

# **ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

Wednesday 28 June 2006

Session 2

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## ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

23<sup>rd</sup> Meeting 2006, Session 2

### CONVENER

\*Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)

### DEPUTY CONVENER

\*Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (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 (Tweddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

\*attended

### CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Mark Brough

### SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Katherine Wright

### ASSISTANT CLERK

Jenny Goldsmith

### LOCATION

Committee Room 6



# Scottish Parliament

## Environment and Rural Development Committee

Wednesday 28 June 2006

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 10:03]

### Petition

#### Food Chain (Supermarkets) (PE807)

**The Convener (Sarah Boyack):** Welcome to our 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting in 2006. I remind everyone to turn their phones and BlackBerries to silent mode. No apologies have been submitted this morning. I welcome members of the press and public to the meeting.

Agenda item 1 is petition PE807, which is a new petition for the committee. The petition, which was submitted by James Mackie, relates to the influence of supermarkets in the food chain. Colleagues will have received a paper from the clerk on the petition, as well as relevant correspondence to the Public Petitions Committee—the history of the petition. The petition covers much of the ground that we dealt with in our recent inquiry into the food supply chain. We need to decide today what to do with it.

We have dealt with everything relating to the food supply chain inquiry in our report. The additional elements relating to food safety and chemicals are probably less relevant to us because they are more of a health issue. The question is the extent to which members think that the Food Standards Agency Scotland has dealt with the issues. For our part, if we send our report to the petitioner, we should be able to close the petition. However, the question is whether members think that we should send the petition to the Health Committee.

**Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP):** We have a locus here because we passed secondary legislation about pesticide levels in crops. Chemicals and extending the life of food are related to that. If the Health Committee is considering looking at the chemicals that are used to extend the life of food on the shelves, we should say to it that those issues might be related. We do not know.

**Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** That is a moot point. There is a crossover: I would think that chemicals in food on the shelves would be a health issue, whereas pesticides in the field would be an agriculture issue.

**Rob Gibson:** But pesticide residues in food—

**Maureen Macmillan:** That is right.

**Rob Gibson:** It is one of the big issues.

**Maureen Macmillan:** I am concerned that, if we pass the petition to the Health Committee, that committee will pass it back to us and it will become a sort of football that nobody wants to deal with. It probably ought to be dealt with.

**The Convener:** That is why I raised the FSA issue. The petition has been addressed as far as the Public Petitions Committee is concerned.

**Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD):** I thought that the correspondence with the FSA had answered the petitioner's concerns. However, for the sake of due form, it might be better for the Health Committee to say that than for us to say it.

**Mr Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con):** I agree. We did a thorough job as far as we went in our inquiry, but issues such as this should be dealt with by the Health Committee. It should be explained to that committee that the petition is its responsibility now.

**The Convener:** I agree. Rob Gibson's point about pesticides is right. We have talked about wider health implications. The issue of pesticides concerns us because it is about agriculture and soil issues, whereas extending the life of food on the shelf relates more to public health. Do we agree to send the petitioner our report on the food supply chain and to forward the petition to the Health Committee on the ground that lengthening the life of food on the supermarket shelf is more of a public health issue?

**Members indicated agreement.**

## Subordinate Legislation

### **Common Agricultural Policy (Wine) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2006 (SSI 2006/311)**

### **Seed (Registration, Licensing and Enforcement) (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (SSI 2006/313)**

### **Plant Health (Potatoes) (Scotland) Order 2006 (SSI 2006/319)**

### **Animals and Animal Products (Import and Export) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2006 (SSI 2006/335)**

### **Avian Influenza (Slaughter and Vaccination) (Scotland) Regulations 2006 (SSI 2006/337)**

### **Sea Fishing (Restriction on Days at Sea) (Scotland) Order 2006 (SSI 2006/341)**

10:07

**The Convener:** We have six negative instruments to consider under agenda item 2. Members will note from their papers that the Subordinate Legislation Committee has considered the instruments and has submitted comments on the first four. Members have a copy of that committee's comments. I shall take the instruments in order. Does anyone have any comments on the Common Agricultural Policy (Wine) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2006?

**Members:** No.

**The Convener:** The second instrument is the Seed (Registration, Licensing and Enforcement) (Scotland) Regulations 2006. Are there any comments?

**Members:** No.

**The Convener:** How about the Plant Health (Potatoes) (Scotland) Order 2006?

**Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green):** I had a query about that one. What implications does the chemical treatment of infected potato shaws have for organic producers? It would be nice to clarify that with the minister. I had a further query, which I have solved. I was unsure what 0.1 hectare was. I was reading the committee papers on the train and, before I lost the will to live, I wondered whether that area might catch some small allotments. However, it will not, because 0.1 hectare is 1,000m<sup>2</sup> and allotment plots are generally 50m<sup>2</sup> to 250m<sup>2</sup>. I just wanted to impress the committee with that.

**The Convener:** Duly impressed. That is on the record.

**Rob Gibson:** I have a question relating to spray drift. When we talk about genetically modified crops and non-GM crops, we talk about separation distances. Is there any way in which the instrument can influence how organic or other growers are affected by the arrival of unwanted drift?

**Nora Radcliffe:** The only reason farmers spray neighbouring crops is because there is some virulent disease in them. They would rather deal with the virulent disease than not deal with it.

**The Convener:** Before we get too technical, I suggest that we ask the Executive for information on the points that have been raised about organics and about the application of chemicals to prevent potatoes being destroyed or infected.

**Nora Radcliffe:** I thought that I would read in the Executive note that there are reasonable checks and balances.

**The Convener:** Rob Gibson is questioning whether there are reasonable checks and balances.

**Rob Gibson:** Yes, I am. It would be helpful to have a little explanation. I do not oppose what the Executive is saying and I am sure that it has drafted the order in a sensible fashion, but it is always good to know.

**Nora Radcliffe:** Dot the i's and cross the t's.

**The Convener:** I presume that members' questions are for information and that we are not suggesting that we hold up approval of the order. Is that correct?

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Does anyone have any comments on the Animals and Animal Products (Import and Export) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2006?

**Members:** No.

**The Convener:** The Avian Influenza (Slaughter and Vaccination) (Scotland) Regulations 2006 are quite important as they implement a European Union directive. We welcome them.

**Members indicated agreement.**

**The Convener:** Are there any comments on the Sea Fishing (Restriction on Days at Sea) (Scotland) Order 2006?

**Mr Brocklebank:** I understand that the order is part of European restrictions on Scottish vessels, so I am not sure what we can say about it. It has come to us as a Scottish statutory instrument, but it is outwith our control, is it not?

**The Convener:** It is basically guidance for fishing communities. It is good that it has come to the committee because it means that it is being looked at. Do members have any detailed comments on the order?

**Members:** No.

**The Convener:** Do members agree that we have no comments on the instruments apart from those already noted, and that we are content with the instruments and happy to make no recommendation to Parliament?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Proposed Aquaculture and Fisheries Bill

10:12

**The Convener:** Agenda item 3 concerns the proposed aquaculture and fisheries bill. We are nearing the end of the parliamentary term and we understand that the bill is likely to be introduced tomorrow. The Parliamentary Bureau will not be able to refer the bill formally to a lead committee until after the summer recess but, given the nature of the bill, we expect to be designated as lead committee for stage 1. The clerks have suggested that we issue a general call for evidence now, so that people have the whole summer recess to read the bill and to make comments. That is longer than normal, but it would be healthy to issue the call now and we have the opportunity to do it. Should the bill come to this committee, I propose that we attempt to take evidence over a series of five meetings from late September. That would give the clerks time to process all the comments and have a paper on the consideration of witnesses ready for the start of next term.

Do members have any comments?

**Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab):** That sounds perfectly sensible.

**The Convener:** The only other thing to suggest is that we receive a briefing from Executive officials before we get into the oral evidence programme. Sometimes we have such briefings in private; sometimes we have them in public. I have discussed the matter with the clerks and we have concluded that it would probably be preferable to do the briefing in public because there are quite a few background issues to the bill—what is in it and what is not in it. It would be useful to have on record at the start of the process the thought that has gone into the construction of the bill.

**Rob Gibson:** I am happy with that.

**The Convener:** Are colleagues happy with that?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

**The Convener:** We shall come back with a detailed set of witnesses at our next meeting in September. That will give us time to see who has given evidence and who the key players are. I suggest that we consider that report in private at that meeting, as is common when we debate who we want to come before us. Are colleagues happy about that?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

10:15

*Meeting continued in private until 12:28.*





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