

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

Tuesday 7 December 1999
(*Afternoon*)

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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

9th Meeting

CONVENER :

*Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS :

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West)

*Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)

*Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab)

*Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)

*Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP)

*Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

*David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con)

*Ms Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

*Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD)

*Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con)

*Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING MEMBER ALSO ATTENDED:

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

COMMITTEE CLERK:

Stephen Imrie

ASSISTANT CLERK:

David Simpson

Scottish Parliament

European Committee

Tuesday 7 December 1999

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:03*]

The Convener (Hugh Henry): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this meeting of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament.

I have an apology from Dennis Canavan, and Ben Wallace has indicated that he will be late.

Forward Work Programme

The Convener: First for discussion is the forward work programme. We have attempted to sketch out some of the main areas that we will be required to examine over the coming year to 18 months, with the aim of trying independently to develop a European agenda, while at the same time looking at some of the scrutiny work that we will have to consider. We would like to set the agenda and push the debate forward on behalf of the people of Scotland.

The draft work programme suggests that we group work into blocks, and identify a lead person to take the work forward. However, one of the things that I spoke to the committee clerk about and on which I wanted to encourage debate was whether the person who is given a lead responsibility should be the only one to work on the subject. Indeed, it may be that members of other committees would contribute. We agreed that more than one person should be involved and that groups of people with lead responsibility would conduct hearings with different organisations in different parts of the country, on behalf of the committee. We do not need to do everything together, but we should engage as many people throughout Scotland as possible.

The paper suggests topics, groups and individuals for consideration. If we cannot agree, I do not want to start changing things name by name. If there are suggestions for changes, we will bring the paper to the next meeting. However, the paper is a starting point for today's discussion. We need to find out whether the topics, issues and time scales are right. Are members interested in the suggestions?

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): Speaking on behalf of the SNP, we are very happy about the topics that we have been

allotted. You made an interesting point about involving members of other committees, convener. That is a good suggestion. For example, I imagine that we might want to hear what the Education, Culture and Sport Committee thinks about disseminating information to reach teachers and pupils.

If one member is the lead person on a subject, would they draft the report themselves or would the clerk help them? In Europe it was done mostly by the clerks and the members took the credit; it might not be like that here.

You mentioned hearings, convener, and that suggests travel. In some cases, it might be necessary to go furth of Scotland to meet European bodies. There could be a problem meeting the costs of necessary travel. We might have to have permission. Have those matters been considered?

The Convener: Any travel beyond Scotland would require approval. It is a rigorous system. I did not envisage that we would be considering that type of travel in developing the reports. If there is a specific requirement, the case would need to be made, first of all to the committee and then to the relevant bodies. It would, however, be the exception rather than the rule.

Stephen Imrie (Committee Clerk): It was always our intention to assist the members with their tasks as rapporteurs. We will have to consider the clerking resources, but we intend to work alongside the member in the production of the reports and in all the other tasks.

The Convener: And, of course, we are all here as individuals, not as representatives of political groups.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): I note what you have just said and what you said earlier about working together. That is the way in which Ben Wallace and I would like to proceed. Ben is keen to work with Bruce Crawford on his policy area. There are different views on that area and, without overly politicising an issue, this committee should reflect a balance of opinion.

I would like us to discuss ways to help Scottish business exploit the opportunities that Europe offers. I do not want to get bogged down in swapping around the roles that have been allocated at this meeting, but that topic is of great interest and I want to pursue it.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): There are two ways of progressing that. One is through Irene Oldfather's portfolio, which relates to links through European networks. The other is through Ben Wallace's enlargement of the EU portfolio. If David Mundell is interested in that, he should ensure that those members know about it.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): I agree with what Winnie Ewing said about the general focus of the report. It is spot on. There are lots of important issues in the report and the timetable that we have will allow us to raise them. Maureen Macmillan has an important area to deal with in terms of industries in the Highlands and Islands.

In many areas, we will need the help of the Scottish Executive and civil servants to understand what the Executive is doing in policy terms and how the situation is developing. Will our clerk be able to make those links for us? In my experience, it is heck of a difficult to get hold of the right civil servant.

Stephen Imrie: I want to reassure members that I will help with all those sorts of matters. Access to civil servants will be arranged by the clerks using our departmental liaison officers in the Scottish Executive.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I want to ask about the role of the clerks. I am a rapporteur on another committee and I have a clerk with me to take notes at every meeting that I go to in that capacity. Is that what is envisaged here, or would the contact be more informal?

The Convener: It could be a mixture of both. If you had arranged a hearing with groups from the salmon farming industry, you would want someone to take notes. If the discussion were informal, a clerk would not be required.

Maureen Macmillan: Most of the people whose views I will be canvassing are based in the Highlands and Islands. It would be easier to meet them up there than for them to come down here. However, that has implications for the clerks.

Stephen Imrie: The questions of time, human resources and financial resources would be considered issue by issue. We intended to facilitate cases in which clerks would be needed to take notes of the meeting to be read in as formal evidence at a future meeting. It would be up to committee members to decide whether we were required to be there.

14:15

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Although it needs a couple of changes, this report is great and is close to what we need to continue our work. I hope that we can agree so that we can begin to work out how we can undertake some of the activities. The chart says that some of our work starts as early as January.

On the issue of balance, every committee member accepts that we are acting as reporters for a group of people and are not putting forward either our individual or party views, which makes the clerking support even more important. I am not

saying that the clerks will act as judge and jury, but they will have a useful role in ensuring that a reporter's strong opinions do not become overbearing. However, I am worried about resources. As there are going to be some timetabling difficulties with all this work, perhaps there should be a paper on how the work will be financed. Otherwise, we might find the time scale slipping.

Furthermore, it might be necessary for members such as Ben Wallace, as rapporteur on the issue of enlargement, to travel to parts of Europe to find out the views of other countries. I do not wish to make a rod for my own back, but it will be difficult to get involved in discussions about the policy implications of the euro unless we talk to the European Central Bank. There will be cases, admittedly limited, where the committee will have to go forth from Scotland. We will need to make a strong case for that to the SPCB. This committee, more than any other in the Parliament, will need to look beyond Scotland.

As for the time scales of the draft timetable, I have concerns about two areas. We do not envisage doing much about the area of enlargement until January 2001; however, the intergovernmental conference is expected to publish its views on enlargement by December 2000 and we might be shutting the door after the horse has bolted. Similarly, as the Portuguese presidency of the EU ends in June 2000, we will need to start work earlier on the implications of European law for Scottish justice, which is David Mundell's area. We need to tighten the timetable in those areas.

The Convener: I have spoken to Stephen Imrie about the IGC and we will report to the committee on that issue next year.

As for travel, we cannot give the Parliament or others the idea that we are constructing a timetable of work that will require travel all over Europe. The advice that we are giving is that such travel will be the exception. We need to take a considered view on that.

Money is available up to the end of the financial year for advice and support from specialists. We might tap into that by grouping different areas of work. Other committees have started to appoint special advisers. We may have access to a budget for specific pieces of work.

The other thing that strikes me, which follows on from what Margo MacDonald said, is that some subjects could be grouped together and we could have co-rapporteurs. For example, Ben Wallace and Irene Oldfather could work together on enlargement, which Margo suggested might link with the areas that Irene is examining.

I want to get agreement on issues that could be

combined, and to find out whether anyone is interested in the headings that we agree.

Ms Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): The issues are relevant and reasonable. One omission, which is not particularly urgent but could be added at some point, is European health initiatives by the Committee of the Regions. Because of the importance of health issues to regional Governments throughout Europe, we might want to put down a marker for a future report.

On the timetable, I agree with what Bruce Crawford said. We must dovetail a bit more with the European agenda, especially on enlargement. That might mean bringing the report on enlargement forward a bit.

I agree 100 per cent about combining issues. I had identified the enlargement of the EU as one of my areas of interest. Promoting links through European networks links with that issue, so I would be happy to work on those subjects if they were combined.

Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab): Can I sound a cautionary note? What struck me about the detailed paper was the volume of the prospective work load. With Margo MacDonald and others, I have been involved in the six-month inquiry by the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee into the two important issues of local economic development services and workplace training. The sheer volume of representations that we have received has been overwhelming. The list of organisations that may submit oral evidence to this committee includes an even greater range of organisations, although there is a significant degree of overlap.

The work programme is fairly ambitious, as is the 12-point suggested programme of issues to be considered. I have no criticisms of the allocation of duties and responsibilities within the overall remit, but I think that those issues require to be prioritised, along the lines that Bruce Crawford suggested. The time scale seems equally ambitious. We should discriminate between areas of Parliament in which we have a direct legislative responsibility—we should consider them in greater detail—and those in which we might have an interest but not a legislative role to perform. A couple of areas spring to mind immediately.

We should prioritise within groupings, as has been suggested. It is important that people work together to reach conclusions that will make a genuine difference to the people of Scotland. If we adopt a scatter-gun approach and try to cover too many issues, our energies and efforts might be too diffuse.

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I will pick up on some points

that have been made. This is an ambitious programme that covers a lot of areas. If we take on these roles, it is important that we are focused about what we are trying to achieve and that we do not try to replicate the work of any of the European institutions or of the whole of the Scottish Parliament.

We should take a focused approach to reviewing some of the information that is around. We should not reinvent the wheel, but suggest ways forward for future work in the Parliament, either, as Allan Wilson suggested, on a legislative basis, or in a wider policy development role.

I am quite happy to take on the area of interest that has been allotted to me. The opportunities to link in with the work of the Social Inclusion, Housing and Voluntary Sector Committee, the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee and the Rural Affairs Committee could lead to a new and exciting way for this committee to bring other people into its work.

I agree with the points that have been made about the timetable, but we must be clear about our aims. If we agree the work programme, the fact that a report is not due until later should not prevent people from starting to gather information immediately. The clerks can assist us in that work. I am concerned that the work allocated to me is scheduled for the summer months. That is fine for me, because I would have fewer parliamentary commitments then, but I would like to be sure that enough staff back-up is available.

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Like Cathy, I wanted to mention duplication. I wonder whether the first stage of the programme will include an investigation of what information is already available in the various areas, because there is probably quite a lot. There may be an overlap, not only from a European angle, but from the point of view of other committees. In Maureen Macmillan's area in particular, work may already be under way.

My second point is about the time scale. If we all have separate areas, although we may be overlapping, why cannot we all start at the beginning? Is there some reason why we cannot start now to look at our areas? Stephen Imrie will no doubt tell me that there is a good reason.

The Convener: You can finish your point first, Sylvia.

Dr Jackson: I just thought that there might be an advantage in our all starting at the same time. That way, we could all report together. We could share information and see where the overlaps are. As a scientist, I am happy with the area that has been allocated to me. However, sustainability is at its core and it will obviously overlap with a number of areas, particularly Tavish Scott's.

The Convener: The practical answer is that the clerks would not be able to cope with everybody starting at the same time. Although we could manage it, it would cause insurmountable difficulties for them.

We can tap into a number of resources. For example, the information centre can commission internal and external research papers. We need to be clear about the fact that we are not conducting major hearings or investigations, as happened when the Health and Community Care Committee considered the Arbuthnott report. Other committees are required to react to the work of the Executive, but our work involves bringing forward our thoughts and comments to promote awareness and discussion.

Having done reports at European level, I know that much of that work can be done with one's own resources, by telephoning, faxing or e-mailing people before producing final reports. Some people think that we need to cover the whole country, but Allan Wilson was right to say that we must keep a sense of perspective. We must ensure that we can manage our work load, but some of the areas will give us the opportunity to combine the commitments that we made to external organisations.

David Mundell mentioned business and industry. If we were considering a report that was significant for business and industry, it would not be sensible to do so without consulting some of the organisations that we have identified. That would be their opportunity to feed back into the European Committee, without having to come to a full committee meeting.

On Cathy Jamieson's points, it would be sensible to talk to the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, the Wise Group and others about their work; that would also represent an opportunity for such groups to influence the committee's work.

We need to be careful about what we think we can do. We also need to tighten up our work programme, which we will reconsider and confirm at our next meeting. However, taking on board some of the comments and suggestions that have been made on the implications of European law for Scottish justice and human rights, perhaps David Mundell and Dennis Canavan could work together. They may need to speak to members of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee. It is possible to produce a joint report, which could go to two committees, and members of that committee might want to comment. That seems to be a sensible link.

On enlargement and links to European networks, I do not know whether there is a clear business link, but I ask the clerks to consider that

as we could work on those topics together. Are there any other obvious areas where there could be co-operation?

14:30

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): Work on enlargement would tie in with the policy implications of the single currency. There will be an enlargement of the European Union concept, with some countries in the euro zone and some not. The differences that we might have to cope with are important.

Ms MacDonald: That is true.

The Convener: Whether or not you take on enlargement as an issue, Ben, the debate on the single currency will have to be faced up to. We are discussing the preparations for a debate on the single currency. Enlargement will either happen or not, and will certainly have implications for the single currency, but they are separate issues.

Ms Oldfather: When I put enlargement on the list of priorities, I had in mind the challenges and opportunities facing Scotland, in terms of both the links between public sector bodies and the opportunities available to business as a result of enlargement, with an additional 100 million consumers. Enlargement is a big topic on its own and I do not think that it should be tied in with a report on the single currency.

Ben Wallace: My point is that the new markets, which I hope enlargement will bring, will be tied inextricably to the euro. Those new markets will not be part of the euro zone at first and it is important that we establish links with them and identify what will inhibit or help us and them. I believe that the issue of the euro is linked to enlargement.

The Convener: I am interested in your faith in the inevitability of the single currency, but that is another matter, Ben.

Ben Wallace: All those countries that will be part of the enlargement process will not be part of the euro zone.

Allan Wilson: Competition will certainly increase for British business, in the light of enlargement, whether that involves intra-trading or inter-trading blocs. A key aspect of our ability to compete in those expanding markets will be our take-up of the education and training initiatives. That topic seems to dovetail entirely reasonably with that of community economic development and the role of the EU. Cathy Jamieson and I could work together on both those policy headings and produce a combined report.

The Convener: I will run through some of the headings and the expressions of interest to see

whether we can agree. We will return to this item at our next meeting for final approval.

I want to reach the stage where we agree the issues and the members who will tackle them. I will bring a report to the next meeting that will incorporate, for example, Allan Wilson's suggestion and some of the points that were raised by Ben Wallace and Dennis Canavan, to see whether we can refine the work programme.

Ms MacDonald: Did we agree that the justice issue would be punted up the timetable a bit?

The Convener: I will come back to the timetable, as I would like to have a further discussion with the clerk about when and how work will be done and about how support will be provided. We should have time to do that either by the next meeting or by the first meeting in January. Are we agreed that we should consider the policy implications of the European Commission's sixth environmental action plan, and that Sylvia should take the lead on that? Is there anything else that would fit in with that?

Tavish Scott: Logically, agriculture would fit in with that.

Dr Jackson: I should add that the paper that you just gave me, convener, refers to sustainable development and integration of environment policy with other policies, so there is quite a big link.

Stephen Imrie: I wonder whether Dr Jackson would help the official report by specifying which paper she is referring to.

Dr Jackson: I am referring to Adrian Colwell's paper. It is a Convention of Scottish Local Authorities briefing note on the European Commission's sixth environmental action plan.

The Convener: Tavish, are you saying that there are links with the agricultural sector?

Tavish Scott: Yes—in terms of the wider sustainability agenda. The Agenda 2000 programme is coming down the track and we still do not know what it contains; we will probably not know until 2000. However, there will be a lot of—to use the agriculture jargon—cross-compliance between the environment and agriculture.

The Convener: Could we reasonably put the two together?

Tavish Scott: Where there is a need to separate them, we can agree to do that.

Bruce Crawford: I am not sure to which paper Sylvia was referring—I do not think that I have it.

The Convener: It is a paper that COSLA produced. I suggested at the start of the meeting that if we agreed on what the committee wanted to consider, the paper would be a useful starting

point for our work on the issue.

Is the issue that Maureen Macmillan was to deal with totally separate from those that are being handled by Tavish Scott and Sylvia Jackson?

Maureen Macmillan: I think so.

Tavish Scott: Yes, it is very precise.

The Convener: That is fine.

It is proposed that Bruce Crawford deal with the single currency. Are there any links that can be made there? I know that Ben Wallace has made a suggestion, but I do not think that it is a useful way of taking the matter forward.

Bruce Crawford: The euro zone will be established across the vast majority of European Union countries—and probably here—before accession takes place. From Ben Wallace's perspective, the main issue will be the implications of the euro for the countries that join the European Union. I am not sure at this stage that there are links between the two issues that we will deal with.

The Convener: However, we are agreed that the single currency is an issue that we need to address. Bruce is happy to take that forward.

Allan Wilson has suggested that the work for which he has been pencilled in should be brought together with that to which Cathy has been assigned. Is there anything else that would reasonably fit with that? Are we agreed that those are issues worth considering?

Allan Wilson: It is difficult to see how education and training initiatives could be considered apart from economic development.

The Convener: That is fine. Is there anything that could readily be combined with tourism, culture and sport?

Ms MacDonald: Holidays. As long as we get to San Remo—

Bruce Crawford: The links between tourism and economic development cannot be ignored either.

Ms MacDonald: However, sport and culture do not fit neatly with those.

The Convener: We will have a look at that. I will talk to Stephen Imrie about Bruce Crawford's suggestion.

Dr Jackson: I will make a point about sustainability. Now that we are broadening the scope of that, there will be an overlap with Allan Wilson in terms of economic development.

The Convener: There is a limit to what we could cope with. We will consider Sylvia's comments.

Dr Jackson: I mean that we should do that at a

later date, not now.

The Convener: We have already spoken about European networks and links between that subject and enlargement of the European Union.

Ms Oldfather: The committee's role is to promote links with European networks, so all of the groups will be involved in that.

Community initiatives on business link-ups have connections with enlargement. I would be happy to work with Ben Wallace.

The Convener: The implications of enlargement are a specific issue, but that also links with how we use European institutions and networks and the opportunities that will come with enlargement.

We have spoken about human rights and European law. Winnie Ewing is our reporter on the provision of information on European issues in Scotland.

We will refine that programme, if we agree that the list of topics is useful. Members have indicated their interest in and willingness to work in those areas.

Ben Wallace: Can members of the committee have a role in other topics?

The Convener: If, in the next week or so, members indicate to Stephen Imrie the issues that they want to work on with the reporters, we will try to incorporate that into the programme.

The paper is private at the moment, but do members agree that we should release it as the view of the committee?

Bruce Crawford: We should understand what is being said—the enlargement issue and European law and its implications for Scottish justice will be reconsidered, which will affect the timetable.

The Convener: We are not agreeing to a timetable. We are seeking agreement about the issues and about which members want to examine particular issues.

Bruce Crawford: In that case, I still need to reserve my position on structural funds and additionality. We still have not had the advantage of discussion between Andrew Wilson, Mike Watson—convener of the Finance Committee—and Hugh Henry.

The Convener: We either agree that those are the topics that we will examine or we do not. If there is a caveat, we will hold the programme back until we agree on the detail. We cannot go forward.

Bruce Crawford: We are not deciding the timetable today.

The Convener: Yes, but we are deciding on the

issues, and that can be put back if we do not want to decide yet.

Bruce Crawford: The point that I have raised does not involve any member in time-consuming work. I was talking about the usefulness of a discussion.

The Convener: Are you not talking about the forward work programme?

Bruce Crawford: Yes, I am. If we are to examine structural funds and additionality, that will involve some members of the committee in work. However, the first part of the process was to have been a discussion between me, the convener of the Finance Committee, Andrew Wilson and you to agree on how we might address that. We have not had that meeting yet.

The Convener: We will consider that as a separate issue. Do members agree that we can release the forward work programme?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I ask members to send their expressions of interest to Stephen as soon as possible.

Dr Jackson: On page 4 of the forward work programme document, there is a list of the various organisations that we thought it might be useful to consult. We should include training organisations with either business and industry, or with education and information. Allan Wilson, who perhaps has an interest in that area, might know of some training organisations.

14:45

The Convener: Once we get into the detail of the programme, we will return to that. The committee will have to agree on the remit for each bit of work for the reporter. Although the reporters will go away and do that work, they are doing so on behalf of the committee, so the committee will have to consider a suggested work programme.

Ms MacDonald: We are probably all trying to give some structure to the actions that we might have to take as part of our particular responsibilities, and for Sylvia's information—and for everyone else's—Allan and I have spoken to heaven knows how many folk who know about training. There are now written records of evidence that has been given to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee. Before you line up anyone else, let us see—

The Convener: We will cross-reference.

Allan Wilson: It comes back to what I was saying about the fairly exhaustive list of organisations. If we were to listen to oral evidence from them all, there would be a sizeable dent in

our work programme well into the new year. To lighten the load, so to speak, we could usefully take written evidence from some and oral evidence from others.

Fisheries Council

The Convener: I welcome Jamie McGrigor.

Tavish Scott has produced a paper on the forthcoming European Fisheries Council. I remind the committee that we asked Tavish to consider the problem, to talk to the industry and to report on what the view of this committee should be in relation to the Fisheries Council, which is meeting on 16 and 17 December. The idea is that we send the report to John Home Robertson before he goes to the council meeting and then invite him to a committee meeting in the new year so that we can hear what was discussed and agreed to in Brussels.

I thank Tavish for an excellent piece of work, which he has done in a short time, and ask him to give his presentation to the committee, after which we will consider his recommendations.

Tavish Scott: Thank you. I am grateful to all the organisations that helped me, and in particular to the Scottish Parliament information centre and Stephen Imrie. I commend to you all the brief that was provided by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation in advance of tomorrow afternoon's debate, and which I think members will have received by now.

There are aspects of this issue that are pretty technical and, it must be said, quite dry, so I will have to test you all individually afterwards. [Laughter.] Suffice it to say that I have tried to write my report in a way that is understandable and not too technical. As I have an agricultural background, on these issues I am as much a layman and am on as steep a learning curve as the rest of the committee.

One of the key points to be made is that the structure and the—as it were—ritualistic way in which the process takes place are in need of reform. They will not be reformed at the next Fisheries Council, but we can ask some of the wider questions of the minister when he—I hope—appears early in the new year; I might highlight those questions at a later date.

The way that the system works is that we ask fishing businesses to plan their investment programme on the basis of a decision that is made every December. There cannot be many businesses in the wider economic sphere that have to plan on such a basis, which is why it is important that the system changes. In other words, the system must change from one that creates a

very short-term business environment, to one that creates a medium and long-term environment. We should strive to introduce such a change to the system.

The other aspect of this—which I know everyone who has been involved in fishing over a period of time feels strongly about—is that fishermen themselves are not involved in the assessment of how their industry should be taken forward. That is possibly unique in a regulated industry. It comes down to how the industry is managed and regulated. However, that decisions are made about people's lives when those people cannot—other than through the political process—influence day-to-day decisions, is an indictment of the current system. There is no doubt that we will want to introduce the involvement of fishermen into the process.

My final general point concerns regional management. Getting people in the industry involved in the day-to-day processes is tied to the desire in all political parties for regional management of fisheries. Sea areas would be divided up and those who fished the areas would have a greater say in what happened there in terms of conservation.

At the forthcoming Fisheries Council, the main point to make will be about haddock—a predominantly Scottish species that is caught by the Scottish white fish fleet. This year, there has been a large uptake of young haddock, and conservation measures that are endorsed by fishing organisations could be introduced to allow those small fish to escape. In other words, the industry would catch sizeable, marketable, high-value fish to satisfy the needs of the consumer, but the small fish would be allowed to escape.

I wanted to bring two net size samples with me today, but I was not allowed to swipe them from the boat that I was on in Lerwick on Friday. Without the samples it is difficult to describe the difference between them, but it is basically the difference between a diamond mesh and a square mesh. When they are dragged through the water, one of them closes up and the small fish cannot escape, but the other—the square mesh—allows the small fish to escape. The size of the square is obviously important. *The Press and Journal* has reported that matter accurately in the past few days and the Scottish Fishermen's Federation is striving for a conservation regime that takes account of those factors. For haddock, the introduction of technical conservation measures is a great step forward, and I would argue that the industry in Scotland and in the United Kingdom as a whole can lead Europe in that process.

The other recommendations are pretty self-explanatory. Most people would take points 20 and 21 as read. Point 22 is about technical

conservation measures. If there is one message that I want to get across, it is that the desire for and drive towards technical conservation measures are possibly the most important thing that the committee can promote. I hope that we can encourage the minister and his civil servants to work with the industry to achieve that goal. Point 22 stresses the importance of creating a long-term, sustainable industry, and points 23 and 24 follow on from that.

The wider points are included in the brief that has been provided by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, which I commend to you all.

The Convener: Thank you very much, Tavish. That was excellent and concise.

Dr Winnie Ewing: I endorse all the points in that excellent report. I have been privy to the spectacle of the fishing bodies of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland sitting in a hotel room hoping for crumbs of information, as their fate was settled in a room where the Fisheries Council was meeting. To be fair, the council did give them crumbs of information as progress was made, but their helplessness was pathetic. I endorse the idea that the fishermen should be involved.

The roll-over makes a great deal of sense. The pathos of what I have described arose from the fishing bodies' fate being decided almost like a lottery every December, so no plans could be made as to the size of boats that were needed or whether boats should be replaced. That was a nonsense, and the roll-over should improve the situation.

Nobody likes the idea of discards, or throwing fish back into the sea. The public do not like it—it is a very unpopular concept. However, it happens because we make rules about the size of fish that we can market. Various television companies have made films showing that small fish are regularly sold in all the stores in Madrid. That is against the law, but nothing is done about it.

The Scottish Fishermen's Federation made a wonderful underwater film proving what Tavish has said about the square mesh panel: that the squares do not close and the small fish get through. The diamond mesh closes, preventing the small fish from escaping. That expensive video from the SFF was shown in my presence to the Fisheries Council, and the European Commission ignored it. It did not seem to be interested in finding a sensible way of dealing with discards. If we let the small fish escape, they will grow into bigger fish—that is in everybody's interests.

The last act of my dear colleague Allan McCartney was to be rapporteur on regional management. He died when he had almost finished producing his report, which was then taken on by an Irish member called Pat the Cope

Gallagher, and unanimously passed by the Committee on Fisheries. That is unusual, because all the different countries and interests are represented on that committee. It would be wonderful if fishermen could be more involved in the process, as it affects their livelihood.

Mr Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I, too, think that the report is excellent. It would be a good idea for the Scottish fisheries sector to give a lead. I like that thought, because fishing is so important to Scotland.

Efforts must be made to keep the water off our west coast a pristine environment. We know what has happened to scallops, although I do not see that mentioned in Tavish Scott's report. The report covers most other matters very well.

The only other issue that I would like to raise is that of cod numbers. Nobody seems to know why the cod stocks have fallen to the current levels; according to the fishermen, they have just disappeared. Scientific research should be carried out to discover what has happened to the valuable cod stocks.

Bruce Crawford: This paper was useful not only in providing background information, but in its recommendations. It is interesting that, although 62 per cent of the value of UK sea fish landings in 1998 were made at Scottish ports and 92 per cent of aquaculture products for sale emanated from Scotland, Scotland has only 40 per cent of sea-fish-processing employment in the UK. That might not be within the remit of this committee, but it is an area of weakness. Would Tavish Scott like to comment on that? Does he think that it would be useful if we were to ask the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee and the Rural Affairs Committee to consider how we can maximise the benefits of landings in Scotland for downstream industry?

Tavish Scott: I endorse that.

The Convener: This report is specifically for the meeting that is to take place on 16 and 17 December. What are you suggesting that we ask the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee to do, Bruce?

Bruce Crawford: It is a wider point. I would like the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee and the Rural Affairs Committee to bring forward suggestions about how we can better maximise the downstream benefits for industries associated with fish landings.

The Convener: We cannot determine the work load of another committee. However, if we agree on this, we can send copies of the report to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee and to the Rural Affairs Committee, drawing their attention to paragraph 7. It is for those committees

to decide how they wish to take this issue forward.

Ms MacDonald: If I may speak on behalf of the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee, there are—I hope that my colleague Allan Wilson will agree—only two things in the report that would interest that committee. First, there is the potential for boosting downstream activity in industries such as fish processing. Secondly, if the Rural Affairs Committee endorses a recommendation on mesh size, that will have financial and all sorts of other implications. Perhaps we should get into the habit of noting matters that may be of interest, rather than sending whole reports. The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee is up to its ears in reports.

The Convener: The report would go to the convener, who would determine what goes on to the agenda. We would want the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee to examine paragraph 7 in particular. It would be for that committee to decide how it took the matter forward.

Allan Wilson: This is a value-added issue, which the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee would be happy to consider.

The Convener: Are there any other comments on Tavish Scott's report?

Mr McGrigor: Does the report cover the renewal of the fleet?

15:00

Tavish Scott: I have not covered that issue or the issue of scallops because the report is about the forthcoming Fisheries Council and I am not aware that either of those items are on the agenda for that meeting. I suggest respectfully that those issues should be dealt with by the Rural Affairs Committee.

The Convener: We endorse the report and agree to send it to John Home Robertson. We will ask him to report back to the committee early in the new year. Thanks to Tavish for an excellent piece of work.

Ms MacDonald: We should put him up for a plain English award.

The Convener: Yes.

Scrutiny

The Convener: The next item on the agenda is scrutiny of European documents. At the end of the meeting I will come back to discuss the documentation that is circulated for this item. For now, we will go through the recommended course of action for each numbered document. For each

number, I will move that we approve the recommendation. If anyone has anything to say, they should let me know.

For document SP 468 (EC Ref No 12373/99 COM(99) 456 final) and document SP 481 (EC Ref No 12585/99 DROIPEN 18) we will request the Scottish cover note and the documents will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

For document SP 482, we will request the Scottish cover note and the document will be considered at the next meeting. Is that agreed?

Bruce Crawford: There are timetabling issues on document SP 482. We should refer the document to the Rural Affairs Committee. The explanatory memorandum gives timetabling information on the proposal. Will that memorandum be discussed today?

The Convener: The recommendation is to request the Scottish cover note and to consider the document at the next meeting.

Bruce Crawford: We need to think about this today despite that recommendation. Paragraph 16 of the explanatory memorandum says that the proposals

"are expected to go to the November Fisheries Council."

It is too late for us to comment. That is why I wanted to flag up the timetabling issue. How did we get into this situation?

Stephen Imrie: I will look into that while the committee continues with the scrutiny process and comment later.

The Convener: Bruce, you also suggested sending the document to the Rural Affairs Committee.

Bruce Crawford: That depends. We could do that if the proposals come before the next Fisheries Council in December, but it might not be worth while if the proposal has already been passed.

The Convener: The proposal will have been passed.

We will approve the recommendation and Stephen will report back to the committee on the timetabling issue.

For document SP 524, we will request the Scottish cover note and the document will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

For document SP 525, we will request the Scottish cover note and the document will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

For document SP 513 (EC Ref No 12795/99 COM(99) 547 final) we will request the Scottish cover note and the document will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

For document SP 470 (EC Ref No, 12031/99 COM(99) 486 final) we await the explanatory memorandum, we will request the Scottish cover note and the document will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

For document SP 484 (EC Ref No 12030/99 COM(99) 487 final), we await the explanatory memorandum, we will request the Scottish cover note and the document will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

For document SP 495 (EC Ref No 12458/99 COM(99) 544 final), we await the explanatory memorandum, we will request the Scottish cover note and the document will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

For document SP 498 (EC Ref No 12347/99 COM(99) 541 final), we await the explanatory memorandum, we will request the Scottish cover note and the document will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

For document SP 503 (EC Ref No 12350/99 COM(99) 551 final), we await the explanatory memorandum, we will group the document with document 498 and we will request the Scottish cover note. The document will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

For document SP 511 (EC Ref No 12349/99 COM(99) 552 final), we await the explanatory memorandum, we will group the document with document 498 and we will request the Scottish cover note. The document will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

For document SP 507 (EC Ref No 12656/99), we await the explanatory memorandum, we will request the Scottish cover note and the document will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

For document SP 514 (EC Ref No 13052/99 EURODA C 22), we await the explanatory memorandum, we will request the Scottish cover note and the document will be considered at the next meeting. That is agreed.

For document SP 349 (EC Ref No 10251/99 SEC(99) 1213), we await the explanatory memorandum. Depending on its contents, we may refer the document to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee. That decision will be taken at a future meeting. That is agreed.

For document SP 393, we await a response from MEPs. Depending on the response, the committee may scrutinise the document at a future meeting. No action will be taken at this stage. That is agreed.

For document SP 417 (EC Ref No 11492/99 COM(99) 425 final), the clerks await feedback from the Executive on the implications for Scottish

industry. No further action will be taken at this stage. That is agreed.

For document SP 488 (EC Ref No 12318/99 SEC(99) 1729), no further action will be taken, but a copy of the document will be sent to the Enterprise and Lifelong Committee. That is agreed.

For document SP 489 (EC Ref No 12392/99 COM(99) 536 final), no further action will be taken, but a copy of the document will be sent to the Rural Affairs Committee. That is agreed.

For document SP 505 (EC Ref No 12680/99 COM(99) 554 final), no further action will be taken, but a copy of the document will be sent to the Rural Affairs Committee. Is that agreed?

Dr Ewing: It says that the explanatory memorandum for document SP 505 has not yet been received. Are we waiting for documentation?

The Convener: We have not received the memorandum, but the recommendation is that we send the documentation that we have to the Rural Affairs Committee and that this committee will take no further action.

Dr Ewing: I would like to read the memorandum. Forests are terribly important in Scotland. We are one of the only areas in Europe with undeveloped land that could be suitable for forestry.

The Convener: Which is the relevant committee, the Rural Affairs Committee or us? If there is a legitimate interest in this, the Rural Affairs Committee is probably better.

Dr Ewing: There is not really a forestry policy in Europe, although it is continually discussed. Those discussions have failed because the interests of the states are all so different. We would want to know about this before it is finalised because we have a big forestry interest.

The Convener: Where should forestry policy be considered? The suggestion is the Rural Affairs Committee.

Dr Ewing: Yes, but I would still like to read the document.

The Convener: The clerk will arrange that and we will send the document to the Rural Affairs Committee for its attention. That is agreed.

For document SP 497 (EC Ref No 12442/99 COM(99) 519 final), the recommendation is for no further action but to send a copy to the Transport and the Environment Committee for its interest. That is agreed.

The committee recommended that no further action be taken on the following document:

SP 453 (EC Ref No 10844/1/99 REV.1)

Ms Oldfather: Document SP 473 (EC Ref No 12090/99 COM(99) 485 COD 99/0208) sets out a timetable and criteria for promoting the European year of languages. It would be useful to look at the document or to refer it to the Education, Culture and Sport Committee to see how we in Scotland can obtain maximum benefit from that year. There will be significant funds for it.

Allan Wilson: Presumably this subject forms part of the remit of the group that we are forming to look at European training and education initiatives.

The Convener: We will bring the document back as part of that remit but also send it to the Education, Culture and Sport committee for its interest. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The committee recommended that no further action be taken on the following documents:

SP 350 (EC Ref No 10742/99 COM(99) 348 final)

SP 447 (EC Ref No 10525/99 COM(99) 429 final)

Dr Ewing: Document SP 447 is about the famous Atlantic salmon originating in Norway—it is a vital issue.

The Convener: The decision has already been taken. The document is about an anti-dumping measure.

Dr Ewing: Too late, is it? The problem has been going on for 20 years and is never solved.

The committee recommended that no further action be taken on the following documents:

SP 483 (EC Ref No 11997/99 COM(99) 495)

SP 486 (EC Ref No 12256/99 COM(99) 497 final)

SP 487 (EC Ref No 12261/99 COM(99) 493 final)

SP 491 (EC Ref No 12380/99 CRIMORG 153)

SP 493 (EC Ref No 3623/99 PE-CONS SOC 351 CODEC 579)

Ms MacDonald: I presume that there is no further action on SP 491, but I am interested in

“practical measures towards combating criminal action”,

if we are talking about the fact that plans for the enlargement of the EU are being undermined by Mafia gangs that are moving west.

The Convener: If there is any background information, it should be given to Margo.

Cathy Jamieson: On document SP 493, I notice that our information from the legal adviser

was that, although health and safety at work is a reserved matter, we might want to ask the Scottish Executive about whether the directive has relevant implications. The document refers to

“improving the safety and health protection of workers potentially at risk from explosive atmospheres”.

We might want to get more information on that. It was a helpful note.

David Mundell: That might apply to ourselves.

The Convener: We could ask the Scottish Executive for an indication and reconsider the matter at the next meeting. Thank you, Cathy.

For document SP 496 (EC Ref No 12456/99 COM(99) 468 final), the recommendation is that no further action be taken. That is agreed.

Ms MacDonald: This is an interesting item. I know that we do not have time to go into detail on every document, but this is the Community supposedly at its best in the area of humanitarian action.

The Convener: Would you like some background information on that?

Ms MacDonald: Yes please.

The Convener: I shall ask the clerks to provide further information on that document.

The committee recommended that no further action be taken on the following documents:

SP 500 (EC Ref No 12187/99 COM(99) 498 final)

SP 501 (EC Ref No 12303/99 COM(99) 518 final)

SP 502 (EC Ref No 12348/99 COM(99) 550 final)

SP 504 (EC Ref No 12657/99 COM(99) 549 final)

SP 508 (EC Ref No 12742/99 COM(99) 496 final CNS 99/0203)

SP 509 (EC Ref No 12751/99 UD 118 CODEC 665)

SP 510 (EC Ref No 0212/98)

SP 512 (EC Ref No 12501/99 COM(99) 556 final)

SP 515 (EC Ref No 12094/99 COM(99) 535 final)

The Convener: For document SP 516 (EC Ref No 12553/99 STUP 22), the recommendation is that no further action be taken. Is that agreed?

Bruce Crawford: Should we not send document SP 516 to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee, as it concerns drugs? It may have implications, particularly in terms of the European

convention on human rights.

The Convener: We shall send it to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee for interest. That is agreed.

The committee recommended that no further action be taken on the following documents:

SP 517 (EC Ref No 12805/99 COM(99) 548 final)

SP 518 (EC Ref No 12947/99 COM(99) 561 final)

SP 519 (EC Ref No 12958/99 COM(99) 558 final)

The Convener: If members want to see paperwork about those documents, they should speak to Stephen Imrie at the end of the meeting.

Dr Ewing: I would like a copy of document SP 510.

The Convener: The clerk can supply you with one after the meeting.

The committee recommended that no further action be taken on the following documents:

SP 523 (EC Ref No 12422/99 PESC 382 COWEB 139)

SP 526 (EC Ref No 12060/99 COM(99) 501 final)

SP 527 (EC Ref No 12061/99 COM(99) 502 final)

SP 528 (EC Ref No 12063/99 COM(99) 504 final)

SP 529 (EC Ref No 12154/99 COM(99) 513 final)

SP 530 (EC Ref No 12188/99 COM(99) 521 final)

SP 531 (EC Ref No 12189/99 COM(99) 522 final)

SP 532 (EC Ref No 12190/99 COM(99) 523 final)

SP 533 (EC Ref No 12191/99 COM(99) 524 final)

SP 534 (EC Ref No 12192/99 COM(99) 525 final)

SP 535 (EC Ref No 12193/99 COM(99) 526 final)

SP 536 (EC Ref No 12194/99 COM(99) 527 final)

SP 537 (EC Ref No 12195/99 COM(99) 528 final)

SP 538 (EC Ref No 12196/99 COM(99) 529 final)

SP 539 (EC Ref No 12197/99 COM(99) 530 final)

SP 540 (EC Ref No 12198/99 COM(99) 531 final)

SP 541 (EC Ref No 12199/99 COM(99) 532 final)

SP 485 (EC Ref No 12071/99 PESC 365 COSCE 8)

SP 490 (EC Ref No 12507/99 PESC 387 COASI 33 CODUN 21)

SP 499 (EC Ref No 12505/99 PESC 385 COASI 31)

SP 521 (EC Ref No 12358 PESC 377 COAFR 27)

SP 522 (EC Ref No 12368/99 PESC 378 COAFR 28)

SP 492 (EC Ref No 94231/99 REV1 CRIMORG 80)

SP 494 (EC Ref No 12867/99 COPEN 56)

SP 506 (EC Ref No 10097/99 EUROPOL 35)

SP 520 (EC Ref No 10098/99 EUROPOL 36)

The Convener: At the end of the meeting, we will return to a discussion of those documents. We will also ask Stephen Imrie to report back on the view of the Justice and Home Affairs Committee on document SP 317 (EC Ref No 10541/99, COM(99) 352 final 99/0152 (COD)).

Ms Oldfather: I would like to point out an error in the notes by the legal adviser on document SP 473 on the European year of languages. It says quite clearly on the front that there would be 50 per cent co-financing. However, on page 18, there is a list of a number of measures that will be financed 100 per cent from the Community budget. That error put one or two members off looking at that document in more detail, but the annexe on page 18 shows the true picture.

The Convener: Thank you. That will be corrected.

Stephen Imrie: I advise the committee that we sent to the Justice and Home Affairs Committee document SP 317 on a proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council, amending Council Directive 91/308/EEC covering the financial system for the purpose of money laundering. That committee has considered and noted the document, but does not have any further comments to bring to the attention of the European Committee.

The Convener: Is it agreed that we should recommend no further action for that document?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Stephen Imrie wants to come back to the document that Bruce Crawford queried.

Stephen Imrie: I advise the member that we have received document SP 482 only recently. As he correctly indicated, the matter has already been considered in the November Fisheries Council. If the committee is agreeable, I shall investigate why we received that document at such a late stage that we were unable to discuss it.

Bruce Crawford: Thank you.

Convener's Report

The Convener: The next item is a report on the meeting with President Mary McAleese of the Republic of Ireland. Margo MacDonald and Dennis Canavan also attended that meeting.

15:15

Ms MacDonald: President Mary McAleese spoke to a number of people assembled in the Signet Library. Politics, the Church and business—the usual suspects—were all represented. I was very impressed by the President's speech, because it teetered nicely between a political analysis and a good-will visit.

The President treated our Parliament and the Scots in general as being the same as the Irish, in that we have every right to think of ourselves as contributing to Europe, rather than being mere beneficiaries. She referred to the historical links between Ireland and Scotland as Celtic fringe nations, but did not dwell on the maudlin. She moved ahead quickly and delicately to stress the fact that we are partners and competitors in developing the European economy, in investing in the European zone and in our approach to coping with the ups and downs of the global economy.

As members will gather, it was a decent speech that the woman made. Everyone who was there was charmed and impressed by her. If I may express a personal observation, I hope that, when the convener of this committee or of any other goes on a reciprocal visit to Dublin, they will appear just as confident about European matters.

The Convener: That is quite a challenge, Margo.

The next item concerns the role of the European Committee in relation to human rights. Following the discussions at previous meetings, we had asked for a report on what we could legitimately consider. The clerk will circulate that report and we can return to it if necessary when we consider our future work programme.

The next item is a letter from Bill Miller MEP, in

which he makes some useful suggestions about European programmes. This is rather different from the work that we have asked the rapporteurs to do, but the committee may want to consider commissioning a seminar to link in with the European Commission, identifying the various programmes and funding sources that Scottish organisations and institutions can tap into. That work could provide education for members as well as information for members of the public who look to the Parliament for advice on such matters.

Winnie Ewing will be familiar with some of the descriptions in the letter, but others may wonder what the new SOCRATES initiative means or what is available through the DAPHNE initiative or ARCHIPELAGO. That could be a useful starting point for discussions at a future meeting.

Ms Oldfather: I can see the proposal being of value to members of this committee. However, local authorities are already participating in many of those initiatives. For example, North Ayrshire Council has been participating in SOCRATES for some time. I know that a great deal of work has also been done in Scotland on the DAPHNE initiative. There are some very well-informed people out there who are already doing a good job in accessing funds.

The Convener: At a future meeting we can consider the various initiatives and funding sources. It was very helpful of Bill Miller to bring this to our attention.

The next issue that I had put on the agenda was how we deal with members' business. Some of this may be covered when we finalise our work programme, but I am aware that there have been a number of expressions of interest in allowing members to present pieces of work. To some extent, that will depend on the work programme and how long it takes to commission the reports that we have requested. I may want to come back to this, to see whether we have space on our agenda in which to progress other issues relatively quickly.

I would like to say two things about the date and time of our next meeting. We are proposing a meeting on 14 December to consider the objective 3 operational plan. With your agreement, I will circulate our draft report, which is based on comments that were made previously. If members want to make any alterations, they should inform Stephen Imrie by 5 o'clock tomorrow, so that he can finalise the report. The report incorporates comments that members have made. The intention is to have those changes approved so that the report can be submitted to the minister ahead of next week's discussion as this committee's view on the plan.

Ben Wallace: I would like to make a point about

the objective 3 plan. Some of us went to the briefing that was held on it last week, at which it was made clear that the plan has not yet been finished. We have been promised that we will get it by tomorrow. It is a 400-page document, and some things have changed. We were briefed by the Executive's officials, who said that a number of changes had been made to the original plan and that they would have been unhappy for us to comment before we saw the finished version. They agreed that we would not have enough time to digest the report and question the minister on it if we did not get it by Friday. Stephen Imrie was also at the meeting.

Stephen Imrie: The intention was that, on the basis of our previous discussion of the objective 3 plan and the comments that were made at the briefing with the Scottish Executive officials, we would try to produce a short draft report highlighting our views at this stage. We would also try to incorporate into the report any comments that members had when they received the final version of the objective 3 operational plan. That report would be tabled at our meeting of 14 December to assist with the discussions with the minister, but it would still be a draft report. After the meeting we would revise it quickly to take into account what had been said there. The finalised report would be presented to the Scottish Executive. That procedure was agreed to assist the Executive to finalise its operational plan, so that it could still submit the plan to the European Commission this side of the Christmas and new year break.

The Convener: There are two separate issues. The draft report is based on members' earlier comments and the informal briefing. Its aim is to focus some specific attention on areas that concern us. However, it is not our final report. We will have an opportunity to revise it further at the meeting of 14 December.

The second issue, which is the inadequate availability of documents ahead of an important meeting with the minister, was touched on by Ben Wallace. He is right to say that the plan is a very bulky document and that it will be difficult for us to give due consideration to it. Do we know when the final draft of the document will be available?

Stephen Imrie: As Mr Wallace said, we agreed informally with the Executive officials that they would try to give us the document by today or tomorrow. Those would be the earliest dates by which they could provide us with the final plan. We indicated to them that if we did not receive it by then, it would be difficult for members to give the plan proper consideration.

Ben Wallace: I had a detailed brief based on the original plan, but when I asked questions from it at the briefing the officials said that they had

changed the plan so much in some areas that they were reluctant to give answers based on the previous draft. What worries me is that we will have a draft report on a draft plan that has now changed.

The Convener: Our difficulty is that the Scottish Executive is working to a tight time scale for getting the plan to the Commission. We could say that we are not prepared to meet the minister because we do not have the document. The problem is that the Executive would go ahead and submit the plan anyway. Next week will be our only opportunity to discuss it, although this is clearly not a satisfactory situation.

Cathy Jamieson: I wanted to follow up on some of the points that have been raised, because I was also at the briefing. Am I correct in understanding that the comments that were made at that briefing have been taken into account in the draft report? There was broad agreement among all of us who were present at the briefing on some of the areas that we would want to be addressed in the plan.

Stephen Imrie: Yes.

Cathy Jamieson: It might be helpful if we could see the draft report, which would give us an indication of how things stand.

The Convener: We will agree to circulate the report. If members have any further comments, they should inform Stephen Imrie, who will try to incorporate what he can into what will still be a draft report ahead of the meeting with Jack McConnell next week. We will make our concern known separately to the Executive about the late availability of the final plan.

Dr Jackson: I am scheduled to attend a meeting of the Local Government Committee on the afternoon of 14 December. Will the meeting with Jack McConnell be in the afternoon?

Stephen Imrie: Would you like me to check when the Local Government Committee meeting is due to take place, or when our meeting is scheduled?

Dr Jackson: At the moment they seem to be scheduled for the same time.

Stephen Imrie: I will check whether there is a clash with the Local Government Committee meeting. Our meeting is at 2 o'clock in the chamber, but I will check the status of the Local Government Committee meeting. We were not due to meet on 14 December. Today's meeting was to have been our last meeting this side of Christmas. Next week's meeting had to be scheduled in.

The Convener: It was done to accommodate the objective 3 plan.

Dr Jackson: I might not be able to attend.

Ms Oldfather: I, too, may have problems attending next week. I want to be clear about this. You want us to submit our comments on the draft report that we more or less agreed at a previous meeting. We have not seen the report, but it takes into account the comments that we made at that meeting. The report will be circulated, and we will have to comment on it by tomorrow. However, the report is not based on the finalised plan. I am not sure that that makes sense.

The Convener: It makes sense up to a point. At the moment, what you have described is all that we can do. The report is based on the information that was provided to us when the officials appeared before the committee, updated by a briefing that a representative of each political group received from some of the officials involved. That is the most that we can do before our meeting with Jack McConnell. It would help to focus attention on what we consider to be the general issues. It is not our final comment. We will make that next week. We hope to have received the document by then, although that will not give us much time to examine it.

15:30

The briefing was based on the most up-to-date information that was available. We must agree whether it goes to the Scottish Executive ahead of the meeting. It would be useful to feed back some of the comments that came out of the informal briefing, although it does not represent the final view of the committee. We will write to the Scottish Executive separately expressing our concern at the lack of provision of the document. Whether we like it or not, we will have to go ahead with that meeting next week. Otherwise, we will not have an opportunity to comment before that document is sent to Brussels.

Ben Wallace: Although this is partly the Executive's fault, I must say in its defence that it is tied as well, as this report must be in Brussels by 17 December. As it is a lengthy report, can we get a briefing on it if it comes in tomorrow or the day after? Can a SPICe researcher give us a synopsis of it?

The Convener: We will do what we can.

Allan Wilson: It might be worth while highlighting the aspects of the report that have been subject to substantial change.

The Convener: I propose that the January meeting focuses on interviewing Lex Gold and members of his committee who are considering the programme on the monitoring of management structures. We will want to meet a range of organisations to examine that. We should therefore schedule that meeting in Glasgow.

Tavish Scott: What is the date of that meeting?

The Convener: We have not fixed a date yet. I will come back to the committee with a suggested venue and date.

The last point goes back to the scrutiny process. We will continue in private so that we are off the record as far as the official report is concerned.

15:32

Meeting continued in private until 15:33.

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