

National Assembly for Wales

Environment and Sustainability Committee

Engaging with Europe

A note of the Committee's visit to Brussels from 9–11 May 2012

Introduction

Since September 2011, the Environment and Sustainability Committee has been considering the implications of the European Commission's proposed reform of the Common Agricultural and Common Fisheries policies for Wales. As the nationally elected democratic institution for Wales it is right and proper that the Assembly should engage effectively with the European Union on issues of importance to Wales. The Committee has sought to do this by:

- providing a public forum through which Welsh stakeholders can understand and articulate their concerns on the draft legislative proposals for CAP and CFP reform
- making a positive contribution in the EU decision-making process, focusing in particular on presenting 'amendments' to the texts to the European Parliament (talking 'legislature' to 'legislature'), which as the democratically elected body in Brussels is effectively co-legislating on our behalf in the negotiation process

To do this, we took evidence from Welsh stakeholders to inform our view and we have engaged with the Welsh Government, UK Government, European Parliament and European Commission to ensure that the Welsh perspective on these significant reforms is being considered as the proposals pass through the European Parliament.

As a second phase, and to ensure that the Welsh perspective is being considered, we travelled to Brussels to make direct representations to those at the heart of the decision-making process. Between the 9 and 11 May 2012, we held nine meetings with MEPs, senior European Commission officials and others. A full list is provided at the end of this paper.

As well as setting out our position, we also gathered useful intelligence on the timeline for the consideration of the proposals, how this consideration is advancing and the level to which concerns of Welsh stakeholders are shared by others at a European level. We have brought this back to Wales and we are now able to strategically target future engagement with stakeholders and the European institutions over the next six to twelve months.

The visit to Brussels was an important part of this process, and gives a clear message about our commitment to engage effectively with the European Union.

This visit exemplifies the approach of speaking 'legislature to legislature' with the European Parliament, on issues where the European Parliament is co-legislator in Brussels on new EU legislation that will have an impact on Wales. Our strong relationship with the Welsh MEPs, who can act as potential 'conduits' in Brussels for this work, is of particular importance to the success of this approach and we were glad to see that the MEPs welcome the approach we are developing.

We are very grateful to all those who met with us during our visit and for the open and frank approach that was taken to these meetings. We look forward to

continuing to work with individuals and organisations as the proposed reforms progress.

Key messages

Below are some of the key messages that the Committee received in relation to the proposed reforms of the CAP and CFP.

Common Fisheries Policy

Multiannual plans – MEPs reported that the European Parliament is having on-going problems in getting legal agreement with the Council of Ministers on Multiannual Plans and that this was, to an extent, hampering the reform process.

Transferable Fishing Concessions – The Committee heard that MEPs had received different representation from fishers on the length of concessions, some of which broadly concurred with the Committee's recommendation of 7-year concessions. Both MEPs and the Commission shared the Committee's view that it was important to ensure that concessions end up in the hands of active fishers.

Regionalisation – there was broad support from MEPs for the Committee's call for greater regionalisation. However, there is currently a legal discussion between the European Parliament, European Council and the European Commission about transferring responsibility for an issue which falls wholly within the competence of the EU to Member States.

The Committee received a view from MEPs that if this legal discussion is not resolved, agreement on the reform proposals could be delayed until late 2013. It was further pointed out that the proposals put forward by the Commission would have no legal basis after 2014.

The Commission suggested that there were structures that existed to provide more local management mechanisms, including the possibility of creating a sub-committee of a regional advisory council e.g. at an Irish Sea level.

Discards ban – MEPs generally agreed that a discard ban should be introduced on a fishery by fishery basis and the Committee heard that the Commission is actively considering this proposal. The Committee also heard that if science suggested that by-catch could be returned alive then the Commission would allow this to happen.

Data collection – the Committee received broad support in principle for its stance on strengthening the gathering of data.

Aquaculture – The Committee heard some support for the inclusion of aquaculture under the CFP.

Common Agricultural Policy

Timeline – the Committee received information from MEPs, the Commission and others that the outcome of the CAP reforms would be shaped by the negotiations on the Multiannual Financial Framework.

The Committee heard that:

- Final agreement on CAP by March 2013 will be essential to allowing Member States the minimum time necessary to set up national programmes.
- It will only be possible for an agreement on CAP to be reached by March 2013 if an agreement on the financial framework is reached by December 2012.
- There may be a hiatus in the high-level negotiations on CAP during the autumn due to focus being on the financial framework.
- Current rural development plans will have no legal basis after 2014.

MEPs are expecting several thousand amendments to the draft report on direct payments currently being prepared by the Agriculture Committee's rapporteur.

Transition to area based payments – In general, MEPs appeared to support the view that Member States moving from a historic to area based payment should have greater flexibility to decide the rate and pace of the transition, to make the transition as smooth as possible. There were different views expressed with regard to the timeframe within which this transition should take place. Stakeholders that participated in the roundtable discussion also presented a range of different views on the timeframe.

The information emerging from the Commission suggested that, at the moment, there is no clear consensus at Member State level on the rate of transition.

Greening – MEPs appeared to accept that some greening of Pillar 1 is likely, but stated that reaching agreement on the exact nature of these requirements would be difficult. There were different opinions expressed about the Committee's call for a menu of greening options.

The Committee heard that the Commission is likely to permit farmers in agri-environment schemes that go beyond the requirements of the greening proposals to automatically receive the greening payments. This would be subject to the requirements of an agri-environment scheme being scrutinised by the Commission before its participants could be exempted from the greening requirements.

On the definition of Ecological Focus Areas, the Committee was pleased to hear that landscape features such as trees and areas currently classified as

unproductive areas were likely to be included in the definition, though work was on-going in this area.

New entrants – The Committee’s view that there should be a focus on supporting all new entrants to farming, regardless of age, was received with interest by both MEPs and the Commission.

Summary of meetings

A summary of the meetings that the Committee held is provided below.

These meetings were held off the record and the summary of these meetings is consequently succinct.

1. Common Fisheries Policy – Meeting with MEPs	
Date and time	Wednesday 9 May 2012 (18.00 – 19:00)
Location	European Parliament
Meeting with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gabriel Mato MEP: Chair of the Fisheries Committee• Struan Stevenson MEP: Rapporteur CMO Regulation, CFP reform

Summary

The Committee pressed its finding on the proposed reform of the CFP.

Both MEPs extended an offer of further follow-up work with the Committee on this and any other issues of relevance to the Assembly in the future.

2. Common Agricultural Policy – Meeting with MEPs	
Date and time	Wednesday 9 May 2012 (19.00 – 20:00)
Location	European Parliament
Meeting with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Luis Capoulas Santos MEP: Rapporteur (Direct Payments, Rural Development)• George Lyon MEP: Shadow rapporteur (Direct Payments, Horizontal Regulation)• Jim Nicholson MEP: Shadow rapporteur (Rural Development, CMO Regulation)• Mairead McGuinness MEP: Shadow rapporteur (Direct Payments)

Summary

The Committee set out its position on the proposed reform of the CAP and it engaged in a discussion with MEPs on how the proposals were progressing through the European Parliament

All of the MEPs said they would be very happy to hold further discussions with the Committee as the negotiations progress in the European Parliament.

3. Common Agricultural Policy – Meeting with Cabinet Staff of EU Agriculture Commissioner Dacian Ciolos	
Date and time	Thursday 10 May 2012 (10.00 – 11.00)
Location	European Commission, Berlaymont Building
Meeting with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Georg Haussler, Chef de Cabinet • Gwilym Jones, Cabinet Member

Summary

After setting out its views on the proposed reform of the CAP, the Committee received a briefing on how the Commissioner Ciolos’s Cabinet saw negotiations unfolding.

The Committee received useful information in relation to the timeline for the proposals and gained a sense of the direction some areas of the reform proposals are heading.

4. Meeting with UKREP	
Date and time	Thursday 10 May 2012 (11.30 – 12.30)
Location	Wales House
Meeting with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tim Render, Counsellor on Agricultural Affairs, UKREP

Summary

The Committee had a productive discussion with Mr Render. He provided an update on:

- The UK Government’s current position.
- The state of discussions at the Council of Ministers on both the CAP and CFP proposals.

5. Working lunch with Welsh MEPs	
Date and time	Thursday 10 May 2012 (13:00 – 13:45)
Location	European Parliament
Meeting with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jill Evans MEP • Derek Vaughan MEP • Kay Swinburne MEP

Summary

The MEPs welcomed the Committee’s visit, and stated that the approach it has taken has maximised its potential to influence developments in Brussels.

The Committee thanked the MEPs for the support they had provided to its work and it expressed its hope that this cooperation in the Welsh interest would continue.

6. Roundtable on CAP and CFP Reform	
Date and time	Thursday 10 May 2012 (13:45 – 15:00)
Location	European Parliament
Meeting with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siân Davies, Assistant Director, British Agriculture Bureau • Tatiana Nemcova, Senior EU Advocacy Officer, Birdlife Europe • Trees Robijns, EU Agriculture Policy Officer, Birdlife Europe • Dermot Ryan, Irish Permanent Representation to the EU Counsellor, Agriculture and Fisheries Unit, • Michael Schwertl, Bavarian Representation to the EU, Agriculture and Rural Affairs • Eileen Kelly, Northern Ireland Executive Brussels Office, Deputy Head of Office

Summary

The Committee heard a range of views from the panel and shared its position with those present. The Committee found it useful to explore areas of agreement and divergence and it was particularly encouraged to see that many of the views expressed by Welsh stakeholders were shared by other European regions and organisations.

7. DG Agriculture	
Date and time	Thursday 10 May 2012 (15:00 – 16:00)
Location	European Parliament
Meeting with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tassos Haniotis, Directorate Economic Analysis, Perspectives and Evaluations • Pierre Bascou, DG Agriculture • Betty Lee, DG Agriculture

Summary

Mr Haniotis provided the Committee with an update on the CAP reform proposals from the European Commission's perspective. He provided detail on aspects of the proposal and agreed to engage with the Committee again as the proposals develop.

8. DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries	
Date and time	Thursday 10 May 2012 (16:30 – 18:00)
Location	European Commission, DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, 99 Rue Joseph II
Meeting with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowri Evans, Director General, DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries • Joost Paardekooper, DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries

Summary

The discussions covered a number of issues including CFP, Marine Spatial Planning and Blue Growth. The Director General welcomed the work of the Committee on the CFP reform proposals and advised keeping this inquiry open over the next 12 months as the negotiations continued on the draft proposals.

9. DG Environment	
Date and time	Friday 11 May 2012 (10:00 – 11:30)
Location	European Commission, DG Environment,
Meeting with:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Karl Falkenberg, Director General for Environment

Summary

The Committee held discussions with the Director General on a range of issues including marine conservation, water policy, invasive alien species and compliance with environmental Directives.

Meeting attendees

Members of the European Parliament

- **Gabriel Mato MEP:** Chair of the Fisheries Committee
- **Struan Stevenson MEP:** Rapporteur CMO Regulation, CFP reform
- **Luis Capoulas Santos MEP:** Rapporteur (Direct Payments, Rural Development)
- **George Lyon MEP:** Shadow rapporteur (Direct Payments, Horizontal Regulation)
- **Mairead McGuinness MEP:** Shadow rapporteur (Direct Payments)
- **Jim Nicholson MEP:** Shadow rapporteur (Rural Development, CMO Regulation)
- **Jill Evans MEP**
- **Derek Vaughan MEP**
- **Kay Swinburne MEP**

European Commission

- **Georg Haussler,** Chef de Cabinet, EU Agriculture Commissioner
- **Gwilym Jones,** Cabinet Member, EU Agriculture Commissioner
- **Tassos Haniotis,** Directorate Economic Analysis, Perspectives and Evaluations, DG Agriculture
- **Pierre Bascou,** DG Agriculture
- **Betty Lee,** DG Agriculture
- **Lowri Evans,** Director General, DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
- **Joost Paardekooper,** DG Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
- **Karl Falkenberg,** Director General for Environment

Others

- **Tim Render,** Counsellor on Agricultural Affairs, UKREP
- **Siân Davies,** Assistant Director, British Agriculture Bureau
- **Tatiana Nemcova,** Senior EU Advocacy Officer, Birdlife Europe
- **Trees Robijns,** EU Agriculture Policy Officer, Birdlife Europe
- **Dermot Ryan,** Irish Permanent Representation to the EU Counsellor, Agriculture and Fisheries Unit,
- **Michael Schwertl,** Bavarian Representation to the EU, Agriculture and Rural Affairs
- **Eileen Kelly,** Northern Ireland Executive Brussels Office, Deputy Head of Office