



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

Minutes of Proceedings

13 June 2024

CAFRE, Manor Suite, Greenmount, Antrim

Present: Tom Elliott MLA (Chairperson)
Declan McAleer MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
John Blair MLA
William Irwin MLA
Patsy McGlone MLA
Michelle McIlveen MLA

Present by Video or Teleconference:

None

Apologies: Nicola Brogan MLA
Tom Buchanan MLA
Áine Murphy MLA

In Attendance: Dr Janice Thompson, Assembly Clerk
Mrs Gillian Barker, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Mr Michael Greer, Clerical Supervisor
Mr Damien Brown, Clerical Officer

The Meeting Opened in Public Session at 10.05 am

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.

Mr Declan McAleer MLA declared an interest at Agenda Item 8 'Oral Briefing from CAFRE – an Overview'. Mr McAleer MLA has completed one of CAFRE's business development courses.

1. Apologies

As noted above.

2. Chairperson's Business

The Chair advised Members of a memo from Michael Cairns (Acting) Head of Communications highlighting an issue with Members sharing Zoom links and of the risk of audio feedback in Committee rooms from devices.

Noted: Members noted the memo.

The Chair informed Members that a survey has issued from Mary-Ellen Nutt. Head of Information Technology. All Members are asked to ensure that they and their relevant staff complete the survey by the extended deadline of 14th June. The Chair encouraged Members to complete the survey.

Noted: Members noted the memo.

The Chair informed Members that the Committee has received a request from John Thompson, Chair of Animal Health and Welfare Northern Ireland (AHWNI) requesting to meet with the Chair and Deputy Chair.

Agreed: Members agreed for an informal meeting to be arranged.

The Chair informed Members that he had received a phone call from the Minister advising that he wishes to brief the Committee on bTB and Lough Neagh issues, after the general election on the 4th July.

Agreed: Members agreed to arrange an extra meeting during the recess period. Monday or Tuesday 8th or 9th July are to be considered.

3. Minutes

Minutes of 6 June 2024 were signed and agreed to be published.

4. Matters Arising

The Committee considered a response from the Department regarding clarity on the NI Food Strategy Framework, in reply to its letter of 31st May 2024, on how it will deal with concerns around lower environmental, food and health standards which could arise from trade deals that import produce to Northern Ireland.

Agreed: Members noted the response.

The Committee considered a response from the Department, in reply to its letter of 10th May 2024, regarding issues around the content of a letter from the Chair of the House of Lords (HoL) European Affairs Sub-Committee on the Windsor framework to Gareth Davies MP, Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury concerning the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

Agreed: Members noted the response.

5. Oral Briefings from RalSe – (i) Innovate (UK) Contracts for Innovation (formerly SBRI) and (ii) Movement of Animals 6 Month Residency Requirement

The Chair welcomed the following RalSe Officials to the meeting:

- Mr Mark Allen, RalSe; and
- Ms Olivia Davis - a post-graduate student who has been working with RalSe

The Committee noted the following papers in connection with the briefings:

- The Innovate UK Contracts for Innovations (formerly SBRI); and
- Movement of Cattle, Six Month Residency Requirement.

The RalSe Officials briefed the Committee and there then followed a question and answer session on both papers.

The Committee thanked Mark and Olivia for their presentations and wish Olivia every success for her future.

The Department Officials joined the meeting at 10.30 am

6. Oral Briefing from The Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs - NIEA Update on Ammonia Planning Applications

The Chair welcomed the following DAERA Officials from the Natural Environmental Division [NED], to the meeting:

- David Reid, NIEA Chief Executive;
- Lara Strutt, Director (NED);
- Sara McGuckin, Head of Natural Science (NED);
- Mark Hammond, Head of Natural Environment Operations (NED); and
- Keith Finegan, Principal Air Quality Branch (NED).

The Committee noted the following papers for this item:

- NIEA Update of Ammonia Planning and Consultations, dated 6 June;
- Departmental response to the Committee, dated 29 March 2024, regarding Ammonia Strategy.

The Officials briefed the Committee and provided an up date on the Ammonia Planning Applications since the briefing on the 14th March and the challenges for the future.

NIEA Officials delivered a PowerPoint presentation to Members regarding Ammonia measurement at sites within Northern Ireland and the impact on biodiversity of excessive levels.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to write to the NIEA on the issues raised during the briefing.

Agreed: The Committee noted that the Departmental Officials offered to return to further update the Committee in the autumn.

The Chair thanked the Officials for their briefing.

Mr Patsy McGlone MLA left the meeting at 11.45 am

Mr Patsy McGlone re-joined the meeting at 11.57 am

The Departmental Officials left the meeting at 11.52 am

Agenda Item 13 was a tabled paper from the Department slotted into the Agenda after Item 6.

13. Departmental Written Briefing – Implementation of the New Northern Ireland Country Code Prefix on Livestock Identification tags.

The Committee noted the written briefing regarding EU Animal Health Law (AHL) requirements to change to the new country code prefix for Northern Ireland, which forms part of the unique identification number for all livestock. The new tags will be available from tag suppliers when launched on week commencing 24 June 2024.

The Committee noted one change for identification, registration and movement [IRM] under AHL, requires livestock to be identified under a two letter alpha code, or three-digit numeric code, unique to the country of origin. The codes must be approved international standards codes known as ISO codes.

Agreed: Members noted the written briefing from the Department.

7. SR 2024/0000 The Fisheries Act 2020 (Scheme for Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024

The Committee noted the following papers regarding the SR:

- The SL5, Explanatory Memorandum and the draft Statutory Rule; and
- The Clerk's Memo on the SL1.

The Committee noted that the purpose of the SR is to establish a scheme for the giving of financial assistance under paragraph 3(1) of Schedule 6 to the Fisheries Act 2020. That financial assistance must be given in accordance with a scheme established by regulations. The aim of the scheme is that the fisheries, aquaculture, seafood sectors and coastal communities will benefit from the introduction of this new scheme.

The Committee noted that there has been no changes to policy content since the SL1 was submitted to the Committee on 16 May 2024. The SR will be subject to draft affirmative resolution procedure and will come into operation on a date following the Assembly motion to affirm it.

The Chair put the formal question on the SR to the Committee:

Agreed: The Committee for Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs considered, SR 2024/0000 The Fisheries Act 2020 (Scheme for Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 and that the Committee agreed that the rule is approved by the Assembly.

8. Oral Briefing – CAFRE an Overview.

The Committee welcomed the CAFRE Officials:

- Mr Martin McKendry, Director CAFRE; and
- Mr Paul McHenry, Head of Knowledge Advisory Services.

The Committee noted the following papers for this item:

- An Overview of CAFRE and its functions.

The Officials briefed the Committee on the work of CAFRE, the role of each Campus - the Agriculture, Food & Equine programmes and the challenges facing the college in the future.

There then followed a question and answer session and the Committee noted that there would be a tour of the dairy facilities as soon as the meeting was adjourned.

The Departmental Officials left the meeting at 12.31 pm

9. Correspondence

The Committee considered correspondence from the Competition and Markets Authority providing Members with details of Groceries Adjudicator.

The Committee considered correspondence from Hennessy Ward, dated 7th June, proposing a solution to the Blue Green Algae issue at Lough Neagh using two complementary technologies – use of Hypochlorous Acid and also a new method of producing reactive species of oxygen known as Low Energy Plasma Technology.

The Committee noted that at last week's briefing the Minister stated he was setting up a unit to consider such enquiries / proposals.

Agreed: The Committee agreed to note these proposals and to forward the correspondence to the Department; and write to Mr David Ward informing him of this action.

The Committee considered the sixteenth Report from the Examiner of Statutory Rules. The Committee noted there was nothing relevant to this Committee.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department, dated 7th June 2024, advising that the Minister has agreed to UKG plans to make a small technical amendment to devolved Assimilated Directive EU 1144/2014, which governs agri-food information provision and promotion measures.

The proposed change to 1144/2014 is a technical consequential one and will simply replace a reference to current procurement legislation with a reference to the new Procurement Act 2023.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence.

The Committee considered correspondence from Minister Muir, dated 7th June, outlining his intent to make a statement to the Assembly on the NSMC on 11th June 2024. The advance copy of Minister Muir's oral statement was sent to Members on Monday evening, 10th June.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence.

The Committee considered correspondence, dated 7 June 2024, from the Clerk to the Committee for Infrastructure - a copy of their letter to DAERA Minister asking for his plans in relation to the issues raised in the BBC Spotlight Programme on Lough Neagh.

Agreed: The Committee noted the correspondence and agreed to ask that Committee to keep AERA Committee updated.

The Committee considered the Seventeenth Report by the Examiner of Statutory Rules (ESR), dated 11 June. The Report contained the following SRs:

- Subject to the draft affirmative resolution procedure - Draft S.R.: The Fisheries Act 2020 (Scheme for Financial Assistance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024; which was considered earlier in the meeting and
- Subject to the negative resolution procedure - S.R. 2024/115: The Agriculture (Student Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024.

The Committee noted that the ESR has drawn no special attention to these rules.

Agreed: The Committee noted the Seventeenth ESR Report.

10. Draft Forward Work Programme

The Committee considered the Forward Work Plan and noted there will potentially be added an extra meeting for 8th or 9th July for the Minister to brief the Committee on a number of specific issues.

Agreed: The Committee agreed the draft Forward Work Programme and that the team will continue to plan for September and October.

11. Any Other Business

None

12. Date, Time and Place of next meeting

The next meeting of the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee is on Thursday 20 June 2024, at 9.30 am Room 21, Parliament Buildings

The Meeting adjourned at 12.35 pm

Tom Elliott, Chairperson