

COMMITTEE FOR AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**THURSDAY 10 SEPTEMBER 2020
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

Present: Mr Declan McAleer MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Philip McGuigan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Clare Bailey MLA (Via StarLeaf)
Mrs Rosemary Barton MLA
Mr John Blair MLA
Mr Maurice Bradley MLA (via StarLeaf)
Mr Harry Harvey MLA
Mr William Irwin MLA
Mr Patsy McGlone MLA (via StarLeaf)

In attendance: Ms Stella McArdle, Committee Clerk
Ms Barbara Love, Committee Clerk (via StarLeaf)
Ms Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk
Ms Marion Johnson, Clerical Supervisor
Mr Ed McCann, Clerical Officer (via StarLeaf)

The meeting commenced at 10.16 a.m. in open session

1. Apologies

None

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson referred to a suggestion made by the NI Business Brexit Working Group during its oral briefing to the Committee on 3 September 2020 that it would be useful if a Government plan for EU Exit for Agri-Food was drafted.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request that it takes the lead on developing the plan for EU Exit for Agri-Food

3. Draft minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2020.

4. Matters arising

The Committee noted the correspondence from the Minister in respect of the temporary closure of Cranswick Country Foods in August 2020 due to an outbreak of Covid-19.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ascertain if any forward planning has been given for an inspection regime as referred to by during Question Time on the 8 September 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Department to ask what measures are currently being provided to the pig farmer in Kilkeel whose pig farm was destroyed in a recent fire.

5. Oral Evidence Session: NI Environment Link

The following representatives of NI Environment Link (NIEL) joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 10.21 a.m.

Sean Kelly, Parliamentary Development Officer, NIEL
John Martin, Head of Policy and Advocacy, RSPB
Rebecca Hunter, Chair of Marine and Fisheries Group, Ulster Wildlife Trust
Diane Ruddock, External Affairs Manager, National Trust

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

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson left the meeting at 10.55 a.m. The Deputy Chairperson assumed the Chair.

The Chairperson rejoined the meeting at 11.05 a.m. and resumed the Chair.

Mr Blair left the meeting at 11.06 a.m.

Mr Blair rejoined the meeting at 11.12 a.m.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

6. Departmental Oral Briefing: EU Exit Preparation

The following departmental officials joined the meeting via StarLeaf at 11.25 am:

Dr Rosemary Agnew, Director of Brexit, Food and Farming Group
Kevin Murphy, Grade 7 Brexit Division, Secondary Legislation Branch
Dr Julie-Ann Moorhead, Grade 7, Brexit Division, Frameworks Branch

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

The oral briefing was reported by Hansard.

Mr Blair left the meeting at 12.15 p.m.

Mr Blair rejoined the meeting at 12.22 p.m.

The Chairperson thanks the officials for their attendance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to discuss the information delivered in the briefing at the Closed Session at the end of the meeting and to forward any further questions and concerns to the Department in writing.

7. Departmental Written Briefing: Common Framework for Radioactive Substances

Noted: The Committee noted the departmental briefing on the Common Framework for Radioactive Substances and that a Committee briefing paper is being prepared for consideration in due course.

8. SR 2020/94: The Direct Payments to Farmers (Penalty Simplification) Regulations (NI) 2020

The Committee considered SR 2020/94: The Direct Payments to Farmers (Penalty Simplification) Regulations (NI) 2020, which will remove the conditions relating to the first offence of over declaring on a Single Application and repayment if a subsequent over declaration occurs. Anyone who over declares their land area by no more than 10% will have penalty reduced by 50% from the 2020 scheme year onwards.

Question put and agreed:

That the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has considered SR 2020/94: The Direct Payments to Farmers (Penalty Simplification Regulations (NI) 2020 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules report, has no objection to the rule.

9. Correspondence

The Committee noted the following items of correspondence:

- i. The Investing Activity Report for August 2020.
- ii. The Departmental Draft Press Release on the Covid-19 Support Fund.

The Committee considered correspondence from Cats Matter on guidance on the collection of deceased pets by local authorities.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the correspondence to the Department and ask that they liaise with Cats Matter on the issue raised in the correspondence.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Energy Efficiency Group NI on the incorporation of energy efficiency measures into any projected NI recovery planning.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Energy Efficiency Group and advise that they should contact the Committee for Finance and the Committee for the Economy as the issues raised fall under their remit.

10. Forward Work Programme

The Committee discussed the draft Forward Work Programme for September-October 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to commence the meeting on 17 September 2020 at 9.00 a.m. and reconvene on 18 September 2020 at 9.00 a.m. if necessary in order to progress the items of business on the agenda.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to defer the oral briefing on the Environmental Strategy for Northern Ireland until mid-October 2020.

Agreed: The Committee noted the oral briefing on 24 September 2020 from the Permanent Secretary on EU Exit Preparedness and agreed that it should also cover the issue of the Internal Market Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

11.AOB

The Committee discussed the recently published report on the Water Framework Directive: Lake Quality Update 2020.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ask what and how the Department plans to address the issue of deteriorating water quality and the reduction in water sampling and highlighting that poor quality lake water could pose a risk to human health.

The Committee noted a recent Written Question to the Minister in respect of the financial support for Lough Neagh Fishermen.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to urge that the financial support is progressed urgently and to request a written briefing on the issue.

The Committee discussed the recent announcement by the Minister in respect of the removal of the greening requirement.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department and request information on what the greening requirement will be replaced with.

12.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 17 September at 9.00 a.m. in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

The meeting moved into Closed Session at 12.36 p.m.

13. Committee Planning

The Committee discussed the briefing it received earlier in the meeting from the Department on EU Exit and Legislation.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to outline a number of concerns and to request further written and oral briefings on its suggested approach to dealing with the legislation.

The meeting adjourned at 12.58 p.m.

Declan McAleer, Chairperson, Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

Date