

COMMITTEE FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

**TUESDAY 12 JANUARY 2016
ROOM 30, PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS**

Present: Mr William Irwin MLA (Chairperson)
Mr Sydney Anderson MLA
Mr Declan McAleer MLA
Mr Kieran McCarthy MLA
Mr Ian McCrea MLA
Mr Oliver McMullan MLA
Mr Ian Milne MLA
Mr Edwin Poots MLA
Mr Robin Swann MLA

In attendance: Ms Stella McArdle, Committee Clerk
Ms Lynda Conlon, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Mr Mark O'Hare, Clerical Supervisor
Ms Marion Johnson, Clerical Officer

10.08 a.m. The meeting commenced in Open Session.

1. Apologies

There are no apologies.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson advised the Committee that Joe Byrne tendered his resignation as a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, effective from the 31st December 2015.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to Joe Byrne to thank him for his service as Deputy Chairperson to the Committee.

3. Minutes of the meetings held on 08 December 2015 and 14 December 2015

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft minutes of the meetings held on 08 December 2015 and 14 December 2015.

4. Matters Arising

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment in order to arrange a joint meeting to receive an update on the performance of both Departments against the recommendations in the Going for Growth Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that DARD update it on any future meetings between the Minister and the Minister for Finance and Personnel to encourage the Chancellor of the Exchequer to give further consideration to measures to support the dairy sector.

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from DARD, dated 10 December 2015, providing an update on the two working groups proposed by the DEFRA Secretary of State, Liz Truss.

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from DARD, dated 10 December 2015, confirming that the Department was aware of the recent call for experts to be appointed as members of the 'Agricultural Markets Task Force' and had forwarded it to members of the Agri-Food Strategy Board.

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from DARD, dated 14 December 2015, informing Members that the Department intends to advise cattle herd-keepers that they may, if they wish, stop keeping a herd register on their farm.

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from DARD, dated 21 December 2015, notifying Members that the Explanatory Memorandum for the BVD Eradication Scheme Order (NI) 2015 has been amended and the information provided in an earlier briefing in relation to fines and penalties imposed by this Rule was corrected.

Agreed: The Committee noted correspondence from DARD, dated 15 December 2015, informing Members that the Department has written to the Paying Agencies in England, Scotland and Wales and the Republic of Ireland to seek information on the number of duplicate field cases identified by them in 2015 and agreed that any

statistics supplied should be forwarded to the Committee at the earliest opportunity.

- Agreed:* The Committee noted correspondence from DARD, dated 15 December 2015, clarifying a number of matters relating to the Young Farmers' Payment and Regional Reserve and agreed that an update on the issue of the qualification requirement should be provided to Members when the requested legal advice has been received and considered by the Department.
- Noted:* The Committee noted correspondence from DARD, dated 15 December 2015, confirming that the £2m IT bid in the Monitoring Round was for the delivery of essential ICT to support a number of developments required for CAP Reform.
- Agreed:* The Committee noted correspondence from DARD, dated 15 December 2015, outlining the development of the Geo-Spatial Aid Application (GSAA) and agreed to request an update on GSAA in advance of the opening date for 2016 applications.
- Noted:* The Committee noted correspondence from DARD, dated 15 December 2015, addressing concerns about the proposed fee increases in the Scrapie Fees amendment regulations.
- Noted:* The Committee noted correspondence from DARD, dated 15 December 2015, confirming that the Republic of Ireland is at the final stages of drafting the Seed Potato Regulations.
- Noted:* The Committee noted correspondence from DARD informing Members of the outcome of the December Fisheries Council held on the 14-15 December 2015.
- Agreed:* The Committee noted correspondence from the Karro Food Group clarifying remarks made in previous correspondence and agreed to forward the information to the UFU.
- Noted:* The Committee noted correspondence from Sainsbury's providing further information on a number of matters, as requested by Members after their briefing to the Committee on 03 November 2015.

5. Rural Needs Bill – Agreement of Amendments and Formal Clause by Clause

The following Departmental officials joined the meeting at 10.15 a.m. to outline the proposed amendments to the Rural Needs Bill.

Colette McMaster, Assistant Secretary, Director of Food, Farm and Rural Policy
Astrid Stuart, Head of Rural Proofing Branch

The officials briefed the Committee on the Department's proposals for amendments to Clauses 1, 2 and 3 of the Rural Needs Bill.

The Committee considered the proposed amendments to Clause 1.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with amendment 1 and amendment 2 provided by the Department, subject to approval by the Executive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with amendment 3 provided by the Department, subject to approval by the Executive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with amendment 4 provided by the Department, subject to approval by the Executive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with amendment 5 provided by the Department, subject to approval by the Executive.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with amendment 9 provided by the Department, subject to approval by the Executive.

The Committee considered the proposed amendment to Clause 2.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with amendment 6 provided by the Department.

The Committee considered the proposed amendments to Clause 3.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that it is content with amendment 7 and amendment 8 provided by the Department.

No amendments were proposed to Clauses 4, 5, 6 or 7.

The Committee commenced its formal clause by clause consideration of the Rural Needs Bill.

Clause 1 – Duty of public authorities to consider rural needs

Question put and agreed: That the Committee is content with Clause 1 as per the wording of the Departmental amendments which are subject to Executive approval.

Clause 2 – Guidance, advice and information, etc.

Question put and agreed: That the Committee is content with Clause 2 as per the wording of the Departmental amendment.

Clause 3 – Monitoring and reporting

Question put and agreed: That the Committee is content with Clause 3 as per the wording of the Departmental amendments.

Clause 4 – Co-operation with other bodies

Question put and agreed: That the Committee is content with Clause 4 as drafted.

Clause 5 – Commencement

Question put and agreed: That the Committee is content with Clause 5 as drafted.

Clause 6 – Interpretation

Question put and agreed: That the Committee is content with Clause 6 as drafted.

Clause 7 – Short title

Question put and agreed: That the Committee is content with Clause 7 as drafted.

10.29 a.m. *Mr McCrea joined the meeting.*

10.29 a.m. *Mr McCarthy left the meeting.*

Schedule

Question put and agreed: That the Committee is content with the amendment to insert a Schedule as per the wording of the Departmental amendment.

Long Title

Question put and agreed: That the Committee is content with the Long Title of the Bill amended as per the wording of the Departmental amendment.

10.31 a.m. Mr McAleer left the meeting.

10.31 a.m. The meeting suspended.

10.33 p.m. The meeting resumed in Open Session with the following Members in attendance: Mr Irwin; Mr Anderson; Mr McAleer; Mr McCrea; and Mr McMullan.

6. SR 2015/399: The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2015/399 The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (Financial Assistance) Regulations (NI) 2015 and, subject to comment from the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objections to the rule.

7. SR 2015/408: The Common Agricultural Policy (Review of Single Common Market Organisations (SCMO) Decisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015

Agreed: The Committee considered SR 2015/408 The Common Agricultural Policy (Review of Single Common Market Organisations Decisions) Regulations (NI) 2015 and, subject to comment from the Examiner of Statutory Rules, has no objections to the rule.

8. Written Briefing DARD: Rural White Paper Action Plan – Annual Progress Report

The Committee noted a written briefing on the Annual Progress Report on the Rural White Paper Action Plan.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to DARD to request details of the decision to suspend the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety programme to increase the procurement of fresh, local sustainable food into Health and Social Care facilities (Action Number 80 in the Rural White Paper Action Plan).

9. Forward Work Programme

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment in order to arrange a joint meeting to receive an update on the performance of both Departments against the recommendations in the Going for Growth Report.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to request that the potential consequences of a decision to leave the EU for the NI farming sector be covered by officials during their oral briefing on EU issues on 02 February 2016.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that details of a potential visit to see the AHWNI database be forwarded to Members.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

10. Correspondence

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from DARD, dated 21 December 2015, informing Members that the Department intends to introduce a new contract TB testing services delivered by veterinary practices.

Noted: The Committee noted correspondence from the Minister of Finance and Personnel, dated 17 December 2015, advising the Chair of the Committee for Finance and Personnel that the Executive has agreed Budget 2016-17 and confirming that the reduction to be applied to the non-protected departmental baselines, including the new Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, is 5.7%.

Noted: The Committee noted the AFBI Annual Report and Accounts for 2014/15.

Noted: The Committee noted the updated DARD Evidence and Innovation Strategy for 2015-17.

Noted: The Committee noted the DARD Investment Strategy Report for December 2015.

10.46 a.m. The meeting suspended.

11.03 p.m. The meeting resumed in Open Session with the following Members in attendance: Mr Irwin; Mr Anderson; Mr McCrea; and Mr Milne.

11. Oral Briefing Rivers Agency: Flooding Incidents

The following Rivers Agency officials joined the meeting at 11.03 a.m.

David Porter, Chief Executive, Rivers Agency
Jonathan McKee, Director of Business Development, Rivers Agency
Henry Robinson, SPTO Section Engineer, Department for Regional Development

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

11.09 a.m. Mr McAleer and Mr McMullan rejoined the meeting.

11.20 a.m. Mr Poots joined the meeting.

11.33 a.m. Mr McAleer left the meeting.

11.35 a.m. Mr McAleer rejoined the meeting.

11.54 a.m. Mr Poots left the meeting.

11.57 a.m. Mr Anderson left the meeting.

12.02 p.m. Mr McCarthy rejoined the meeting.

12.03 p.m. Mr McCrea left the meeting.

12.04 p.m. Mr McMullan left the meeting.

12.15 p.m. Mr McMullan rejoined the meeting.

12.19 p.m. The officials left the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister expressing concern about the impact of recent flooding incidents on rural communities and requesting that she appeal to the Executive to introduce a compensation scheme to assist farmers affected by the floods.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that individual Members may wish to visit the Craigavon site to see flood alleviation tools.

12. Written Briefing DARD: Flood Risk Management Plans

The Committee noted the 'Response to the Public Consultation on the draft Flood Risk Management Plans' published by DARD in late November 2015 and the three Flood Risk Management Plans (for North Eastern, North Western and Neagh Bann) published on 22 December 2015.

12.24 p.m. The meeting suspended.

3.03 p.m. The meeting resumed in Open Session with the following Members in attendance: Mr Irwin; Mr Anderson; Mr McMullan; Mr Poots; and Mr Swann.

13. Written Briefing RaISe: Fisheries Bill

The Committee considered two Bill papers provided by the Assembly Research Service.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to send paper NIAR 685/2015 'Fisheries Bill - Assessing the Costs' to the Department requesting a written response to the issues raised for meeting 26 January 2016.

14. Oral Briefing DARD: Fisheries Bill

The following Departmental officials joined the meeting at 3.05 p.m.

John Terrington, Fisheries Bill Team, DARD
Paddy Campbell, Sea Fisheries Policy, DARD

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

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Delegated Powers Memorandum for the Fisheries Bill to the Examiner of Statutory Rules, advising him of the Committee's decision to consider only Clause 6 of the Bill, and requesting his opinion on the Delegated Powers within the Bill.

3.18 p.m. Mr McAleer rejoined the meeting.

3.21 p.m. The officials left the meeting.

3.21 p.m. Mr McAleer left the meeting.

The Committee noted that, in addition to Clause 6, Members will also be required to consider Clause 18(1) and 19 of the Fisheries Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to table notices of intent that Clauses 1 to 5, 7 to 17 and 18(2) not stand part of the Bill.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Minister to co-sign the notices of intent that Clauses 1 to 5, 7 to 17 and 18(2) not stand part of the Bill in the name of both the Committee and the Minister.

15. Oral Briefing Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation (ANIFPO): Fisheries Bill

The following representative joined the meeting at 3.23 p.m.

Alan McCulla, Anglo-North Irish Fish Producers Organisation

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

3.25 p.m. Mr McCarthy rejoined the meeting.

3.25 p.m. Mr Anderson left the meeting.

3.26 p.m. Mr Swann left the meeting.

3.32 p.m. The representative left the meeting.

16. Oral Briefing DARD SL1: The Areas of Natural Constraint Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016

The following Departmental officials joined the meeting at 3.33 p.m.

Norman Fulton, Chief Agricultural Economist, DARD
Rosemary Agnew, Principal Officer, DARD

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

3.34 p.m. Mr McAleer rejoined the meeting.

Agreed: The Committee agreed that the SL1 moves to the next legislative stage.

3.42 p.m. The officials left the meeting.

17. AOB

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister expressing concern at the poor price paid to producers by supermarkets for locally grown produce.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Agri-Food Strategy Board expressing concern at the poor price paid to producers by supermarkets for locally grown produce and requesting that they address the issue during their presentation to the Committee.

18. Date and time of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development will take place on Tuesday 19 January 2016 at 1.30 p.m. in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

3.50 p.m. The meeting adjourned.

William Irwin, Chairperson, Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

19/02/2016

Date