



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 3 March 2022

Meeting Location: Room 30/Virtual Meeting via StarLeaf

Present: Philip McGuigan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Rosemary Barton MLA

John Blair MLA

Thomas Buchanan MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

William Irwin MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

Apologies: Declan McAleer MLA (Chairperson)

Clare Bailey MLA

In Attendance: Nick Henry, Clerk

Oliver Bellew, Assistant Clerk

Emma Magee, Clerical Officer

In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:

Elaine Farrell, Clerical Supervisor

The meeting commenced at 10.01 a.m. in open session

1. Apologies

Declan McAleer MLA (Chairperson)

Clare Bailey MLA

2. Chairperson's Business

Red Diesel Tax Rebate

The Deputy Chairperson drew Members' attention to correspondence from the Department of Finance advising of its ongoing engagement with the Treasury since March 2021 on the impending removal of the tax rebate for red diesel.

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that the Minister of Finance has written to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury requesting that the planned removal of the rebate be reconsidered and that alternative solutions be found.

Members noted that a response was still outstanding.

Potential LCM for Pet Abduction Offence

The Deputy Chairperson reminded Members of correspondence that the Committee had received from the Department in January 2022 in relation to the potential introduction of a legislative consent motion for the establishment of an offence locally in respect of pet abduction.

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that the proposals would not be brought forward in the current mandate as they necessitate Executive approval.

Rising Cost of Animal Feeds and Fertilisers

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members of concerns in relation to the rising price of animal feeds and fertilisers and the impact on local farmers.

The Committee discussed the on-going conflict in Ukraine and its additional impact on operating costs.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to request that the Minister and/or Senior Departmental Officials provide an urgent oral briefing on the matter and to discuss mitigation options which may be available before the end of the mandate to offset pressure on local producers.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2022.

4. Matters Arising

Marine Licensing (Exempted Activities) (Amendment) Order

The Committee noted tabled papers relating to the Marine Licensing (Exempted Activities) (Amendment) Order which had been laid in the Business Office on 1 March 2022.

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that the proposed regulations were subject to the negative resolution procedure and that clarity on a number of issues has been sought from the Department.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the proposed regulations to the Examiner of Statutory Rules for scrutiny

5. Oral Briefing: DAERA – Capacity Constraints in the Planning Process

The Deputy Chairperson reminded Members of its correspondence with DAERA over recent months in relation to actions it has taken to resolve issues with ongoing backlogs of planning applications within the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

The Committee noted the latest response from the Department and that a response from the Department for Infrastructure is still outstanding.

The Chairperson welcomed the following officials and invited them to brief the Committee:

Helen Anderson – Director of Natural Environment Division, DAERA

Stephanie Millar – Principal Scientific Officer, DAERA

Mark Hammond – Head of Natural Environment Operations, DAERA

Keith Finegan – Air Quality and Biodiversity Principal Scientific Officer, DAERA This was followed by questions from Members.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for clarity on:

- The outcome/assessment of commissioned legal advice in terms of the potential introduction of a system to prioritise cases;
- The details of internal service improvement measures including advice provided to authorities to reduce risk of over consultations;

- The status of the bid for additional resource to include the total amount of investment sought; and,
- A breakdown of the cases with the longest timeframe including type, length of time in system and measures taken by NIEA to progress.

Agreed: It was agreed that the Clerk would write to the Department for clarity on whether the Ammonia Strategy would be published for consultation before the end of the Mandate.

6. Oral Briefing: Rural Community Network – RDP Leader Structures

In relation to the Committee's consideration of proposals for a new Rural Policy Framework the Committee noted research on the benefits of the LEADER Programme and how it may be included in future strategies.

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that the research had been commissioned by the Rural Community Network and the Rural Women's Network and conducted by Professor Ruth McAreavey.

The Chairperson welcomed the following representatives and invited them to brief the Committee.

Professor Ruth McAreavey – Newcastle University

Aidan Campbell – Policy Officer, Rural Community Network

Louise Coyle – Director, NI Rural Women's Network This

was followed by questions from Members.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to endorse the research report and to request that officials formally note its recommendations and consider how they may be embedded in the framework for future Rural Development Policy.

7. Written Briefing: DAERA – Register of those Convicted of Animal Cruelty Offences

Members noted a Departmental written update on the potential introduction of a register aimed at mitigating the risk of those convicted of animal cruelty offences from acquiring an animal.

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members that Departmental Officials were in the process of finalising their proposals which will be presented to the Minister in due course.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to ascertain whether a way forward was likely to be achieved before the end of the mandate.

8. Written Briefing: DAERA – Consultation on Inshore Vessel Monitoring System for Fishing Vessels under 12m Overall Length

Agreed: As the Department failed to provide papers in relation to its consultation on Proposals for Inshore Vessel Monitoring System for Fishing Vessels under 12m Overall Length, the Committee agreed to defer its consideration of the matter to a future meeting. The Committee agreed to, again, write to the Department to express its concern at the lack of availability of briefing papers.

9. Clerk's Written Briefing – Draft Committee Position Paper: Animal Health and Welfare Common Framework

The Committee noted a draft Committee position paper on the Animal Health and Welfare Common Framework.

The Deputy Chairperson invited the Clerk to brief the Committee.

The Clerk briefed the Members and indicated that a research briefing would be provided by RaISe at the next meeting of the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee discussed the draft Position Paper and agreed that it be finalised and published following the briefing by RaISe.

10. Clerk's Written Briefing – Draft Committee Position Paper: Fisheries Management and Support Common Framework

The Committee noted a draft Committee position paper on the Fisheries Management and Support Common Framework.

Members noted correspondence from the Marine Taskforce which contained their views on the draft Joint Fisheries Statement.

The Deputy Chairperson invited the Clerk to brief the Committee.

The Clerk briefed the Members and indicated that a research briefing would be provided by RaISe at the next meeting of the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee discussed the draft Position Paper and agreed that it be finalised and published following the briefing by RaISe.

11. Clerk's Written Briefing – Draft Committee Position Paper: Fertilisers Common Framework

The Committee noted a draft Committee position paper on the Fertilisers Common Framework.

The Deputy Chairperson invited the Clerk to brief the Committee.

The Clerk briefed the Members and indicated that a research briefing would be provided by RaISe at the next meeting of the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee discussed the draft Position Paper and agreed that it be finalised and published following the briefing by RaISe.

12. Clerk's Written Briefing – Draft Legacy Report 2017-2022

The Committee noted a draft Legacy Report in respect of its work in the 2017-2022 Mandate.

Members noted that the draft Report made recommendations for a successor Committee to consider including in its Forward Work Programme.

The Deputy Chairperson invited the Assistant Clerk to brief the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee noted the draft Legacy Report and agreed that it be published following the inclusion of End of Session statistical date.

13. Correspondence

- i. Departmental correspondence to advise that it intends to launch a 6-week consultation on how the local allocation of the 2022 Additional Fishing Quota may be divided and it is proposing two options.
Agreed: It was agreed that Members would forward any comments they had to the Clerk after the meeting.
- ii. Correspondence from the NI Fiscal Council to advise it has published a Stakeholder Engagement and Future Work Programme Report.
- iii. Correspondence between the House of Lords Scrutiny Committee on the Protocol and DEFRA outlining that it is drawing its scrutiny on regulations C (2021) 7641, C (2021) 7567 and C(2021) 6590 to a close.
- iv. Correspondence between the The House of Lords Scrutiny Committee on the Protocol and DEFRA outlining its disappointment that a compromise has not been reached between the EU and UK on proposals for identification of animals moved from GB to NI and that it keeps an active interest in this document.
- v. Correspondence between the House of Lords Scrutiny Committee on the Protocol and DEFRA outlining its regret about the lack of information provided in respect of the implications for Regulation of energy costs in NI.
- vi. Correspondence between the House of Lords Scrutiny Committee on the Protocol and DEFRA outlining that it is drawing its scrutiny on regulation C (2021) 5584 to a close.
- vii. Correspondence from the NI Human Rights Commission to advise it has published its draft strategic plan 2022-25 for consultation.

- viii. Response from the Department of Finance to the Committee outlining the actions it has taken in respect of lobbying against the impending changes to red diesel tax rebate.
- ix. Correspondence from Social Value Monitoring to advise that the latest Delivery Tracking System report has allocated a "Green" assurance rating against the six projects being managed by DAERA.

14. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

15. Any other Business

The Clerk informed the Committee of a correspondence he had received from the Clerking and Members Support Office requesting that Members provide their mobile numbers to its staff to facilitate end of mandate arrangements.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk would provide the relevant details on their behalf.

The Deputy Chairperson informed Members of legislative changes in other jurisdictions in relation to general licensing for the shooting of wild gulls.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for clarity on local provisions on licensing the shooting of wild birds, particularly in relation to gulls.

16. 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 10 March 2022 at 10.00 a.m. and will be a hybrid meeting streamed on the Assembly's website.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to move to closed session.

12.46 p.m. The Committee moved to closed session.

17. Clerk's Oral Briefing – Arrangements for Breaking the Grass Ceiling Launch Event

The Committee noted briefing papers pertaining to the launch of the Committee Report on Breaking the Grass Ceiling.

The Deputy Chairperson invited the Clerk to brief Members on the itinerary and supporting material for the event.

The Committee discussed revised indicative timings for Plenary on Tuesday 8 March. The Clerk informed Members that the itinerary was sufficiently flexible to account for the movement of business.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft itinerary and draft Press Release for the event.

The Clerk reminded Members that the Committee motion on the Report would be debated on 8 March also.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.55 p.m.

Declan McAleer MLA Chairperson,

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

10 March 2022