



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

23 May 2024

Room 21, Parliament Buildings

Present: Tom Elliott MLA (Chairperson)
Declan McAleer MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
John Blair MLA
Nicola Brogan MLA
Tom Buchanan MLA
Patsy McGlone MLA
Áine Murphy MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

None

Apologies: William Irwin MLA
Michelle McIlveen MLA

In Attendance: Dr Janice Thompson, Assembly Clerk

Mrs Gillian Barker, Assistant Assembly Clerk

Mr Michael Greer, Clerical Supervisor

Deputy Chair, Mr Declan McAleer MLA opened the meeting deputising for Chair, Mr Tom Elliott MLA, who had sent apologies for the first hour of the meeting.

The Chair reminded Members of the ‘Declaration of Interests’ and asked 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.

The meeting opened in public session at 10.07 am

1. Apologies

William Irwin MLA

Michelle McIlveen MLA

2. Minutes

Minutes of 16 May 2024 were agreed; and it was agreed that they would be signed by the Chair once he joins the meeting.

3. Chairperson’s Business

The Deputy Chairperson advised Members that the PFSU in RalSe have requested the Committee share the Committee’s Response on the budget as agreed at the meeting of 16th May and sent to the Committee for Finance.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to forward the Response to PFSU in RalSe.

4. Matters Arising

The Deputy Chairperson advised that a response, dated 21 May 2024, had been received from the Department to the Committee’s letter dated 3 May 2024, requesting a written briefing on the Animal Welfare (Livestock Exports) Bill.

The response highlights that the Bill will remove Great Britain as a land bridge for export of livestock, meaning no livestock can be taken from Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland through Great Britain and onwards to mainland Europe for slaughter.

It is not a piece of legislation developed by the Department, nor has it been extended to include Northern Ireland. The Department will continue to review the progress of this Bill by engaging with colleagues in Defra, and the other devolved administrations.

The Bill has moved through the House of Commons into the House of Lords and is expected to receive Royal Assent at the end of May and come into force immediately after.

Agreed: The Committee noted the response.

The Committee considered correspondence dated 22 May 2024, from Minister Muir to The Speaker on Windsor Framework (Implementation) Regulations – Decision not to Exercise Direction and Control – Animal and Plant Diseases.

The correspondence stated that from 17 May 2024, the Secretary of State is exercising his discretion to not retain direction and control over functions concerned with disease awareness, disease preparedness and disease control in respect of both animal and plant health.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for further information and clarity on the precise details of the legislation that is now back in DAERA's control, in the context of letter received dated 23rd April 2024, outlining the 19 areas of EU legislation relevant to DAERA [listed in Annex 2] of the Windsor Framework.

Mr Patsy McGlone MLA joined the meeting at 10.12 am

The Committee was advised that Agenda Item 5 is now Agenda Item 14 in Tabled Papers – the Committee Team removed the Agenda Item as it was advised that papers were unlikely to be received from the Department, however they were received in time and added back into the Agenda.

5. Briefing from the Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs – Farm Sustainability Transition Payment Scheme.

The Chair welcomed the Departmental Officials:

- Dr Rosemary Agnew, Director of Agricultural Policy, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs; and
- Mr George Moffett, Deputy Director of Agricultural Policy, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

The Committee noted the following papers:

Briefing paper Farm Sustainability Payment Scheme.

The Committee received a briefing from the Officials regarding the Farm Sustainability Payment replacing the current Basic Payment Scheme, phased in over a 2-year period, commencing with the Farm Sustainability Transition Payment in 2025 and the full Farm Sustainability Payment in 2026.

There then followed a question and answer session and issues raised included concerns around the impact on around 1400 small Farm Business of 3 ha and under and their geographical spread.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Department regarding the geographical location of the 1400 small business farmers.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Royal Ulster Agriculture Society on holding such a successful Balmoral Show this year.

The Deputy Chair thanked the Officials for their briefing.

***The Officials remained in the meeting for Agenda Item 6 – 10.48 am
Mr Tom Elliott, MLA joined the meeting at 10.51 am.***

6. Briefing from The Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs - Carbon Foot printing Project.

The Deputy Chair welcomed the Departmental Officials:

- Dr Rosemary Agnew, Director of Agricultural Policy, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs; and
- Mr George Moffett, Deputy Director of Agricultural Policy, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

The Committee noted the following papers:

- Briefing paper from the Department – Carbon Footprinting Project.

The Committee received a briefing from the Officials and there then followed a question and answer session. The issues raised included the collection and measuring of carbon emissions, standardisation of methodologies, baseline footprinting, and the advice and training available through CAFRE across the sector.

Mr Tom Elliott MLA took the Chair after the briefing at 10.58 am

Mr John Blair MLA left the meeting at 11.12 am

Ms Áine Murphy MLA left the meeting at 11.17 am

Ms Áine Murphy MLA re-joined the meeting at 11.22 am

The Chair thanked the Officials for briefing the Committee.

The Officials remained in the meeting for Agenda Item 8 – 11.23 am

Ms Áine Murphy MLA left the meeting.

The meeting was suspended at 11.23 am

The meeting was convened at 11.31 am

7. SL1 Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.

The Chair welcomed the Departmental Officials to the meeting to provide some further information on this SL1. The Committee had previously considered the SL1 at their meetings on 2nd & 16th May 2024.

The Committee noted the following papers:

- The Clerk's Memo dated 29 April 2024;
- SL1 Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024; and
- Response from the Department, dated 21 May 2024,

The Committee further discussed the additional information received from the Department. The Committee noted the SR will remain as negative resolution as per the primary legislation under which the SR is being made.

Agreed: The Committee considered a proposal by the Department to make a Statutory Rule: “Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024.” and agrees that it is content for the Department to make the rule.

The Committee was advised that Agenda Item 8 is now Agenda Item 12 in Tabled Papers – the Committee Team removed the Agenda Item as it was advised that papers were unlikely to be received from the Department, however they were received in time and added back into the Agenda.

8. SL1 – The Farm Sustainability Transition Payment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.

The Chair declared a potential future interest in the new farm sustainability transition payment scheme. The Chair welcomed the Departmental Officials:

- Dr Rosemary Agnew, Director of Agricultural Policy, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs; and
- Mr George Moffett, Deputy Director of Agricultural Policy, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

The Committee noted the following papers:

- Clerk’s Memo dated 13 May 2024; and
- SL1 - Farm Sustainability Transition Payment Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.

The Officials briefed the Committee and there then followed a question and answer session. The Committee had already discussed the main issues regarding the Farm Sustainability Transition Payment scheme at Agenda Item 5, however they agreed to propose to the Department that the eligible size definition in the SL1 should be revised, as being 3 Ha or less, and not 5 Ha as currently in the SL1.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the Minister that he re-considers the increase in the eligible land size to 5 Ha and that it should be 3 Ha.

The Officials left the meeting at 11.53 am

9. DAERA Written Briefing: Inland Angling Licencing and Permit Policy - Inland Angling Licencing and Permit Policy

The Committee considered the written briefing:

- The Departmental Briefing dated 10 May 2024.

The written briefing advised that the Department has formalised its policy in relation to inland angling licencing and permits to ensure a coherent application of the powers under the Fisheries Act (NI) 1966 and Fisheries Regulations (NI) 2014.

The Department is currently working to progress a wider review on the DAERA Inland Angling Licensing and Permit Regime by the end of 2024.

Agreed: The Committee noted they will receive an oral briefing from the Department in due course; and agreed to receive a briefing from the Angling Groups.

10. Correspondence

Members considered correspondence, dated 15th May 2024, from the Department providing a summary of responses to the UK-Wide consultation on contractual relationships in the UK fresh produce industry.

Agreed: Members agreed to note.

Members considered copied correspondence from the House of Lords EU Affairs Sub Committee on the Windsor Framework on the labelling of organic pet food, dated 16th May 2024.

Agreed: Members agreed to note.

Members considered copied correspondence from House of Lords EU Affairs Sub Committee on the Windsor Framework on animal health requirements when travelling within the Union, dated 16th May 2024.

The letter highlights that the regulation refers to the movement of horses and other equine animals as well as captive birds, dogs, cats, and ferrets and requests information as to the Government's assessment of the impact of this Regulation on pet owners.

Agreed: Members agreed to note.

Members considered copied correspondence, dated 16th May 2024, from the Clerk to the Committee for Finance highlighting correspondence from the House of Lords EU Affairs Sub Committee on the Windsor Framework on the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.

Agreed: Members agreed to note as this issue was previously considered at our meeting on 09th May 2024.

Members considered correspondence, dated 20th May 2024, from the Department forwarding a presentation by Dr Pete Falloon of the Met Office, which was given at the Annual George Scott Memorial Lecture in Queen's University entitled 'What does Climate Change mean for the UK food system?'

Agreed: Members agreed to note.

Members considered correspondence dated, 21st May 2024, from The Minister of State for Food, Farming and Fisheries to the Chair of the EU Affairs Sub Committee on The Windsor Framework regarding Marketing Standards for the Fruit and Vegetables Sector, Certain Processed Fruit and Vegetable Products and the Bananas Sector.

Agreed: Members agreed to note.

Members considered correspondence from three Mushroom Producer Organisations: Commercial Mushroom Growers, Northway Mushrooms and the Mushroom Producer Organisation highlighting their issues on the potential changes to the Fruit and Vegetables Scheme in Northern Ireland.

The Committee noted it had considered a letter from the Minister at its meeting on 11 April 2024, regarding his plans to consult on a proposal for a small Assembly Bill, which will allow DAERA to amend two legacy EU CMO Schemes, the Fruit and Vegetable Aid Scheme and Agri-food Information and Promotion Schemes. The Department's consultation started on 3rd April and closes on 27th May.

Agreed: The Committee noted they will be briefed by the Department once the consultation has closed.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to invite the Mushroom Producers to brief the Committee on the same day as the departmental briefing. **Draft Forward Work Programme**

The Committee noted the draft forward work programme through to 4 July 2024.

11. See Agenda Item 8

12. Budget 2024 – 25

The Committee noted the Budget Paper from the Minister of Finance for next week's Vote on the Budget debate. They noted a significant amount of the document deals with context – the economy, the budget process, the timeline for setting the budget, etc. and that there is less detail on departmental budgets.

Agreed: The Committee noted it will receive a briefing on the Budget 2024-25 at their meeting 6 June 2024.

13. See Agenda Item 5

14. Any Other Business

There were no other items of business

15. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting of the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee is on Thursday 30 May 2024, 10.00 am in Room 21.

The Meeting adjourned at 12.07 pm

Signature:

Tom Elliott, Chairperson

Dated