



# Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 25 February 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  
Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk



Marion Johnson, Clerical Supervisor

Kate Duffy, Clerical Officer

*The meeting commenced at 10.05 a.m. in closed session*

The Committee discussed the continuing issue of the lack of provision of departmental briefing papers to the Committee to the agreed timescales.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request an informal meeting with the Permanent Secretary to discuss the continued failure of the Department to provide briefing papers to the Committee as outlined in the document, "Timescale for Interaction between Assembly Committees and Departments".

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Chairperson would raise the issue of the provision of departmental papers to the Committee at the meeting of the Chairpersons' Liaison Group and to write to the Speaker highlighting the issue.

*The meeting moved into open session 10.33 a.m.*

## **1. Apologies**

None.



## **2. Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson advised the Committee that will be attending an informal meeting with the NI Affairs Committee on 2 March 2021 to discuss issues relating to the Protocol.

## **3. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 18 February 2021.

## **4. Matters arising**

None.

## **5. Departmental Oral Evidence Session: Update on the Climate Change Bill Discussion Document**

The following departmental officials joined the meeting at 10.37 a.m.

Colin Breen, Director of Environmental Policy

Arlene McGowan, Grade 7, Climate Change Branch

Anthony Courtney, Grade 7, Climate Change Branch

The officials briefed the Committee on the late arrival of the departmental briefing paper on the Update on the Climate Change Bill Discussion document.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to reschedule the agenda item on the Update on the Climate Change Discussion Document to the meeting on 18 March 2021.



## **6. Oral Evidence Session NI Farm Groups: Proposals for a Farm Welfare Bill**

The following representatives from NI Farm Groups joined the meeting at 11.04 a.m.

William Taylor, NI Farm Groups

Michael Clarke, NIAPA Chairperson

Jim Carmichael, NIAPA Development Officer

Sean McAuley, Farmers for Action Steering Group

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

The Chairperson left the meeting at 11.37 a.m. The Deputy Chairperson assumed the Chair.

The Chairperson rejoined the meeting at 11.52 a.m. and resumed the Chair.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the NI Farm Groups Draft Farm Welfare Bill to the Department and the Research Officer in advance of their briefings at the meeting on 4 March 2021.

## **7. Departmental Oral Evidence Session: Implications of EU Exit and Impact of TCAs on SRs**

The following departmental officials joined the meeting at 12.24 p.m.

Seamus McErlean, Chief Economist

Mark McLean, Principal Agricultural Economist

Tommy McNamara, Staff Officer, Environmental Farm Branch

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 left the meeting at 12.45 p.m.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a resume of the issues discussed at an interdepartmental level in relation to EU Exit and the impact of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

#### **8. Departmental Written Briefing: SL1 The Agricultural Commodities (Coronavirus) (Income Support) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2021**

The Committee considered the departmental Written Briefing on SL1 The Agricultural Commodities (Coronavirus) (Income Support) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2021 which will enable the Department to make direct income support payments to pig producers, poultry broiler breeders and organic milk producers who have been affected by Covid-19.

The following departmental official joined the meeting at 12.57 p.m.

Steve Millar, Head of Brexit Contingency

Mr Millar briefed the Committee and this was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chairperson thanked the official for his attendance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that it was content with the merits of the policy and that it should move to the next legislative stage.

#### **9. Departmental Written Briefing: Statutory Instrument – The Air Quality (Legislative Functions) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 (Defra/ENV/27)**

The following departmental officials joined the meeting at 1.07 p.m.

Caroline Barry, Acting Head of Chemical and Pollution Policy



Colin Nugent, Environmental Health Officer

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

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the Statutory Instrument until the meeting on 11 March 2021.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification on whether anaerobic digesters are included in the Statutory Instrument regulations.

#### **10. Departmental Written Briefing: Consultation on the Agricultural Wages (Regulations) Order (Northern Ireland) 1977: Abolishment of the Agricultural Wages Board**

The Committee considered the departmental written briefing on the proposed consultation on the abolishment of the Agricultural Wages Board (AWB) which will require revocation of the Agricultural Wages (Regulations) Order (Northern Ireland) 1977.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an assessment from DAERA that the abolishment of the AWB will not diminish workers' rights and that those rights will be protected. Furthermore, the Committee agreed to seek confirmation from the Department that an Equality Impact Assessment and Rural Needs Assessment will be completed during the consultation exercise.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request a pre-consultation update from the Department prior to its launch.



## **11. Departmental Written Briefing: EU Exit Update**

The Committee noted the departmental written update on EU Exit and that questions for the Department should be forwarded to the clerk by close of play.

## **12. Correspondence**

The Committee noted the following:

- i. Correspondence from Lord Gardiner of Kimble, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, in response to the Committee's letter highlighting post-Brexit issues for the horticulture sector.
- ii. Correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee on its primacy over reports of the Northern Ireland Audit Office.
- iii. Correspondence from the Department on issues raised at the Committee meeting on 4 February 2021.
- iv. Correspondence from the Permanent Secretary on the issue of late provision of briefing papers to the Committee;
- v. Correspondence from the Finance Committee on correspondence it considered from Jim Shannon MP on Single Farm Payments.
- vi. Correspondence from the Permanent Secretary on a 2019 review on Inland Fisheries Culture.
- vii. Correspondence from the EU Affairs Manager on 'Structures of Intergovernmental Relations and EU Exit'.

The Committee considered correspondence from Renewable Heat Association Northern Ireland (RHANI) on its submission to the Clean Air Strategy Consultation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to RHANI to thank it for the information and to advise that due to work pressures and agreed Committee priorities, it is unable to consider the Clean Air Strategy at this time.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department on the consultation on the development of fisheries management measures for Marine Protected Areas.



**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request an update on the outcome of the consultation in due course.

The Committee considered copied correspondence from Ulster Wool to Minister Lyons following a virtual meeting to discuss the financial impact of Covid-19 on the wool market.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Ulster Wool and the Department to request that the Committee is kept informed of any progress in relation to roll-out of payments.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Justice Committee on its Protection from Stalking Bill and a request for written evidence from the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Justice Committee to suggest that it raises the issue of awareness of the issue within rural areas with stakeholders. The Committee further agreed to suggest that the call for evidence is extended to the various rural stakeholders that exist.

The Committee considered correspondence from a concerned farmer regarding concerns he has with the election of Trustees for the Mourne Mountain Middle Trust Estate.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request a written briefing on the issues highlighted within the correspondent's email.

### **13. Forward Work Programme**

**Noted:** The Committee noted that an oral briefing has been scheduled on the Forward Work Programme with Shared Environmental Services for 22 April 2021.





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**Noted:** The Committee noted that the departmental oral briefing on the DAERA Business Plan 2021-22 had been deferred from 18 March until April 2021.

**Noted:** The Committee noted that the roundtable meeting with BEIS Committee to discuss COP26 has been arranged for 15 March 2021. Members are requested to advise the clerk of the most suitable time.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

#### **14.AOB**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department in response to a video clip shared on WhatsApp in relation to animal euthanasia and the mechanisms it deploys to do so.

#### **15. Date, Time and Place of the next meeting**

The next meeting of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs will take place virtually on Thursday 4 March 2021 at 9.30 a.m. and will be streamed from Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting was adjourned at 1.20 p.m.

**Mr Declan McAleer MLA**  
**Chairperson, Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs**  
**<< Date Goes Here >>**