



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

## Minutes of Proceedings

13 November 2025

**Meeting location: Room 21, Parliament Buildings, Belfast**

**Present:** Robbie Butler MLA (Chairperson)  
Declan McAleer MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
John Blair MLA  
Tom Buchanan MLA  
Aoife Finnegan MLA  
William Irwin MLA  
Daniel McCrossan MLA  
Michelle McIlveen MLA

**Via Zoom:** Áine Murphy MLA

**In Attendance:** James Gilsenan, Acting Assembly Clerk  
Nick Faulkner, Assistant Assembly Clerk  
Michael Greer, Clerical Supervisor  
Sarah Dowd, Clerical Officer

***The meeting opened in Public Session at 10:21am chaired by the Deputy Chairperson***

**1. Apologies**

None

**2. Declaration of Interests**

The Deputy Chair reminded Members of their responsibility to declare any interests in any of the items under discussion.

None were declared.

**3. Chairperson's Business**

The Deputy Chair referred to the road traffic accident on 11 November involving a minibus with CAFRE students onboard and expressed thanks to the emergency services and to the Minister for the Department's offer of support to those involved.

The Deputy Chair wished all involved a full and speedy recovery.

The Deputy Chair referred to the grace period for distribution of veterinary medicines from Great Britain into Northern Ireland ending on 31 December and that Minister Muir addressed questions on the matter in the Chamber on 11 November and the House of Lords NI Scrutiny Committee heard oral evidence on 12 November.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that a written briefing on the matter from the Assembly EU Affairs Team would be sought for the meeting of 27 November.

**4. Minutes**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

## **5. Matters Arising**

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department dated 7 November regarding The Bovine Genetics Genotyping Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 in response to a querying if there are plans to introduce regulations post 2026/27 to make participation mandatory.

The Committee noted that the Department will continue to engage with Sustainable Ruminant Genetics Ltd (SRG) and the Agricultural Policy Stakeholder Group (APSG) to consider and co design future policy measures to include incentivisation, conditionality and regulation.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note.

***The Departmental Officials joined the meeting at 10:25am***

***The Chairperson joined the meeting at 10:47am***

***Tom Buchanan MLA joined the meeting at 10:54am***

## **6. Departmental Oral Evidence Session - Update on the progress of Rural Policy Development**

The following officials briefed the Committee:

- Jason Foy, Director of Rural Affairs;
- Claire McAllister, Head of Rural Policy Unit; and
- Maria Bradley, Head of Strategic Rural Policy Branch

The Committee heard that the nine outline rural policy proposals signify a shift in DAERA's approach to collaboration and co design with both central and local government and other stakeholders across the UK to tackle both longstanding and emerging rural challenges.

The Committee heard it will require a long-term strategic policy over a 15-year period and that significant engagement with stakeholders is ongoing.

There then followed a question and answer session and areas of discussion included: access to services, transport and health; the importance of support for the voluntary and community sector; the need to recognise that policies need to consider the diversity within rural areas; and concerns that to date there have been no funds delivered at a grass roots level.

A Member expressed concern that previous work developing rural policy had been lost with the development of new work in the current mandate.

The Chair thanked the officials for their attendance.

***The Departmental officials left the meeting at 11:02am***

***The Chairperson Chaired the meeting from Agenda Item 7***

***The Ulster Beekeepers Association (UBKA) representative joined the meeting at 11:02am***

**7. Oral briefing - Ulster Beekeepers Association (UBKA)- DAERA Bee Inspectorate and the Potential Impact of Asian Hornets on Local Hives**

The following UBKA representative briefed the Committee:

- Mrs Valentine Hodges - Executive Chair

The Committee heard that there are real and present risks in Northern Ireland of an outbreak of foul brood and other diseases being allowed to flourish in the absence of an effective bee inspection service.

The Committee heard that the UBKA were pleased with the NIEA response to the Asian Hornet spotted in Dundonald and have been fully briefed on developments.

The Committee also heard that lesson must be learned from how the Asian Hornet issue has been dealt with in Europe and that a coordinated response is needed between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

There then followed a question and answer session and areas of discussion included: concerns with recruitment of suitably experienced bee inspectors; lack of training support offered to beekeepers from DAERA; the opportunities for growth of the honey industry; the need for greater public awareness regarding Asia Hornets

and other invasive species such as the mite *Tropilaelaps*; and the 2026 International Meeting of Young Beekeepers due to be held in Belfast.

The Chair thanked the representative for her attendance.

***The UBKA representative left the meeting at 11:45am***

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department requesting an update on recruitment for bee inspectors.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department of Agriculture, Food, Fisheries and the Marine to enquire as to whether the Irish Government is considering a ban on the importation of bees and second hand beekeeping equipment into the Republic of Ireland to mitigate the risk of importing Asian hornets, *Tropilaelaps* and other diseases and pests.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department regarding providing support to the International Meeting of Young Beekeepers.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to visit the beehives on the Stormont estate.

## **8. Correspondence**

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the following items detailed in the correspondence memo:

- The 49th Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules (ESR) dated 7 November.
- A Clerks memo dated 6 November from the Clerk to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee seeking examples of any Statutory Instruments the Committee have considered to assist a Review into the development of a formal process and guidance on the handling of Westminster Statutory Instruments which impinge on devolved matters.
- A Memo from the Clerk to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee dated 5 November regarding DAERA's response to the Review of Assembly Committee engagement on cross-cutting Executive strategies.
- A Memo from the Clerk to the Committee for Finance, dated 7 October at providing an update from the Department of Finance regarding the current status of the Review of Arm's Length Bodies

- Correspondence that the Committee has been copied into between the Chair of the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee and Defra dated 5 November providing further updates in the following matters within the scope of the Windsor Framework: Animal Welfare (Import of Dogs, Cats and Ferrets) Bill ; and The Marking of Retail Good Regulations 2025.
- Correspondence the Committee has been copied into between FASTA (Foyle Association of Salmon and Trout Anglers) and the UFU regarding engagement.
- An invitation to Belfast Harbour's Annual Festival Reception at the Harbour Office Corporation Square Belfast on Tuesday 9th December.
- Correspondence from the Department dated 11 November regarding the Committee's query relating to the definition of 'Significant Issue' in relation to an exceptional review of the UK Air Quality Provisional Common Framework.
- A Clerks memo from the Clerk to the Committee for Communities dated 11 November regarding a request for a Cross-Departmental Briefing from DAERA on Retrofitting and Future-Proofing Homes.
- Correspondence from Teagasc offering to provide a technical presentation on its research and knowledge transfer activities in the areas of water quality and nutrient management.

## **9. Forward Work Programme**

**Agreed:** The Committee noted and agreed to publish the Forward Work Programme.

## **10. Any Other Business**

The Committee noted an invitation to a webinar entitled Online Launch of Sustainable Trails Development Guide from Outscape.

The Chair noted that the Committee's informal Nutrients Action Programme stakeholder event in the Stormont Hotel would begin at 2pm.

## **11. Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Thursday 21 November at Room 21, Parliament Buildings at 10.00am

***The meeting was adjourned at 11:46am***

**Signature: .....**

**Robbie Butler MLA, Chairperson**

**Dated .....**