



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 15 April 2021

Meeting Location: Virtual Meeting by StarLeaf

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Declan McAleer MLA (Chairperson)
Philip McGuigan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Clare Bailey MLA
Rosemary Barton MLA
John Blair MLA
Maurice Bradley MLA
Harry Harvey MLA
William Irwin MLA
Patsy McGlone MLA

Apologies: None

In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Stella McArdle, Clerk
Barbara Love, Clerk (agenda item 11)
Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk
Marion Johnson, Clerical Supervisor
Kate Duffy, Clerical Officer



The meeting commenced at a 9.49 a.m. in open session

1. Apologies

None.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the informal meeting with the Chairperson of the Office for Environmental Protection will take place at 2.30 p.m. and will be discussed in further detail under Forward Work Programme.

The Chairperson advised that is will be attending an informal meeting with the NI Affairs Committee Chairperson and other Assembly Chairpersons at 12.30 p.m. today.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that a working has been established to develop the Assembly's Good Relations Action Plan which will include a number of stakeholder events with marginalised groups and communities. Assembly committees have been asked for their input around what meaningful information should be asked from the groups.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward their suggestions to the clerk by close of play.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2021.



4. Matters arising

None.

5. PSNI Oral Evidence Session: Withdrawal of DAERA and Local Authority Staff from Ports

The following representative from the PSNI joined the meeting by StarLeaf at 9.53 a.m.:

Assistant Chief Constable (Temporary) Bobby Singleton, Community Safety Department,

ACC Singleton briefed the Committee and this was followed by a questions and answer session.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Mr Blair MLA joined the meeting at 9.54 a.m.

The Chairperson thanked ACC Singleton for his attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the PSNI written briefing on the Committee webpage.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the PSNI to request information on the incident referred to in a local Sunday newspaper regarding a phone call made which allegedly threatened staff working at the ports.

The meeting suspended at 10.23 a.m.

The meeting resumed at 10.29 a.m.



6. Departmental Oral Evidence Session: Withdrawal of DAERA and Local Authority Staff from Ports

The following departmental officials joined the meeting by StarLeaf at 10.29 a.m.

Dr Denis McMahon, Permanent Secretary

Dr Robert Huey, Head of Veterinary Service

Mark Livingstone, Director of Operational Readiness & Food Supply Security

The officials briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

Mr Blair MLA declared an interest that he is a member of the Policing Board.

The Chairperson left the meeting at 12.08 p.m.

The Deputy Chairperson assumed the chair at 12.08 p.m.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to publish the departmental written briefing on the Committee webpage.

7. Departmental Written Briefing: SR 2021/63 The Agricultural Commodities (Coronavirus) (Income Support) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2021

The Committee considered SR 2021/63 The Agricultural Commodities (Coronavirus) (Income Support) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2021, which will provide financial assistance to pig producers, broiler pullet and broiler hatching egg producers and organic milk producers who have suffered a financial loss due to Covid-19.

Question put and agreed:



“That the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has considered SR 2021/63 The Agricultural Commodities (Coronavirus) (Income Support) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2021, and has no objection to the Rule”.

8. Departmental Written Briefing: The Animal Health Law Implications for the Northern Ireland Bovine Tuberculosis Programme

The Committee noted the departmental written briefing on the Animal Health Law, which is listed in Annex 2 of the Protocol and will apply for 21 April 2021 and will have implications for the Northern Ireland Bovine Tuberculosis Programme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request that it keeps the Committee informed of progress on the implementation timetable.

9. Departmental Written Briefing: Covid-19 Update

The Committee noted the departmental written briefing on the Covid-19 update and were advised to forward question to the clerk for the Department by close of play.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that the Department moves to providing the Covid-19 update on a bi-monthly basis.

10. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following:

- i. Correspondence from the Department on issues raised at the Committee meeting on 11 March 2021.
- ii. Correspondence from the Department on the Loughs Agency Annual Report and Accounts 2019.
- iii. Correspondence from the Department on the Livestock and Meat Commission Annual Report and Accounts for 2016-2017.



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- iv. Correspondence from the Department on the Livestock and Meat Commission Annual Report and Accounts for 2017-2018.
- v. Correspondence from the Department on the Livestock and Meat Commission Annual Report and Accounts for 2018-2019.
- vi. Correspondence from the Committee for Justice which provides clarification on the Rural Needs Assessment that was carried out on the Damages (Return on Investment) Bill.
- vii. Correspondence from the Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland on the Investing Activity Report for DAERA.
- viii. Correspondence from Jim Shannon MP on the Committee's recent work on the Independent Panel for Review of Decisions as well as copied correspondence to the Department on an information request.
- ix. Correspondence from the Department on a public consultation on the NIEA Regulatory Charging Policy which ran from January to March 2021.
- x. Correspondence from the Department on a public consultation on the Marine Plan and advising that a statement will be published detailing how the Department intends to proceed.
- xi. The Thirty Third Report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules which references SR 2021/63: The Agricultural Commodities (Coronavirus) (Income Support) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2021, which broke the 21-day rule.
- xii. Correspondence from Minister Poots advising that the Executive has confirmed that it is content with the proposals to introduce the Horse Racing (Amendment) Bill to the Assembly following Easter Recess.
- xiii. Correspondence from the Department on the current position on the Review of Northern Ireland Financial Processes timetable and the revised DAERA estimate structure.
- xiv. Correspondence copied from Jim Shannon MP to the DAERA Permanent Secretary regarding the Committee recommendation for support for the mental health and well-being of appellants in the appeal process with the Independent Panel for Review of Decisions.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance on the proposed scrutiny timetables for the 2021-2022 Budget and the request that the AERA Committee forwards departmental evidence to the Committee for Finance by no later than 6 May 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department's NDPBs to request a written briefing on their budgets.



The Committee considered correspondence from Minister Poots, including an updated letter, on the issue of the difficulties regarding the movement of trees from GB-NI and the potential impact on the “Forests for our Future Programme”.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request that the Committee is kept informed of any progress in the negotiations between the EU and UKG and the potential for an SPS Agreement.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department of Education in response to a Committee letter regarding the closure of St Mary’s High School, Brollagh and whether a Rural Needs Assessment had been conducted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the response from the Department of Education to the member of the public, who originally raised the issue with the Committee, for information.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department on the launch of a public consultation on the UK Dolphin and Porpoise Conservation Strategy which will run for a period of 12 weeks from 22 March 2021.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an analysis of the consultation responses and any proposed actions.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department on the development of a dashboard which demonstrates the environmental impact of Covid-19 during the lockdown period.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to commend it for its work on the development of the dashboard and to request any further updates as the work it taken forward.

The Committee considered copied correspondence from the National Beef Association (NBA) to Minister Eustace and Minister Poots on the ongoing issues with post-Brexit trade of live animals between NI and GB.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the NBA thanking them for the copied correspondence and requesting that they keep the Committee informed of any developments regarding the issues raised.



The Committee considered correspondence from the USPCA which requests to meet with the Committee to discuss issues relating to animal welfare.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to schedule a meeting with the USPCA as and when the work schedule allows and to coincide with a time when the issue of animal welfare is being considered.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Fermanagh Beekeepers Association (FBA) on their opposition to the potential of importation of Italian Buckfast Bees to GB.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department, with the permission of FBA, to ask them to address the issues raised and provide the Committee with an update. The Committee further requested that the Department copies the Committee into the reply to the FBA.

The Committee considered correspondence from a member of the public regarding the RHI Scheme.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the member of the public to thank them for providing the information.

11. Forward Work Programme

Noted: The Committee noted that the Horse Racing (Amendment Bill) has been introduced to the Assembly on 13 April 2021.

Noted: The Committee noted the briefing papers for the informal meeting with the Chairperson of the Office for Environmental Protection, Dame Glenys Stacey, at 2.30 p.m. today.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

The meeting moved into Closed Session at 12.22 p.m.

The Bill Clerk briefed the Committee on the Private Member's Bill on Climate Change.



Mr McGlone MLA left the meeting at 12.30 p.m.

The meeting moved into Open Session at 12.42 p.m.

12. AOB

None.

13. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs will take place on Thursday 22 April 2021 at 9.30 a.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.43 p.m.

Declan McAleer MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs