



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

Draft Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday 7 March 2024

Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present: Tom Elliott MLA (Chairperson)
John Blair MLA
Nicola Brogan MLA
Tom Buchanan MLA
William Irwin MLA
Áine Murphy MLA
Michelle McIlveen MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

None

Apologies: Declan McAleer MLA (Deputy Chairperson)

Ms Michelle McIlveen MLA

In Attendance: Dr Janice Thompson, Assembly Clerk

Ms Gillian Barker, Assistant Assembly Clerk

Mr Michael Greer, Clerical Supervisor

Ms Andrienne Magee, Clerical Officer

The Chair reminded members of the 'Declaration of Interests' and asked Members if there are any new interests to declare, relevant to the items under consideration at this meeting, that had not already been declared at the first meeting. None were declared.

The meeting opened in public session at 10.06 am

1. Apologies

The following apologies were noted:

Declan McAleer MLA

Michelle McIlveen MLA

2. Minutes

Minutes of 29 February 2024 and 5 March 2024 were agreed and signed.

3. Chairperson's Business

The Committee noted the Clerk's Memo regarding the informal meeting the Chair, Deputy Chair and Clerk held with representatives of the Ulster Farmers' Union on Monday 19 February 2024. The memo covers the various issues discussed including TB, Future Farm Support Scheme, Lough Neagh, BVD and lack of support for the Sheep Sector.

The Committee also noted that the Ulster Farmers' Union are briefing the Committee on Thursday 21 March 2024.

Agreed: The Committee noted the Clerk's Memo.

The meeting remained in Public Session at 10.04 am

4. Matters Arising

None

Mr William Irwin MLA joined the meeting at 10.08 am

Mr Patsy McGlone MLA joined the meeting at 10.08 am

5. Departmental Briefing – Climate Change, Science and Innovation Group

The Chair welcomed the Departmental Officials to the meeting and invited them to brief the Committee:

- Pauline Rooney – Director of Innovation & Science Transformation;
- Claire Cockerill, Director of Green Growth & Climate Action Delivery;
- Jane Corderoy, Director of Climate Change & Green Growth Policy;
- and
- Alistair Carson – Chief Scientific Adviser.

The Committee noted the following papers for the briefing:

- DAERA First Day Brief; and
- DAERA Key Challenges.

The Officials briefed the Committee followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Chair thanked the Officials for attending the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department for further information regarding the ‘Just Transition Fund for Agriculture’, funding available and from which budget this is to be funded.

The Departmental Officials re Climate Change, Science and Innovation Group left the meeting at 11.00 am.

The meeting was suspended at 11.00 am.

The meeting was reconvened at 11.05 am.

6. Departmental Briefing – Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group

The Chair welcomed the Departmental Officials to the meeting and invited them to brief the Committee.

- Ms Liz Loughran, Acting Deputy Secretary
- Mr Owen Lyttle, Director of Marine and Fisheries;
- Ms Fiona Dickson, Assistant Director; and
- Mr Shane Doris, Director of Environment Resources Policy

The Committee noted the following papers for the briefing;

- DAERA First Day Brief; and
- DAERA Key Challenges.

The Officials briefed the Committee followed by a question and answer session.

Agreed: The Chair thanked the Officials for attending the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department regarding their concerns of around 300 planning applications ‘stuck’ in the planning system and the impact of the forthcoming Ammonia Strategy.

Mr John Blair MLA left the meeting at 11.53 am

Mr John Blair MLA re-joined the meeting at 11.59 am

The Departmental Officials re Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group left the meeting at 12.17 pm.

7. SL1 The Period Products (Department of Environment and Rural Affairs Specified Public Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee noted the following papers:

- SL1 The Period Products (Department of Environment and Rural Affairs Specified Public Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024; and
- The Clerk's Memo regarding the SL1.

The Committee noted that the Period Products (Free Provision) Act (NI) was made by the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2022 requiring free period products are made available from May 2024 in all public bodies.

The Committee noted the Rule will be laid before the Assembly under the Affirmative Resolution Procedure and it is anticipated it will come in to operation as soon as it is approved.

Agreed: The Committee noted the SL1 The Period Products (Department of Environment and Rural Affairs Specified Public Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024; and had no objection to the rule being made.

8. SR 2024/16 The Farming for the Generations Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024; and SR 2024/31 The Farming for the Generations Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Chair welcomed the Departmental Official to the meeting and invited him to brief the Committee on the original SR and the subsequent amendments.

The Committee noted the following papers:

- SR 2024/16 The Farming for the Generations Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024;
- 2024/31 The Farming for the Generations Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024; and
- Examiner of Statutory Rules Second Report.

Mr George Moffett, DAERA Official briefed the Committee followed by a question and answer session.

The Committee noted the purpose of SR 2024/16 was to introduce the Department's 'Farming for the Generations Pilot Scheme' providing payments for eligible farm businesses in relation to succession planning consultation grant, succession business restructuring grant and the successor development grant.

The Committee note that the Examiner of Rules, Ms Kelly, had drawn attention to this SR in her second report. The Regulation made provision for a power of entry in regulation 9(2) of the SR 2024/16; the Amended Regulations SR 2024/31 has now been laid to remove powers of inspection.

The Committee noted that the Examiner of Statutory Rules has confirmed she is content with this approach.

Agreed: The Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs considered SR 2024/16 The Farming for the Generations Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024; and SR 2024/31 The Farming for the Generations Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024; and had no objection to the rules.

Mr Patsy McGlone MLA left the meeting at 12.28 pm.

Mr Patsy McGlone MLA re-joined the meeting at 12.31 pm.

Mr George Moffett left the meeting at 12.35 pm

9. Correspondence

The Committee addressed the following items of correspondence:

9.1 The Committee noted correspondence from Phillipe Bolo from the Commission des Affaires Économique, Paris, regarding plastic pollution. The United Nations Environment Assembly has convened an intergovernmental negotiating committee with the objective of producing an international legally binding instrument to put an end to plastic pollution. Phillipe Bolo, is working towards the creation of a coalition of parliamentarians and wrote to the Committee.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Mr Bolo requesting to be kept up dated with the initiative.

- 9.2 The Committee noted correspondence dated 26 February 2024 from the Clerk of Justice regarding correspondence from Barry MacDonald KC and legal proceedings in respect of residential properties at Victoria Square, Belfast.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence and that Members await response from Department on this matter.

- 9.3 The Committee noted correspondence dated 27 February 2024 regarding the UK Wide Statutory Instrument - The Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Act 2023 (Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) (Revocation) Regulations 2024 (XC/001/R).

Agreed: The Committee noted the SI

- 9.4 The Committee noted The Fair Dealing Obligations (Mild) Regulations 2024 laid at Westminster by Defra. The Regulations will introduce mandatory written contracts across the whole of the UK dairy sector and will apply to all new and existing contracts between first purchasers and milk producers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Ulster Farmers' Union to ask if they have any concerns regarding these new regulations.

- 9.5 The Committee noted correspondence dated 1 March 2024 from Ms Kerrie Sweeney Chief Executive, Maritime Belfast Trust, to Minister Muir, regarding Belfast Waterfront Promenade Framework and the plans to create a pilot Waterfront Design Panel to take forward a 'people centric waterfront city'.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note.

- 9.6 The Committee noted correspondence received on 1 March 2024 from an individual highlighting various issues of concern including the blue / green algae, the environment, ecology, food waste, farming sustainability, peatlands, rewilding and water policy.

Agreed: The Committee noted the substantial amount of information that Members may wish to read for future reference.

The Committee were content to action the remainder of the correspondence memo as drafted and also noted the Articles of Interest referenced in the Correspondence Memo.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee noted the Forward Work Programme through to Easter, which includes four Departmental briefings and three stakeholder briefings from Northern Ireland Environment Link, Office for Environmental Protection and Ulster Farmers' Union.

The Committee noted the proposal to hold a strategic planning day in the weeks after Easter.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to consider arrangements for a strategic planning day at next week's meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the Clerk to publish the draft Forward Work Programme.

11. AOB

The Committee noted International Woman's Day is Friday 8 March 2024 and agreed to 'quote post' post on X (formerly Twitter) a photo taken by the Speaker's Office supporting this important day.

Agreed: The Committee noted the previous Committee's Report 'Breaking the Grass Ceiling' and plan to keep these challenges to the fore.

12. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee is on Thursday 14 March 2024, 10.00 am in Room 21.

The meeting went into private session at 12.38 pm

Mr John Blair MLA left the meeting at 12.38 pm

Mr John Blair MLA re-joined the meeting at 12.44 pm

Ms Áine Murphy MLA left the meeting at 12.40 pm

Ms Áine Murphy MLA re-joined the meeting at 12.42 pm

13. Briefing from the Assembly's Acting Head of Communications

The Chair welcomed Mr Michael Cairns, Acting Head of Communications, to the meeting and invited him to brief the Committee.

The Committee noted the following paper:

- Corporate Communication Strategy and Committee Support

The Acting Head of Comms briefed the Committee outlining the services and support provided by Comms.

Agreed: The Chair thanked Mr Cairns for the briefing and the work in supporting committees.

The Meeting adjourned at 12.51

Signature:

Tom Elliott, Chairperson

Dated