



# Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 20 May 2021

**Meeting Location:** Room 30, Parliament Buildings

**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:** Nick Henry, Clerk  
Kate Duffy, Clerical Officer



Mark Allen, Research Officer (agenda item 5)

**In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:**

Elaine Farrell, Assistant Clerk

Neal Flanagan, Assistant Clerk

Marion Johnson, Clerical Supervisor

Jonathan McMillan, Head of Legal Services (agenda item 10)

The meeting commenced at 10.02 a.m. in Open Session

**1. Apologies**

None

**2. Chairpersons Business**

None

**3. Draft Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2021.



#### **4. Matters arising**

The clerk provided an update to the Committee on the launch of the call for evidence on Citizen Space for the Climate Change Bill, including the NI Assembly policy on the publication of public notices in newspapers.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the draft Press Release on the Call for Evidence and Views on the Climate Change Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the Citizen Space template for the Call for Evidence and Views on the Climate Change Bill which will go live today.

#### **5. Oral briefing RaISe: Proposals for a Farm Welfare Bill**

The Research Officer joined the meeting at 10.07 a.m.

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

The Chairperson left the meeting at 10.26 a.m. The Deputy Chairperson assumed the Chair.

The Deputy Chairperson thanked the Research Officer for his briefing.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request information from the Research Officer on a DAERA report on farm incomes per sector in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request further information on the potential challenges for agri-food in light of a UK Fair Trade Agreement with Australia once it has been agreed.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek clarification from the Research Officer on a number of legal aspects regarding the Farm Welfare Bill.



## **6. Oral Evidence Session: DAERA – Proposals for a Farm Welfare Bill**

The following departmental officials joined the meeting by StarLeaf at 10.51 a.m.

Seamus McErlean, DAERA Chief Economist

Mark McLean, Principal Agricultural Economist

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

The oral evidence session was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson rejoined the meeting at 11.18 a.m. and resumed the Chair.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to publish the departmental briefing paper on its webpage.

## **7. Oral Briefing Session: DAERA – Nature Friendly Farming**

The following departmental officials joined the meeting by StarLeaf at 11.23 a.m.

Dave Foster, Director of Regulatory & Natural Resources Policy

Dr Rosemary Agnew, Brexit Director

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

The oral briefing was reported by Hansard.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for their attendance.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request further information on CAFRE educational programmes on environmental and sustainability requirements.



**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to publish the departmental briefing on the Committee's webpage.

#### **8. Departmental Written Briefing: SL1 The Spring Traps Approval (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2021**

The Committee considered the SL1 which proposes to amend the list of makes and models of spring traps that are authorised for use in Northern Ireland as well as adding to the target species for which two of the traps previously approved may be used.

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

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to move in to Closed Session.

The Committee moved into Closed Session at 12.19 p.m.

#### **9. Committee consideration of Nature Friendly Farming**

The clerk briefed the Committee on the oral and written evidence gathered to date on Nature Friendly Farming.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the draft motion on Nature Friendly Farming and that it should be forwarded to the Business Office for scheduling in a plenary debate in June 2021.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to publish all written evidence it had received from stakeholders on the Committee's webpage for its consideration of Nature Friendly Farming.



## **10. Committee consideration of Evidence into the Withdrawal of DAERA and Local Authority Staff from the Ports**

The clerk briefed the Committee on the consideration of the evidence gathered to date on the investigation into the withdrawal of DAERA and Local Authority staff from the ports.

The Head of Legal Services joined the meeting by StarLeaf at 12.29 p.m and briefed the Committee on legal advice it had received in respect of the publication of a letter to a Member from the Chief Executive of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to publish the letter on the Committee's webpage.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to seek legal advice in respect of an item of emailed correspondence to the Committee from a Councillor from Mid and East Antrim Borough Council.

The Committee discussed outstanding aspects of information needed to inform its inquiry and the fact that the evidence session facilitated with representatives from Mid and East Antrim Borough Council on 6<sup>th</sup> May was unfinished due to the fact that broadcasting time had been exceeded. The clerk advised the Committee that it may be prudent to seek outstanding information/answers in writing, rather than to invite stakeholders to provide a further oral briefing.

Mr McGuigan proposed that the Chief Executive of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council should be asked to appear before the Committee in order to answer outstanding questions.

The Committee divided: Ayes 6; Noes 3

### **AYES**

Ms Clare Bailey  
Mrs Rosemary Barton  
Mr John Blair  
Mr Declan McAleer



Mr Patsy McGlone  
Mr Philip McGuigan

### **NOES**

Mr Maurice Bradley  
Mr Harry Harvey  
Mr William Irwin

The proposal was carried.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to request a further attendance to a Committee meeting of the Chief Executive of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council in order to complete outstanding evidence in respect of the investigation into the withdrawal of staff in the ports.

**Agreed:** Committee members to forward specific areas of outstanding information to the clerk to be included in the invitation

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to publish all written evidence from Mid and East Antrim Borough Council on its webpage.

The meeting moved into Open Session at 12.50 p.m.

## **11. Correspondence**

The Committee noted the following:

- i. Correspondence from the Department noting the Committee's request to be kept informed on the potential creation of a central register of people convicted of animal welfare offences.
- ii. Correspondence from the Department on the movement of bees from the Calabria and the decision not to impose additional constraints on their import.
- iii. Correspondence from the Committee for Finance on the additional detail and granularity the Department of Finance has sought from departments regarding their accruing resources.
- iv. Correspondence from the Department on the launch of the Covid-19 Financial Support Scheme for Lough Neagh Fishing Industry.



- v. Correspondence from the Department on the Consultation on a proposal to revoke the Agricultural Wages (Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 (Abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board).
- vi. correspondence from the Committee for the Executive Office on an SR which outlines the Transfer of Powers laid by the Executive Office for a transfer of functions for the Department for Infrastructure of certain functions of DAERA for the Reservoirs Bill.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department on a Review of the Cross-compliance penalties Scheme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to seek clarification on the implications of the relaxation of penalties in respect of non-regression and environmental aspects.

## **12. Forward Work Programme**

**Noted:** The Committee noted that the departmental briefing on the consultation on the Protection of Service Animals has been deferred.

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

## **13. AOB**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to welcome the recent announcement of the Rural Halls Refurbishment Scheme and to seek assurance that the distribution of funding will apply across all sectors of the rural community in a fair and equitable manner.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to express concern that the closure of the Lough Erne Eel Fishery due to conservation methods had never resulted in compensation for those whose livelihoods had been impacted.





#### **14. 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 27 May 2021 at 10.00 a.m. in Room 30, Parliament Buildings and virtually on StarLeaf.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.57 p.m.

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