



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 10 March 2022

Meeting Location: Room 30/Virtual Meeting via StarLeaf

Present by Video or Teleconference:

Declan McAleer (Chairperson)

Philip McGuigan MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Clare Bailey MLA

Rosemary Barton MLA

John Blair MLA

Thomas Buchanan MLA

Harry Harvey MLA

William Irwin MLA

Patsy McGlone MLA

Apologies: None

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

None

2. Chairperson's Business

Breaking the Grass Ceiling Launch

The Chairperson thanked Members for their participation in the Plenary debate on, and the official launch of, the Committee's *Breaking the Grass Ceiling* report. Members noted the Minister's apologies as he was unable to attend the Report launch as planned.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister and the Department to request that appropriate consideration be given to the recommendations contained in the Report.

Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board Amendment Order Consultation

The Chairperson reminded the Committee of its discussion on the proposals to amend the functionality of the Agricultural and Horticultural Development Board.

Members noted that DEFRA has published the outcome of its consultation on the proposals. The Chairperson informed Members that this included confirmation that DEFRA does not immediately intend to extend the scope of the Board to other agriculture sectors across the UK but that intergovernmental discussions on the matter will be taken forward.

UFU Call for Agri-Taskforce in response to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine

The Chairperson expressed concern at the impact of the on-going Ukrainian conflict in respect of food production and its subsequent effect on the cost of fertilisers and other farming inputs. Members discussed the Ulster Farmers' Union call for a taskforce to consider the wide-ranging implications of the invasion on the local agricultural sector and potential mitigation strategies to deal with the issue.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister in support of UFU's call for a taskforce and to request that urgent interventions be made to support the sector. The Committee also agreed to request an urgent oral briefing by the Minister.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to DEFRA with its concerns and to reiterate the crucial role played by Northern Ireland in the British food industry; and, to request government support for the local agri-food sector.

3. Draft Minutes

Agreed: The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2022.

4. Matters Arising

Constraints in the Planning Process

The Committee expressed its concern at the potential legal implications for decisions taken in the absence of responses from statutory consultees in the planning process.

Agreed: Members agreed to seek clarity on the capacity for Authorities to make planning decisions in the absence of returns from statutory consultees.

5. Oral Briefing: DAERA – Future Agricultural Policy – Consultation Responses

The Committee noted that the Department's consultation on the Future Agricultural Policy proposals had closed on 15 February 2022.

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee had reported and published its position on the proposals on 18 February.

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

Dr Rosemary Agnew – Director of Transition Policy, DAERA

Steven Millar – Deputy Director, DAERA

Julie-Ann Moorehead – Senior Adviser, DAERA

This was followed by questions from Members.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for the briefing.

Agreed: Officials agreed to update the Committee on their briefing to the Minister on recommendations for a way forward.

6. Oral Briefing: DAERA – Avian Influenza Outbreak Update

The Committee noted a written update by the Department on the local situation on avian influenza.

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

Jim Blee – Deputy Director Animal Health and Welfare, DAERA

Julian Henderson – Senior Principal Veterinary Officer, DAERA

Gemma Daly – Senior Principal Veterinary Officer, DAERA This was followed by questions from Members.

The Chairperson thanked the officials.

7. Oral Briefing: RaISe – Common Frameworks

The Committee noted a research paper by RaISe which contained an overview of the Committee’s prioritised Common Frameworks.

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

Suzie Cave – Researcher, RaISe

Mark Allen – Researcher, RaISe

In line with Standing Order 73 the Clerk advised the Chairperson that, as an aspect of the briefing was sub judice, Members should not refer to it in any questions they may wish to ask.

This was followed by questions from Members.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for the briefing and for providing the paper.

Agreed: Members agreed that the Committee’s position papers on the Common Frameworks for Animal Health and Welfare; Fertilisers; and, Fisheries be updated to

reflect the comments of the Research briefing and forwarded to the Department as its official response.

8. Written Briefing: DAERA – Business Plan 2021-2022 Update

The Committee noted a written update by the Department in respect of its Business Plan 2021-2022.

Members noted that the priority tasks contained in the Plan were partially achieved, or on course to be achieved by March 2022, but that some areas retained a red status in the RAG Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for clarity on the next steps for the ‘partially achieved’ and ‘not achieved’ targets; and, for an indication of when the Business Plan for 2022-2023 would be developed.

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

The Committee noted Departmental correspondence in respect of its intention to consult on legislation for Vessel Monitoring Systems on vessels of under 12 metres.

The Chairperson informed Members of similar provisions in other jurisdictions and of the benefits of VMS in respect of efficient fishing practises, marine planning and marine safety in terms of lost and damaged vessels.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department to confirm its content for the consultation to be progressed and to seek further information in respect of the costs of a VMS and how use of these systems may promote biodiversity

10. Clerk’s Written Briefing – Draft Committee Position Paper: Agricultural Support Common Framework

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

The Chairperson invited the Clerk to brief the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee noted the draft Common Framework paper and agreed it be finalised to incorporate comments from the proposed RalSe briefing.

11. Clerk’s Written Briefing – Draft Committee Position Paper: Chemicals and Pesticides Common Framework

The Committee noted a draft Committee position paper on the Chemicals and Pesticides Common Framework.

The Chairperson invited the Clerk to brief the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee noted the draft Common Framework paper and agreed it be finalised to incorporate comments from the proposed RalSe briefing.

12. Correspondence

- i. Ministerial acceptance of the Committee’s invitation to attend the launch event of the “Breaking the Grass Ceiling” report.
- ii. Correspondence from the Committee for the Economy containing a copy of the Women's Policy Group paper for economic and social recovery. **Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward a copy of the Feminist Recovery Plan to the Department and to request its views on the recommendations. iii. A response from the Minister for the Economy to the Committee’s correspondence regarding the EU’s Fit for 55 proposals and CBAM, noting the potential implications for different sectors of our economy due to the CBAM and welcoming further analysis from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.
- iv. A response from the Minister for the Economy to the Committee’s comments and questions on the Energy Strategy.
- v. Correspondence between the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and DAERA in relation to the Department’s consultation on its future agricultural policy proposals.
- vi. A response from the Department for Infrastructure to the Committee’s queries regarding the capacity constraints within the planning system and measures it is taking forward to modernise and improve output.
Agreed: The Committee agreed to respond to the Department for Infrastructure in relation to outstanding issues with the planning system.
Agreed: The Committee also agreed to write to the NI Environment Agency for a breakdown of the number of responses it makes in relation to planning applications.
- vii. Correspondence from Sir Michael Lyons, Chair of the Independent Review of Invest NI to advise of its call-for-evidence which is open until 1 April 2022.
- viii. Invitation to Members to the Future High Streets Summit, which is to be held on 30 March 2022 and hosted by Retail NI.
- ix. A tabled copy of correspondence between the House of Lords Framework Scrutiny Committee and the EU Affairs Office in respect of its observations and recommendations on the Agri-Support Common Framework.

13. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme.

14. Any other Business

The Committee discussed a newspaper report on the Department's intention to appeal a case of constructive dismissal.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for its comments on the matter.

15. Date, time and place of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs will take place on Wednesday 16 March 2022 at 10.00 a.m. and will be a fully virtual meeting streamed on the Assembly's website.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.39 p.m.



Declan McAleer MLA
Chairperson, Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs 16
March 2022