



OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

Wednesday 4 November 2020

Session 5



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Wednesday 4 November 2020

CONTENTS

| | Col. |
|---|-------------|
| DECISION ON TAKING BUSINESS IN PRIVATE | 1 |
| EUROPEAN UNION (WITHDRAWAL) ACT 2018 | 2 |
| Plant Health (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020..... | 2 |
| Plant Health (Amendment) (No 2) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 | 2 |
| Common Organisation of the Markets in Agricultural Products (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) (No 2) Regulations 2020 | 2 |
| Common Organisation of the Markets in Agricultural Products (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 | 4 |
| Common Organisation of the Markets in Agricultural Products (Producer Organisations and Wine) (Amendment etc) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 | 4 |

RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE
28th Meeting 2020, Session 5

CONVENER

*Edward Mountain (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Maureen Watt (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Peter Chapman (North East Scotland) (Con)

*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

*Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP)

*Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP)

*Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP)

*Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con)

*Mike Rumbles (North East Scotland) (LD)

*Colin Smyth (South Scotland) (Lab)

*Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Graham Simpson (Central Scotland) (Con) (Committee Substitute)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Steve Farrell

LOCATION

The Sir Alexander Fleming Room (CR3)

Scottish Parliament

Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee

Wednesday 4 November 2020

[The Convener opened the meeting at 10:00]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Edward Mountain): Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the committee's 28th meeting in 2020. I ask those present in the room to ensure that their mobile phones are on silent. The meeting will be conducted in a hybrid format, with some members participating remotely.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on taking business in private. The committee is asked to consider taking items 4 and 5 in private, which will allow the committee to discuss its approach to the Scottish Government's forthcoming climate change plan and draft correspondence to the Scottish Government on financial scrutiny by the committee. Are members agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018

Plant Health (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020

Plant Health (Amendment) (No 2) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020

Common Organisation of the Markets in Agricultural Products (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) (No 2) Regulations 2020

10:01

The Convener: Item 2 is the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. We have received consent notifications in relation to three United Kingdom statutory instruments, as detailed on the agenda. Those instruments are being laid in the UK Parliament in relation to the withdrawal act. Members will note that two of them, which relate to plant health regulations, are category B, which means that more significant policy issues are involved and that powers to legislate have been transferred. Several issues have been identified in our briefing papers detailing the nature and extent of the provisions. Do members have any comments?

Stewart Stevenson (Banffshire and Buchan Coast) (SNP): I am content to support the proposals before us, but it would be appropriate to put on record that I—and others, I suspect—retain relatively substantial concerns about the operation of phytosanitary certifications between Northern Ireland and Great Britain and, in particular, Scotland. This is an issue for food generally—fish, potatoes and so on—and is potentially an issue for my constituents and the constituents of other members. That reminds me that I should declare that I own a registered agricultural holding jointly with my spouse, from which I take no income.

The papers before us make the point that I mention. The point is also made that the Scottish and UK Governments continue to discuss the issue, and we are advised that there are not anticipated to be long-term problems. Nonetheless, in advance of seeing the final outcome, it is important simply to record that concerns remain.

Emma Harper (South Scotland) (SNP): My comment is on the back of Stewart Stevenson's. Paragraph 29 in the committee paper talks about a phased approach to checking plants and says that "checks would only be performed on certain high-risk plants."

From reading the papers and looking at the various issues, I am concerned about protecting potato crops. Eight diseases of potatoes are mentioned, one of which is caused by the potato flea beetle. The beetle comes from North America, but we are already seeing it in Spain and Portugal. We know how important seed potatoes are for Scotland—they are a £200 million industry—and there were issues raised, last week I think, about potatoes going to Ireland. We should see how this progresses to make sure that checks are conducted in a way that protects our valuable seed potato industry.

Oliver Mundell (Dumfriesshire) (Con): I am happy for us to consent to the regulations and note the comments. It is important, though, that we do not scaremonger. These are technical regulations and, although it is important to see how they progress and ask questions about them, to suggest that there will be widespread issues as a result of them is probably taking things a bit too far.

The Convener: Stewart Stevenson was shaking his head. I think that it is a disagreement rather than an inability to hear.

As Stewart Stevenson has made a declaration of interest, I declare that I have an agricultural interest in a family farming partnership in Moray.

I have comments relating to the 11 issues that are raised in the committee's briefing paper. Even if we do not object to the SIs, which I think would be wrong, it would be useful to ask questions of the Government. If we submit those questions to the Government, we can consider its response. We should also address the issues that have been raised by Stewart Stevenson, Emma Harper and Oliver Mundell.

Can members all hear what is being said? I think that there are problems with sound quality. Stewart Stevenson is saying that there is a problem. Richard Lyle, have you got a problem with sound? I will keep talking. Is the sound getting any better? Does anyone else, apart from Stewart Stevenson, have a problem with it? Raise your hand if you have a problem. Are members content to continue? If you are not content to continue with the quality as it is, I will suspend the meeting to sort the sound quality out. Could members use the chat function to make any comments? I see a raised hand from Richard Lyle.

Richard Lyle (Uddingston and Bellshill) (SNP): Sorry, convener. I did not intend to comment. I just moved my hand.

The Convener: That is all right. It is better that I call you than ignore you. Angus, did you want comment?

Angus MacDonald (Falkirk East) (SNP): Thanks, convener. It seems that the problem is just from the committee room. I can hear everyone who is remote without a problem.

The Convener: Okay. Our sound technicians are looking at the issue and will do what they can, but I suggest that we push on.

Are we content to write to the Scottish Government to confirm our consent to the UK regulations and highlight the points that have been raised? Stewart Stevenson is saying yes.

Emma Harper: I did not hear what Oliver Mundell said, but I picked up the word "scaremonger". Phytosanitary conditions and the safety of our production and supply chain are serious issues. I am happy to consent to the regulations, but we need to be aware of the phytosanitary measures that are hugely important for our Scottish producers.

The Convener: I will bring Oliver Mundell in to clarify what he said and give Emma Harper some certainty.

Oliver Mundell: I do not deny that these are serious and important issues. I just think that it is wrong to suggest that the regulations are going to be a major problem. It is right to ask questions and seek guarantees, but we should not cause unnecessary concern by suggesting that there will be a problem.

The Convener: Emma, I hope that that clarifies.

My understanding is that we should consent to the regulations but, at the same time, raise the issues that have been mentioned by committee members and the clerks. Unless I see any shakes of the head, that is the way we will go forward.

Members indicated agreement.

Common Organisation of the Markets in Agricultural Products (Miscellaneous Amendments) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020

Common Organisation of the Markets in Agricultural Products (Producer Organisations and Wine) (Amendment etc) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020

The Convener: The next item is consideration of correspondence from the Scottish Government relating to two UK statutory instruments. The instruments have been laid before the UK Parliament in relation to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018. The committee is not being asked to give consent to the SIs, as the UK Government considers that they relate to reserved matters. The Scottish ministers, however, consider that consent is required. Does the committee wish to note the correspondence and respond to the

Scottish Government asking to be kept updated on the SIs as things progress?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: Thank you. We will now go into private session.

10:12

Meeting continued in private until 12:20, suspended thereafter until 14:00 and continued in private thereafter until 15:48.

This is the final edition of the *Official Report* of this meeting. It is part of the Scottish Parliament *Official Report* archive and has been sent for legal deposit.

Published in Edinburgh by the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

All documents are available on
the Scottish Parliament website at:

www.parliament.scot

Information on non-endorsed print suppliers
is available here:

www.parliament.scot/documents

For information on the Scottish Parliament contact
Public Information on:

Telephone: 0131 348 5000

Textphone: 0800 092 7100

Email: sp.info@parliament.scot



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba