

# **ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 7 June 2006

Session 2

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## ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

### 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting 2006, Session 2

#### CONVENER

\*Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)

#### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

#### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

\*Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)

\*Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

\*Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP)

\*Maureen Macmillan (Highland and Islands) (Lab)

\*Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab)

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

\*Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

#### COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

\*attended

#### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Mark Brough

#### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Katherine Wright

#### ASSISTANT CLERK

Jenny Goldsmith

#### LOCATION

Committee Room 2



## Scottish Parliament

### Environment and Rural Development Committee

*Wednesday 7 June 2006*

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 11:51*]

#### Item in Private

**The Convener (Sarah Boyack):** I remind everyone to have their mobile phones and BlackBerrys turned to silent. Apologies have been received from Nora Radcliffe, who has other commitments in Aberdeen.

The first item is to ask colleagues to agree to take agenda item 5—our draft food supply chain inquiry report—in private. Are colleagues happy with that?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Subordinate Legislation

### Seed Potatoes (Fees) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2006 (SSI 2006/264)

**The Convener:** Agenda item 2 is subordinate legislation. The Subordinate Legislation Committee has considered the regulations and has no comments to make.

As members have no comments to make, are they content with the regulations and happy to make no recommendation to the Parliament?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

### Pesticides, Code of Practice for Using Plant Protection Products in Scotland (SE/2006/83)

**The Convener:** Agenda item 3 is another piece of subordinate legislation. The draft code of practice is subject to annulment. The Subordinate Legislation Committee has considered the draft code and has no comments to make.

As members have no comments to make, are they content with the draft code and happy to make no recommendation to the Parliament?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Work Programme

**The Convener:** Agenda item 4 is our work programme. Colleagues have a paper from me, inviting the committee to consider options for several issues that we have said that we will pursue. We are extremely busy with the legislative programme for the rest of the parliamentary session; however, we have some scope to address other priorities.

First, can we agree to make a bid to the Conveners Group for a committee debate slot on our inquiry into the food supply chain at the first opportunity?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** We are unanimous on that.

Secondly, we need to consider our future work programme. We have agreed to consider undertaking further work on sustainable development. I suggest that, as part of our scrutiny of the impact of Executive bills, we take evidence from the Minister for Environment and Rural Development on 21 June, when he will come before us to discuss European issues. I also suggest that we ask the Scottish Parliament information centre to carry out some research over the summer on other legislatures that are mainstreaming sustainable development. We have agreed to take oral evidence on that later in the year, and Mark Ruskell is keen for us to involve the Cabinet sub-committee on sustainable development in our considerations.

**Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green):** Yes, I think that there needs to be scrutiny of how the sub-committee has been working.

**The Convener:** Okay. If we get some work done over the summer, that will put us in a better position to schedule an evidence session, having already taken evidence from the minister on 21 June. Are colleagues happy with that proposal?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**Richard Lochhead (Moray) (SNP):** I have one other issue to raise. We previously discussed briefly the idea of appointing reporters on some subjects. I am not sure that we have pursued that, but there are some subjects that the committee may wish to discuss at some point, which Parliament has not had the chance to discuss—for example, the role of rural schools in rural development and the affordable housing crisis in rural Scotland. Those are both huge issues throughout Scotland, but I am unaware of any parliamentary committee having had the opportunity to conduct inquiries into them.

I think that those issues are important. Perhaps at our away day we can discuss how to build them into our work programme, whether we have the opportunity to do so during this session and whether there is a role for reporters at any point.

**The Convener:** We will have the opportunity to return to the issue at our away day. If any other members support those proposals, bearing in mind our workload, we can review the position at that time.

**Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab):** I think that that is an untenable proposition, given what we already know is ahead of us over the next 10 months. Other committees are looking into the issues relating to rural schools, and the housing issue is certainly getting plenty of ventilation both in the Executive and in the committees of the Parliament. Given the complexity of the issues, to charge one or two people to undertake what would be a serious piece of work is, as I said, an unrealistic proposition.

**The Convener:** We do not have agreement on that suggestion, but it is a matter to which we can return at our away day if members have firm proposals.

Thirdly, we need to consider how we view scrutiny of the environment and rural affairs budget. We have a long list of issues that we could discuss, but the clerk has suggested a shortlist. There is strong agreement among the committee that we should scrutinise the Scottish Environment Protection Agency—especially how it is coping with efficiency savings through its budget. A lot of statutory instruments relating to environmental regulation have come before us this year, and members probably all have an agenda in considering how SEPA is carrying out its work. Are colleagues happy with that as our main budget scrutiny focus?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** That does not prevent us from dealing with other issues when we have the budget in front of us; this is just about how we will target our energies.

Fourthly, at our previous meeting we agreed to consider possible future inquiry work. I know that members have a strong interest in both energy and the marine environment, and there is probably unanimity on our doing a piece of work on marine issues. I suggest that the clerks scope out what we might do on marine issues, and we can discuss that in the early autumn. Are colleagues happy with that?

*Members indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** The final issue for us to address is our away day. We have discussed the matter informally several times. I propose that we submit

a bid to the Conveners Group for resources to enable the committee to have an away day at which we can arrange our future work programme, target our time effectively and begin to explore the legacy issues that we want to discuss.

I know that there is strong support among members for combining our away day with a visit to the island of Arran specifically to address crofting issues and a petition that has been referred to us, which relates to Lamlash and issues to do with the coast around there. We would need permission from the Conveners Group to get the resources to do that. We can ask the clerks to put together a committee bid that we can then put to the Conveners Group. Are colleagues happy with that?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** Excellent.

11:59

*Meeting continued in private until 12:29.*





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