, the Minister said that a UK consultation exercise on a strategy for animal health and welfare would begin before Committee's next meeting. Copies of the consultation document would be circulated to Members. The Minister also announced that he was inviting bids for two pilot schemes to promote the development of sustainable retail outlets in rural areas where they had disappeared.

### ***Hunting Bill***

2.2 Members welcomed the Minister's decision to consider seeking the devolution of regulatory powers to the National Assembly. This was in line with the plenary resolution on the matter passed in June 2000. The Minister said that the Assembly Cabinet did not have a collective position on whether or not hunting with dogs should be banned. With respect to Forestry Commission land in Wales, the Minister would apply the new legislation once the Bill had been passed. In the meantime, hunting on Forestry Commission land would continue to be controlled through a licensing system. The Minister agreed to circulate the legal advice he had received on his powers to ban hunting on Forestry Commission land.

### ***Intervention meat***

2.3 Members expressed concern about the prosecution brought by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) against the owner of an abattoir in Raglan, which had exceeded its permitted capacity during the foot and mouth outbreak. The Minister said that the FSA was not accountable to him when it acted as an enforcement authority. He agreed to report back to the Committee, as appropriate, on the actions taken, and information given to the abattoir owner, by DEFRA, the FSA and the Assembly. The report would also include details of any other small abattoirs that might be subject to similar action.

2.4 The Minister agreed to include in his next report a note on the membership of the Beef Management Committee and the stance taken by the UK representation on the Committee with regard to specified risk material in intervention beef.

### *Payment of CAP subsidies*

2.5 The Committee congratulated Agriculture and Rural Affairs Department staff on their efforts to process Sheep Annual Premium Scheme (SAPS) payments. It was hoped that SAPS LFA supplement and Beef Special Premium Scheme payments would start to be made later in the week. Although base area payments for Tir Mynydd were lower than equivalent schemes elsewhere in Great Britain, actual payments in England and Scotland were often reduced when other factors, such as stocking density, were taken into account. The working group considering the future shape of the Tir Mynydd scheme was looking at equivalent schemes in Scotland and England to see if there was merit in applying aspects in Wales.

### *Proposed new meat body*

2.6 Proposals for the structure of the Board had not altered since those outlined at the last meeting of the Committee. The Minister was not aware of any legal obstacles to the establishment of the new body.

### *Other issues*

2.7 The Minister said that:

- a GB strategy was being developed to deal with the impact of **EU animal by-product regulations**, in particular, the banning of on-farm burial of carcasses. The strategy was being developed through an industry/government working group and would address the issue of incineration;
- the **export of live sheep** had not been stopped although the manner in which traders and collection centres had been applying EU requirements on animal movements prior to export had been challenged. The note on the relevant legislation, requested at the previous meeting, would be made available before the Christmas recess;
- the **promotion of Welsh meat through butchers' shops** should be a matter addressed by the new meat promotion body;
- he had not overturned any decision of the **independent appeals panel**. Members of the panel were independently appointed and the system had been developed after consultation with the industry. It was suggested that the Committee should consider the operation of the system in the future, once it had had time to become well established.

### **Action points**

Minister to circulate the legal advice he had received on his powers to ban hunting on Forestry

## Commission land - **Minister, Forestry Commission, OCG**

Minister to report back to the Committee, as appropriate and within his responsibility, on the actions taken, and any advice issued to the abattoir owner, by DEFRA and the Assembly. Report to include details of any other small abattoirs that might be subject to similar action – **Minister, Animal Health Division**

The Minister agreed to include in his next report a note on the membership of the Beef Management Committee and the stance taken by the UK representation on the Committee with regard to specified risk material in intervention beef – **Minister, Animal Health Division**

Copies of consultation document on animal health and welfare strategy to be circulated to Committee members – **Minister, Animal Health Division, Secretariat.**

Note requested at 27 November meeting, on EU legislation governing export of live animals, to be circulated before Christmas recess – **Minister, Animal Health Division**

### **Item 3: CAP mid-term review: ARD 17-02(p2)**

3.1 The Minister invited Members' comments. In discussion the following points were made:

- on decoupling, the Commission's proposals were to be broadly welcomed in principle but it would be important to understand the operational detail and the impact for Wales. The Minister said that draft legislative texts should be published by the Commission in late January, at which point such an assessment could be made;
- seeking a fairer distribution of pillar 2 funds to rectify the historic under-funding by the EU of rural development in the UK, was fundamental to the UK's negotiating position. The Committee agreed unanimously with this priority. It was explained that the allocation of pillar 2 funds for the period to 2006 had been legally fixed under Agenda 2000 and the Commission were not prepared to reopen this. What was for resolution was the allocation of any money raised under the proposed EU-wide compulsory modulation.

### **Item 4: Scrapie: ARD 17-02(p3)**

4.1 The Committee considered the steps being taken to eradicate scrapie from sheep in Wales. In discussion the following points were made:

- there was evidence to suggest that only around 15% of scrapie cases were actually notified by farmers. More reliable information on the true prevalence of the disease was being collected through the testing of some 60,000 abattoir sheep and a further 6,000 fallen stock. Of those tested to date, the disease had been detected in only 0.08% of live sheep and 0.8% of fallen stock;
- an element of the Scrapie Affected Flocks Scheme, which was currently out for consultation, was

- financial compensation to encourage a higher level of reporting of the disease by farmers;
- the incidence of scrapie-resistant genotypes varied between individual flocks and breeds, partly due to the breeding strategies adopted in the past. Across the Welsh flock as a whole, around 50% were currently thought to have the top 2 categories of scrapie-resistant genotypes;
- research was ongoing to assess whether the disease was masking BSE in sheep and results were becoming progressively available. To date, there was no evidence to suggest that BSE in sheep was more than a theoretical possibility;
- at its current rate of progress, 90% of lambs would be resistant by 2027 under the National Scrapie Plan. The Assembly was pressing for a strategic review of the Plan and had also introduced the measures outlined in the paper to speed up progress in Wales.

4.2 The Minister agreed to provide Members with a further note on the operation of the Scrapie Affected Flock Scheme.

### **Action point**

The Minister agreed to provide Members with a further note on the operation of the Scrapie Affected Flock Scheme – **Minister, Animal Health Division**

### **Item 5: Committee inquiry in to agri-environment schemes: ARD 17-02(p4)**

5.1 Dr Tony Prater and Richard Lewis Davies gave oral evidence to the Committee's inquiry. In discussion, they made the following points:

- agri-environment schemes cut across other Assembly policy areas such as its obligations under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, flood protection and commons land management;
- the RSPB strongly supported the continuation of Tir Gofal as an all-farm scheme;
- there was a role for Farming Connect to provide advice on agri-environment schemes and to help minimise the administrative burden of application;
- there was a body of evidence to indicate that wildlife benefits rose dramatically in line with the area of land managed in an environmentally sensitive way. Larger areas promoted greater species diversity and made individual wildlife populations more sustainable;
- targeting specific habitats, such as wet lowland grassland or coastal heathland, was necessary to restore lost species. Targeting would also benefit if other funding streams, such as those available for flood management, could be co-ordinated;
- part-farm measures, such as a hedgerow scheme, should form part of the broad and shallow scheme and could be tailored to encourage the dairy and other intensive sectors that found it difficult to enter Tir Gofal;
- organic production delivered environmental, but not always wildlife benefits. Tying organic maintenance payments to environmental standards to discourage intensification would help to maximise the benefits delivered;
- future agri-environment schemes should incorporate monitoring and evaluation of the bio-

diversity benefits delivered.

5.2 The Minister agreed to provide the Committee with a note on arrangements for the evaluation of Tir Gofal and Tir Cymen

### **Action point**

Minister to provide a note on the arrangements for evaluation of Tir Gofal and Tir Cymen – **Minister, Food & Farming Development Division.**

### **Item 6: Rural retailing: ARD 17-02(p5)**

6.1 The Committee considered the report of the Wales Co-operative Centre (WCC) – *Rural Retail Services – a Study* and asked that the WCC be invited to address the Committee in the future. The following points were made:

- the Committee welcomed the strategic approach recommended by the report but recognised that the task of regenerating rural retail services was considerable;
- the report recommended that the public sector should not play a role in directly supporting non-viable retail services. The Minister said that the Assembly should seek to facilitate a community-led approach, encourage private sector initiatives and to assist individual businesses in becoming viable;
- the WDA was the appropriate agency to take the lead in the implementation of any strategy but the role of local authorities, community councils and the voluntary sector was also crucial;
- the *Your Guide* pilot project, providing a single point for public information through post offices in Leicestershire and Rutland, was not to be implemented more widely. Nonetheless, the Minister said that he favoured such an approach and would consider how a less costly version might be implemented in Wales. ELWa was attempting to co-ordinate the rollout of information databases by individual local authorities;
- the aim of a specific community enterprise fund within Finance Wales was to develop community-based entrepreneurs;
- in order to encourage customers to use local retail outlets, innovative solutions, involving wholesalers and local suppliers, were necessary to address the product range and pricing of goods available.

### **Action point**

Wales Co-operative Centre to be invited to address the Committee in the future – **Secretariat.**

### **Item 7: Minutes of the previous meeting**

7.1 The minutes were approved.

**Committee Secretariat**

**December 2002**