

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

Tuesday 8 February 2000
(*Afternoon*)

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CONTENTS

Tuesday 8 February 2000

	Col.
REPORTERS	409
SCRUTINY	413
PETITIONS	428
CONVENER'S REPORT	440

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

3rd Meeting 2000, Session 1

CONVENER

*Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

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

CLERK TEAM LEADER

Stephen Imrie

ASSISTANT CLERK

David Simpson

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

European Committee

Tuesday 8 February 2000

(Afternoon)

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

The Convener (Hugh Henry): Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the third meeting of the European Committee in 2000. I would like to welcome Mr Michael Roberts, who is a senior official in the European secretariat of the Cabinet Office in London. No doubt he is coming to Scotland to see how things should be done properly. I hope that that will be fed back.

Reporters

The Convener: The first item on our agenda is the terms of reference for reporters. We have agreed our work programme for the next 18 months and the procedures by which our committee reporters shall work. That allows us to bring forward proposals on the terms of reference for reporters' work. Unfortunately for her, Sylvia Jackson is the guinea pig for this process. She has produced a detailed remit and proposal for our consideration on the sixth environmental action programme. Sylvia, would you like to speak to your paper?

Dr Sylvia Jackson (Stirling) (Lab): Yes, most willingly. First, I wish to thank Stephen Imrie, because he worked closely with me and did a lot of the work.

The first part of the paper provides the background to the key issues. It gives the historical context for the involvement of the European Community in the area of sustainability. Paragraph 4 states one of the important points, which is the

"recognition that environmental legislation in itself is not sufficient to improve the environment. Development in other policy areas create their own environmental pressures".

Page 2 develops the argument that we need to look at mainstreaming and asks how other policy areas can take account of sustainability. I am investigating a number of business organisations to see how that is being dealt with. They are not mentioned in the document, but reports will be included later—those reports are rather negative about how much various industries are taking sustainability on board.

One could spend a lifetime working on this subject, so we have focused on specific topics. I

thank Stephen for suggesting that we examine the debate that is taking place on the European Commission's sixth environmental action programme. We should consider how we can input into that programme and how we can increase awareness of sustainability in the areas of development in which this Parliament is involved.

The third last paragraph on page 2 highlights some of the main issues. They are

"the provision of information on environmental issues"—

that is, awareness building—

"to help the public and other stakeholders understand and contribute to the debate".

There is "the question of implementation" in Scotland

"and how well legislation and/or measures are progressing".

Finally, there are

"new emerging concerns such as chemicals, GMOs, degradation"

and so on, which will be new subjects on the agenda.

Keeping pace with European legislation will be important. I thank Stephen and the Executive secretariat, because they are highlighting the documents that will be important to keep me and those who are involved with sustainability well informed. Page 4 of the document lists the organisations that will be consulted. The Scottish Parliament information centre will do some initial research in this area. As I say, there are a lot of other documents that we would like to look at before we start. Obviously, the Scottish Executive will be another important starting point. That is all that I wish to say at the moment.

The Convener: Thank you, Sylvia. This is a comprehensive and exceptionally good paper to start us off. I open up discussion to members of the committee.

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): I have a number of questions, two of which are on definitions. In your paper, you talk about the anguish over the definition of sustainable development. You also use the phrase "environmentally friendly". Do you intend to define sustainable development and to give its parameters? Your paper is good but, unless we set the boundaries on what is meant by sustainable development and environmentally friendly, we may not be sufficiently focused.

Dr Jackson: The definition of sustainability that is most widely accepted covers its three aspects—the environmental, the economic and the social. We are focusing on the environmental action programme, whose key emphasis is to link the environmental aspect to the other two aspects.

That is why mainstreaming is an especially important part of the exercise. Is that helpful?

Ben Wallace: I am sure that you understand my concern, but I accept your definition.

I would like to ask the convener for some guidance. The sixth European environmental action plan is forecast to go on for a number of years. It will cover the enlargement of the European Union. There is concern within the EU that the new countries will not be able to keep pace with the environmental requirements of the action plan. I will consider the impact of enlargement in my project; will you be considering whether the action plan is sustainable in Scotland and in those other countries?

The Convener: That is an extremely important issue and your point is well made, Ben. Sylvia will have to consider it and keep in contact with you and whoever works with you. Similarly, when you consider enlargement, Ben, you will have to address sustainability. However, even if there were no enlargement, the focus of the programme deserves our attention, and clearly Sylvia will concentrate on that.

Dr Jackson: As I understand it, the sixth environmental action programme will be about not only vision, but action on the ground. However, it will not be implemented overnight. Enlargement simply makes it a bigger picture, if you see what I mean. Applying the suggestions in the environmental plan will be for the longer term.

Ben Wallace: I am concerned about the overlap. The sixth environmental action plan talks about the long term as well. We have to tie in the action plan with the enlargement, both of which are long term.

Dr Jackson: I agree. I should add that Tavish Scott and I will also be liaising because of the agricultural aspect of many of the environmental projects. I am sorry that I did not mention that, Tavish.

Tavish Scott (Shetland) (LD): Although it is right, as Sylvia has suggested, to have "the vision thing", it is crucial that we do not make the projects that we allocate to individuals into academic exercises. They must be practical. At the end of the time allotted, we must be able to show that we have produced a body of work that has direct relevance to people in Scotland. Hugh said right at the beginning of this committee's work that it was important that we were able to show why Europe mattered and why we were involved in it. At the end of Sylvia's work, it will be essential that we can produce practical outputs.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): I agree with Tavish 100 per cent. I have been visiting manufacturing plants in my area over the

past few weeks. They are facing particular difficulties. They are not unwilling to comply with European environmental regulations, but there is a problem with time scales. I would be happy if Sylvia's report could consider the practical issues in relation to time scales, and I would be happy to speak to her and to Tavish about some of the problems that I have come across in my area.

The Convener: I hope that each of the reporters—especially when they are working with others—will arrange specific meetings and visits on behalf of the committee. Rather than sending the committee out to different parts of Scotland for no apparent reason, we must have a focus and a reason for convening a meeting. On the issue of sustainability, I hope that Sylvia and one or two others can, on behalf of the committee, arrange to meet interested organisations and sectors in other parts of Scotland, so that we can bring aspects of our work together.

Allan Wilson (Cunninghame North) (Lab): There is a list of organisations that should be consulted about which economic sectors will be affected. The list could be longer—my experience on the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee tells me that, in addition to the Confederation of British Industry (Scotland) and the Federation of Small Businesses, it might be appropriate to consult the Scottish Trades Union Congress. The issue of sustainable development does not often appear on the bargaining agenda, and that should be addressed by both partners in the various economic sectors that would be affected.

The Convener: That is a good point, Allan. The same point would also apply to the voluntary sector, in which many organisations may be affected.

Are we agreed that what Sylvia is proposing has the right focus and helps the committee to proceed with its work? Have we given Sylvia a proper steer to take the work out beyond the committee? Do we accept the paper as it stands?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you, Sylvia, for an excellent piece of work.

Scrutiny

14:15

The Convener: We move on to the second item on our agenda, which is the scrutiny of European documentation.

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Convener, at the previous meeting, I raised the question of the non-appearance of some documentation—of any documentation—relating to the lifting of the arms embargo on Indonesia. I specifically asked for the matter to be put on the agenda for a future meeting. Why is it not on the agenda for this meeting? What efforts have you, as convener, made to find out why we were not given any documentation relating to this very important matter?

The Convener: The simple reason, Dennis, is that the committee clerk has not yet received any documentation. I take responsibility for the agenda; the clerk has not received the documentation and that is why the issue is not on the agenda. At the end of this meeting, you and I can speak with the clerk to find out whether you have some information of which he is not aware. However, the agenda is before us, and that issue is not on the agenda.

Dennis Canavan: Can I just say—

The Convener: No, Dennis—

Dennis Canavan: On a point of order. The standing orders are quite clear. They state that:

“A committee shall meet to consider such business on such days and at such times as it may from time to time decide”.

I stress the word “it” in the phrase

“as it may from time to time decide”.

It is not the convener or the clerk but the committee that has control of the agenda. You have been trying to stifle debate on this matter, and, frankly, it is about time that you realised that this is not a meeting of Renfrewshire Council or the militant tendency. This is a parliamentary committee, and I am fed up with the stifling of debate by you on this and many other issues. I want an assurance that this important matter will be put on the agenda for the next meeting.

The Convener: Dennis, your comments are inappropriate and offensive.

Dennis Canavan: And very relevant.

The Convener: Dennis, I listened to you, so please do not interrupt.

Your comments are unnecessarily offensive and

inaccurate. I am not aware of any issues on which debate has been stifled. You had the opportunity to speak to the clerk. The clerk is still waiting for the information, which he has not seen. Your language is unfortunate, because it is inaccurate and unhelpful. We are trying to work together as a committee. If you have another agenda that you are seeking to address, that might explain the tone of your comments.

Dennis Canavan: Can I have an assurance that the matter will be put on the agenda for the next meeting? That is all that I ask.

The Convener: Dennis, I have explained how the matter will be dealt with. We will speak together to the committee clerk at the end of the meeting and take it from there.

Bruce Crawford (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): To help the process along and to ensure that we get the appropriate documentation, would not it be helpful to agree to put the issue on the agenda for the next meeting?

The Convener: I am sorry, Bruce, but that is not how business is conducted. We are on a specific agenda item—the scrutiny of documentation. Dennis has raised a separate point about documentation, which the clerk to the committee says he has not received. We are moving on to the next item on the agenda.

Dennis Canavan: I move that the non-appearance of the documentation on the lifting of the arms embargo in Indonesia be put on the agenda for the next meeting. It is a matter for the committee to decide; it is not for you to decide, convener.

Ms Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (SNP): I second that.

The Convener: I am sorry. The motion is not competent.

Ms MacDonald: According to standing orders, convener, it is.

The Convener: I will take advice on the standing orders.

Rule 12.3.1 of the standing orders clearly states:

“The convener shall notify the Clerk”—

Dennis Canavan: Notify. Not decide.

The Convener: As convener, I shall

“notify the Clerk and the Clerk shall notify members in the Business Bulletin of the agenda for each meeting.”

Your proposal, Dennis, is therefore not competent.

Dennis Canavan: On a point of order, convener. The second part of that rule refers simply to notification. The decision about what is and what is not on the agenda is not your

decision; it is the decision of the committee.

The Convener: I am advised that that is not the clerk's understanding of the standing orders. I have said that we will meet to discuss the matter at the end of the meeting. Your proposal is not competent, so we are moving on to the second item on the agenda.

Dennis Canavan: I will challenge your interpretation of the standing orders with a higher authority.

The Convener: That is entirely up to you.

Bruce Crawford: I want to raise a separate point of order. We need to clarify the process for making decisions when there is a conflict in the committee. Are we able to vote, for example? The clerk will need to advise us whether it is competent for Dennis to move a motion, which is seconded, so that the committee can discuss it.

Ms MacDonald: That is why I seconded Dennis's motion.

The Convener: I have ruled that Dennis's motion is incompetent. I will speak to Dennis and the clerk to the committee at the end of the meeting about the issue that Dennis raises. Before the next meeting I will also seek advice from the clerk and other authorities on the interpretation of standing orders. However, as far as this meeting is concerned, we have a specific agenda, to which I am sticking.

Bruce Crawford: I raised the point to be helpful. There may be issues on which a vote is necessary, because there is not consensus round the table. We need to know whether it is legitimate for a member to move a motion, which is seconded, so that the committee can have a debate and take a decision. As far as I understand it, that has already happened in a number of committees.

The Convener: I will take advice from the appropriate authorities on the interpretation of the rules. As far as this meeting is concerned, we are moving on to the second item on the agenda. Dennis will have the opportunity to discuss the item that he spoke about with the clerk and me. I repeat that the clerk to the committee has no further documentation on that matter, which is why it is not on the agenda.

Bruce Crawford: In that case—

The Convener: I am moving on.

Bruce Crawford: I want to suggest—

The Convener: No, Bruce—

Bruce Crawford: On a point of order.

The Convener: No. I am moving on.

Bruce Crawford: I do not accept your ruling. I suggest that we adjourn so that we can get advice before we proceed any further.

Dennis Canavan: I second that.

The Convener: No, Bruce. I do not intend to adjourn this meeting. I am moving on to item 2 on the agenda, which is scrutiny of European documentation.

Dennis Canavan: The decision to adjourn a meeting is not your decision, but the committee's, just as the agenda is for the committee to decide, not for you to decide. You are the convener of this committee, not a dictator.

The Convener: Dennis, this may be the way in which you are used to conducting meetings and it may be your style of operation, but—

Dennis Canavan: No. Unlike you, I was not in the militant tendency. I am a democrat.

The Convener: Dennis, we are here to discuss a specific agenda, which is what I intend to do. I will take advice on whether the committee can adjourn the meeting, as you suggest.

Bruce Crawford: I suggested the adjournment.

The Convener: Dennis also suggested it.

Dennis Canavan: I seconded the idea.

The Convener: I am advised that the suggestion is not competent. Therefore, we move to item 2 on the agenda.

The documents that we have before us are now structured—

Ms MacDonald: On a point of order. I am sorry, convener. I do not want to pursue something that may seem arcane, but it seems an important matter that the convener cannot take advice on how the standing orders should be applied as the committee proceeds. I thought that that was why we had clerks to the committee. You can ask for advice, but to do that, you would have to adjourn the committee for a few minutes.

The Convener: I will not adjourn the meeting. I will bring the clerk to the committee into the discussion. I then intend to move on.

Stephen Imrie (Clerk Team Leader): In relation to motions for adjournment and closure of meetings, rule 8.16 of standing orders states:

"Any member may, by motion without notice, propose that a meeting of the Parliament be adjourned or closed. Such a motion may be taken only with the agreement of the Presiding Officer."

Adapted for committees, that means that the motion can be taken only with the agreement of the convener. A similar ruling applies to motions, the selection of which is the responsibility of the convener.

If members wish, I will read out the rule that deals with the agenda. Rule 12.3.1 states:

"A committee shall meet to consider such business on such days and at such times as it may from time to time decide, subject to any timetable specified in the business programme. The convener shall notify the Clerk and the Clerk shall notify members in the Business Bulletin of the agenda for each meeting."

My interpretation of that, as I have been instructed to follow standing orders, is that the convener sets the agenda—

Dennis Canavan: No. He notifies the clerk of the agenda.

The Convener: Dennis, please do not interrupt. Do not be so rude.

Stephen Imrie: The convener then notifies the clerk of the agenda and I notify the members.

The Convener: Thank you, Stephen.

Dennis Canavan: With respect to the clerk—

The Convener: Dennis, you do not have the floor. I am moving on to the second item on the agenda.

Bruce Crawford: Convener, can I just say—

The Convener: No, Bruce. We are moving on.

Bruce Crawford: The issue will come back.

The Convener: Bruce, I am sorry, but we are moving on.

The clerk to the committee has structured the documents in a way that I hope will be helpful. We have tried to set the documents out in groups: those that require priority scrutiny; those that require routine scrutiny and that should be referred to another committee; those that require routine scrutiny, but for which we await further information; those for which we suggest that there should be no further action, but that should be sent to another committee for its interest; and—by far the largest group—those that we believe require no further action.

When we come to the documents in the last category, I will suggest simply that the convener's recommendation be accepted. If anyone has a point to make on one of the documents in that category, they can raise it individually. We will not go through the documents one by one.

We turn to the first group of documents, which—

Ben Wallace: I have a point of order, although it is not on the same issue as before. I see again that a number of the documents before the committee have already come into force. There have been a number of directives—more than 40—about which the committee could do nothing.

I have done some research into this issue: in the

treaty of Amsterdam, the Government signed an accord to the effect that it would respect the legislative procedure of directives. The directives would be studied by national Parliaments before they became law. Is it possible to put to the Executive, in the strongest terms, that continually to pass on directives—via the Cabinet Office to the committee—that are already law is not only to treat the committee with contempt but to break the accord that was signed in the Amsterdam treaty?

14:30

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): It is difficult for the committee to comment on a number of elements in the process, because those elements were, as we are aware, in place before the committee existed. I was keen to see the way in which we scrutinise such documents being approached differently. The way in which we have been doing things allows us to give priority to those directives that we can still influence. We have, in the past, spent a lot of time talking about issues that, although they might be interesting, we can do nothing about. I hope that the discussion today will help to change that.

The Convener: Those comments will be reflected in a letter that I will have drafted on that subject.

We will move on to consideration of documents for which priority scrutiny has been recommended.

Irene Oldfather: I would like some clarification. Will we undertake priority scrutiny of such documents today, or will we merely agree that they are documents for priority scrutiny? The documents were not circulated with the other papers, so I have had no chance to examine them.

The Convener: The documents will come before the committee for scrutiny at a later date. Does any member wish to raise any points on any of the documents?

Ben Wallace: Can I have a copy of document SP 625?

The Convener: All the documents in the priority scrutiny category will be circulated to committee members.

For the following documents, the recommendation is that they be given priority scrutiny:

SP 625 (EC Ref No 13522/99, COM(99) 624 final)

SP 627 (EC Ref No 13536/99, COM(99) 564)

Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: For the following documents,

the recommendation is that they be given priority scrutiny:

SP 634 (EC Ref No 13676/99, COM(99) 613)

SP 666 (EC Ref No 566 99/0225, COM(99) (CNS))

SP 670 (EC Ref No 13540/99, COM(99) 565)

Is that agreed?

Dr Winnie Ewing (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I would certainly like to read what has been sent to the committee about SP 634, which is to do with regional fisheries organisations, a subject that strikes a chord with me.

Stephen Imrie: I should advise members what is meant by priority scrutiny. According to the procedures that the committee agreed at a previous meeting, priority scrutiny means that the committee is likely to invite the Scottish Executive to discuss the nature of such documents. That is because such documents represent an early—white paper or green paper—stage of policy development on an issue. Members might want to ask the Executive what its plans are in relation to future legislative proposals. Such documents might also raise issues of particular relevance to Scotland, such as the regional fisheries organisations.

I understand that SP 634 is likely to be discussed in the European Council of Ministers in April. Members might want to use a procedure similar to that used before the December Fisheries Council, when the committee discussed the issue with civil servants and officials and then produced a report for the Minister for Rural Affairs before he attended that council's meeting.

Dr Ewing: By the time that the matter comes before the council, our democratic intervention is pretty well over. I would like information about the issue at the earliest opportunity.

The Convener: We will examine that urgently.

Ms MacDonald: I would like to see document SP 670. Such a directive will have considerable implications. The Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee will also be interested in it.

The Convener: As I have said, all the priority scrutiny documents will be circulated to committee members.

Ms MacDonald: If the committee wants to discuss document SP 670 further after having read a paper on it, what is the trigger date by which we will have to inform the Executive of our thoughts?

Stephen Imrie: That depends. I will need to consult the explanatory memorandum to examine the timetable, but the trigger date for us is usually

the date on which a document is taken in council, if it is at the stage of the process when it is about to be finally agreed. If the document is at the green paper or white paper stage, there might not be a particular date by which the committee would have to speak to the Executive.

Members are advised that that should be done at the earliest possible opportunity. If members seek to influence the way in which such documents are considered in Brussels, the committee will have to take into consideration the dates on which various working groups will take place in Brussels. In that way the committee will be able to either speak directly to the European Commission, for example, or to Scottish members of the European Parliament.

The committee could also speak to Scottish Executive civil servants as they become engaged in the process of negotiating a UK position.

Ms MacDonald: Would those civil servants be involved in the process? Equal treatment in employment is a grey area in which some matters are devolved and some are reserved.

Stephen Imrie: The degree to which Scottish Executive civil servants are part of the process of negotiating a UK line depends on the content of each document. I do not have information to hand on the documents that we are discussing, but I can find out more if Ms MacDonald wishes.

Cathy Jamieson: I would like something clarified. If we agree that the documents are for priority scrutiny, does that mean that, in a sense, we are notifying the Executive that the committee will want to comment at some stage? There would, therefore, be an onus on members to read the documents and to indicate the issues that they wanted the Executive to address.

The Convener: That is right.

Dr Jackson: I would like to see how our timetable develops over the weeks. My sympathy goes to the clerks in this. We might have to rejig our agendas week by week as new priority areas appear. As with the document that Winnie Ewing mentioned, we might receive documents that need quick examination if the committee is to be effective.

The Convener: I will bring in the clerk on that point.

Stephen Imrie: If members will indulge me, I will provide a further point of clarification. Two groups of documents should be separated. On the one hand are documents that are near the end of the legislative process, in which the committee might seek to influence the fine details before such documents are taken in council. On the other hand are green papers and white papers that make no specific legislative provisions. They are not pieces

of legislation, but policy proposals for future legislation. At that stage members might want to consider whether the committee should ask the Executive how it plans to respond—in one or two years' time—to the legislation that results from a green or white paper. There are two different types of document and two different times when the committee should intervene in their passage.

Allan Wilson: Can I take it from that that the proposals that are referred to in documents SP 666 and SP 670 are at the stage where they are being considered in principle? I can imagine that there might be several voices raised against the principle of an equal treatment in employment and occupation directive. The study of the directive would come subsequent to that and the committee would be asked whether it was in favour of the principle of the directive rather than of the content.

The Convener: It is the implementation and the establishment that are important, rather than saying whether we agree with the principles.

The recommendation is that documents SP 649 (EC Ref No 14080/99, COM(99) 641 COD 98/0350) and SP 697 (EC Ref No 14242/99, SEC(99) 1981) be referred to the Transport and the Environment Committee.

Tavish Scott: Can I suggest that when they are referred—and I dare say the Transport and the Environment Committee is greatly looking forward to receiving them—that there is an accompanying note from the Scottish Executive, or that this committee's clerk asks the Scottish Executive to provide a note for the Transport and the Environment Committee?

There is something of a grey area caused by devolution, over where the responsibilities lie for marine pollution. It would be helpful for the Transport and the Environment Committee to have some sort of line from the Executive.

Stephen Imrie: There is a request to the Scottish Executive to provide further information on all documents that members select for scrutiny. If Tavish Scott wishes to give me the questions after the meeting, I will ensure that they are incorporated into our request.

The Convener: The recommendation is to await further information on the following documents, on page 3 of the sift note, for routine scrutiny:

SP 653

SP 659 (EC Ref No 14114/99, COM(99) 608 99/246 CNS)

SP 678 (EC Ref No 5091/00, COM(99) 717 99/0284)

SP 695 (EC Ref No 5118/00, COM(99) 664).

We will return to them at a future meeting.

Ben Wallace: Can I have a copy of document SP 659?

The Convener: We are deferring that, and all the documents on page 3, to a future meeting.

Dr Ewing: Is there any timetabling for that? Can we get more information on the beef labelling system?

The Convener: I will ask the clerk to look into that for you, Dr Ewing.

Dr Ewing: It is an continuing matter. We get lots of letters about it and we do not always know how to answer them at the moment.

The Convener: For the following documents, the recommendation is for no further action to be taken, but for a copy of them to be sent to the specific committees identified for their interest:

SP 674 (EC Ref No PE-CONS 3638/99)

SP 691 (EC Ref No 14205/00, COM(99) 687)

SP 698 (EC Ref No 14251/99, COM(99) 620 COD 99/0269)

SP 709 (COM(99) 719)

Are we all agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The recommendation for the documents listed on pages 5 to 12 of the sift/scrutiny recommendation note is for no further action. Does anyone have a particular item to raise about any of those documents?

Dr Ewing: The top document on page 7, SP 640 (EC Ref No 13879/99, COM(99) 629 COD 98/0169), is on the Culture 2000 programme. I hate to bring up the past, but when I was chairman of the European Parliament's Committee on Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport, the Commission had a great desire to put together all the different budget headings, because that made things easier for them. In fact, it was better for the whole of Europe that the budget headings were clear and different, so that interested parties could make applications and perhaps eventually get some funding.

I am a wee bit suspicious of this document. I do not like the idea of the Commission putting the budget all together. I would therefore like some more information on the document. I have more points that I could make, but I do not want to hog the floor.

The Convener: It says on our private papers that document SP 640 may have already been adopted, as it is meant to replace the previous arrangements as of 1 January 2000.

Dr Ewing: Oh dear.

The Convener: Our papers say that document SP 640 may be of interest to the reporter on culture and sport, who is Margo MacDonald. We could find out whether the establishment of the cultural policy instrument as detailed in document SP 640 has already happened. I will ask Stephen Imrie to check that.

Dr Ewing: Establishing that single budget is a nice easy way for the Commission to lump everything together, but it is not a good thing for the people of Europe.

The Convener: We will check whether the instrument has already been adopted.

Is there anything else?

Dr Ewing: Document SP 652 (COM(99) 700), on fishing opportunities and fish stocks, appears on the same page of the sift note. I would like that at least to be examined by our fisheries people. If not, I would like to look at it.

The Convener: The document was adopted at the Fisheries Council on 16 and 17 December 1999.

Dr Ewing: So it is too late? It is something that has happened already?

The Convener: Yes.

Tavish Scott: Is it not the point that it was the measure shown in document 652 which implemented the December Fisheries Council, following the agreement of member states? It is merely the implementation of the political decision taken in December 1999.

Dr Ewing: So it is over already? Fine.

I would also like to highlight document SP 656 (EC Ref No 13659/99, COM(99) 669). I know that the imposition of anti-dumping duties on Norwegian salmon imports is something that has been going on for all of 20 years, but it is still hard to know where we stand at the moment.

The Convener: Members will see from the advice notes that the European Council adopted the proposal as Council regulations on 8 December 1999. I am advised that, on all dumping matters, the decisions tend to be taken before they come near this committee.

Dr Ewing: But the whole point is that we have never really enforced anti-dumping yet. I try to read everything about this, and it is still happening. It is a very serious matter for the whole salmon industry. More information for me, please.

The Convener: Anti-dumping measures tend to be taken at a European Council level, so we could seek some further advice on anti-dumping measures generally, and on the procedure and timing of decisions. That would help to clarify the

process for us.

14:45

Ms MacDonald: Winnie Ewing was saying that, although the decision has been taken, it does not matter a docken leaf. Prior anti-dumping measures have passed into statute and recommendation. Perhaps we do not need to reinforce that, but rather see how they are monitored to discover whether they are working.

The Convener: We can certainly ask the question about how the anti-dumping measures are being monitored and bring the answers back in report form.

Is that action agreed for document SP 656?

Members indicated agreement.

Dr Ewing: Document SP 668 (EC Ref No PE-CONS 3633/99) covers renewable energy. Scotland is a sleeping giant in this respect. The document details a programme for the promotion of renewable energy, but should this committee perhaps have a rapporteur to examine the way in which we do not take advantage of the moneys available for renewable energy?

The Convener: What we are not doing here is discussing the broader issue; we are discussing a specific document. It may be legitimate for a reporter to look into that at some stage, but, for now, is there anything that members wish to say in relation to that document?

Dr Ewing: I have not got document SP 668 in front of me, so it is impossible to answer that. I would like to have the document in front of me.

The Convener: As members know, if they require any of the documents, we can ask the committee's clerk team leader for them.

Bruce Crawford: I might be off the beam here, convener, but I wonder if some of the other committees might not be interested in some of the other documents listed for no further action.

Specifically, document SP 616 (EC Ref No 12999/99, SEC(99) 1886) is a working paper entitled "Fifth Report on the Implementation of the Telecommunications Regulatory Package". I know that the Transport and the Environment Committee is carrying out an examination into the whole issue of telecommunication masts. I do not know whether such masts come under the telecommunications regulatory package, but it may impact on that committee's work. I wonder whether that document should be passed to the Transport and the Environment Committee.

The Convener: We will consider that. I suspect that it is not an issue, but if it is, I will ensure that the clerk draws it to the attention of the

appropriate committee.

Bruce Crawford: There are other documents in that group which are perhaps more obviously of interest to the Transport and the Environment Committee. For example, document SP 618 (EC Ref No 13414/99, COM(99) 617 final) discusses the

"interoperability of the trans-European conventional rail system".

That is bound to have an impact not just on the UK, but on Scotland, with the possibility, for example, of having a uniform gauge of railway lines.

If I am going off the beam on some of this stuff, I am sure that you guys will tell me.

The Convener: What are you suggesting?

Bruce Crawford: I suggest that we pass SP 618 to the Transport and the Environment Committee as a matter of interest.

The Convener: That would do no harm. We can do that.

Bruce Crawford: SP 628 (EC Ref No 13549/99 REV 1 ECO 396 ENV 412) on European Union industry policy and sustainable development should go to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee.

The Convener: I want to bring in the clerk to make a general point, and then we will go back to the specific notes.

Stephen Imrie: The documents have been examined to find out if they provide information of interest or have particular relevance to the work of another committee, which may want to take the issue forward. I suspect that several documents, if not all of them, have some degree of interest to other committees.

I respectfully advise members that they may wish to consider the volume of documents that we send to other committees, given the work load of those committees. I would be happy to copy documents for the interest of other committees if members decide that that is desirable.

The Convener: It would do no harm to send SP 628 to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee for interest and to allow the committee to decide whether to put it on the agenda.

Bruce Crawford: The document on a single European sky, SP 636 (EC Ref No 13735/99, COM(99) 614), and the implications of a unified airways system would certainly be of interest to the Transport and the Environment Committee, taking that committee into an area of significant debate.

The Convener: We will send SP 636 to the

Transport and the Environment Committee.

Bruce Crawford: We should also send SP 637 (EC Ref No 13736/99, COM(99) 614) to that committee.

The Convener: We will send SP 637 to the Transport and the Environment Committee.

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): It might help the smooth running of the committee if members could indicate before the meeting matters that should be dealt with in a different way to that indicated on the schedule. That would allow the clerks to prepare an explanation of the current situation.

The Convener: That would be helpful. However, individual members have the right to raise matters at the committee. If the clerk knows in advance what members are going to suggest, he can construct the recommendations in accordance with that.

Irene Oldfather: When we drafted the guidelines on whether something would be priority or routine, we said that we would revisit them. Perhaps we could do that in a few weeks. I am losing the thread of what the guidelines are on deciding whether something has priority or should be referred to another committee.

I thought that we would look at things as a priority that had a particular and perhaps differing interest to Scotland. The Council directive implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons, irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, SP 666 (EC Ref No 566 99/0225, COM(99) (CNS)), is something that will be applied across the UK.

I understand that we might want the document for information, but it is not something that we need to spend a great deal of time on, given, as Allan Wilson said, that the principle has been agreed. The issue is one of implementation and I assume that such implementation will be uniform across the UK.

The Convener: We will come back to that in the near future. That is a useful suggestion.

Allan Wilson: If we agree to Bruce Crawford's proposal to send SP 618 to the Transport and the Environment Committee, we should also send SP 619 (EC Ref No 13417/99, COM(99) 616), which deals with three amended proposals for Parliamentary and Council directives on the development of the Community's railways, the licensing of railway undertakings and the allocation of railway infrastructure and safety certification.

The Convener: Do we agree to send SP 619 to the Transport and the Environment Committee?

Members indicated agreement.

Ms MacDonald: In discussing renewable energy, Winnie Ewing highlighted the fact that there will be documents that are not of immediate importance, but that are important to the underlying strategy of economic development.

The Convener: We have gone over this before. We are not being asked to make general comments on the advisability of particular topics or whether we think that they are good ideas. At this point, we are asked to comment specifically on documents before us. Notwithstanding the significance of renewable energy, the issue today is whether there is something in the document that should be acted on, either by us or by another Scottish Parliament committee. It is not a general discussion on the principle of the document.

Ms MacDonald: I do not want a general discussion on the principle, I want an effective way of ensuring that things do not fall through the cracks. The railways documents could have fallen through the cracks. We have already agreed that that is important and should be considered.

David Mundell: I have a question for the clerk. Do the other committees and their clerks have access to this information? Can they be proactive on that?

Stephen Imrie: All members of the Parliament and my clerking colleagues have access to original EC documents. A full set is held in the reference centre of the Parliament, which receives the documents on the same day as I do. I proactively discuss the contents of certain documents with fellow clerks to inform them of particular issues that arise when we carry out the initial analysis, before we discuss the documents with the convener. After discussion with the convener, we produce the recommendations.

David Mundell: If a document appears in the no further action section of the recommendation, is there an opportunity for somebody else to take it before another committee?

Stephen Imrie: Yes.

Petitions

The Convener: We have two petitions to consider, PE61 and PE62, both coming from the National Farmers Union of Scotland. PE61 calls for the allocation of national funds to compensate Scottish arable producers for the introduction of the euro. Both petitions ask the Parliament to ask the Executive to fully compensate certain agricultural sections for the fluctuations in the value of the euro against sterling. Agrimonetary schemes are available, but those require matched funding from national funds.

I propose that we ask the Executive to give details of its plans to the Rural Affairs Committee for detailed consideration. That committee has spent some time considering the problems of the rural economy. Given that this is a problem that may affect other sectors of the economy in Scotland, I suggest that we ask the Executive what plans, if any, it has for compensation. Those plans should be passed to the European Committee for our consideration.

Bruce Crawford: I agree with the two points you make in the paper—they give us a useful focus—but the biggest question that needs to be addressed is that which was raised by the NFU on matched funding, proposed by the European Commission, for compensation for fluctuations in the euro.

As you said in your opening statement, convener, there is an issue concerning matched funding—which is potentially worth £30 million or £40 million—from the UK Government. Although the EU will pay £19 million into the system in the first year, the UK Government must match the £9.5 million from the EU that will be provided the following year.

The Government must still agree to put in additional money under the compensation scheme available to UK growers for the fall in the value of the euro. The committee might want to take a view on progressing this specific request from the NFU.

Furthermore, would not it be appropriate to ask the Executive if it is in favour of the euro compensation schemes, and whether it will ask the UK Treasury to match the EU's proposed support? Although monetary policy is a reserved matter, the Executive could press the UK Treasury on behalf of Scottish farmers, and the committee should be actively involved in that process. As a result, I suggest that we take the two steps that I have outlined, which are additional to those that you have rightly recommended.

15:00

The Convener: You are asking us to reach a conclusion, Bruce. Perhaps we should get information about the Executive's plans and proposals before we do. I certainly want to be informed of the Executive's views if it does not intend to find out what the implications might be, and why. Thereafter, the issue is whether the matter simply goes back to the Rural Affairs Committee or back both to us and that committee. I am open to the suggestion that it would be appropriate for this committee to consider the matter.

Dennis Canavan: I listened carefully to what you said, convener. However, with respect, we must try to feed into the decision-making process before the Executive makes decisions. If the committee believes in principle that there should be a generous response to the farmers' petitions—particularly to PE61—we should ask the Scottish Executive now to make representations to the UK Government to be as generous as possible with its matched funding. Although there might not be a majority in the committee who wish to commit to 100 per cent of what the farmers request, time is of the essence if our representations are to be meaningful. Instead of being a reactive committee, we should be making our views known to the Scottish Executive now and urging it to take appropriate action.

The Convener: Equally, if we are not to be a reactive committee, we should have all the information that will enable us to make a decision, instead of simply reacting to a petition. At the moment, all we have are the details in the petition. If the committee's decisions are to carry any weight, we must find out what the Executive's proposals are and the implications of those proposals—that will help us make to an informed decision. Although I take your point about time being of the essence, Dennis, we have to be able to make such an informed decision if we are to do justice to this issue.

Ben Wallace: Jack McConnell's letter to me about structural funding gave me information about the euro and payments from Europe into the Treasury. On the matter of fluctuations in the euro, the euro is paid into the Treasury's account; the Treasury then works out the exchange rate and passes that on. I wonder whether the committee should make representations to John Reid, as the UK Secretary of State for Scotland, to lobby the Treasury, because the Scottish Executive might not be able to pay compensation.

The Convener: Although that might be a legitimate course of action, it reinforces my point that we need information before we jump to a conclusion.

Dr Ewing: I would have thought that we have all the information, unless farmers have written only to me with serious facts and figures about the possible bankruptcy of great sectors of the agriculture industry and the threatened suicides that some of us are trying to avert. I am not exaggerating when I say that; we have just narrowly averted a suicide in Moray.

We have the facts and figures. The committee wants the money that is on offer—which I believe is £19.5 million—to be matched by £9.5 million from the Government. That is not a lot to save an industry. Welsh farmers have reached the point of backing a vote of no confidence in the First Secretary if he does not agree to match EU funding for them.

Frankly, I would be appalled if we waited for more information on this issue or for the matter to go to this or that committee. If we do not ask for matched funding now, we put great sectors of the industry at risk, particularly the vulnerable areas in the Highlands and Islands.

The Convener: The difficulty with your suggestion—and it comes back to my point about needing information—is that the petitioners are not asking for the petition to be passed to John Reid or whoever; they are asking the Scottish Parliament to allocate sufficient national funds. Ben Wallace rightly said that the solution might not be entirely within the gift of the Scottish Executive. We need further information to find out whether that is the case and I have suggested a course of action that will help us do that.

Cathy Jamieson: From letters and lobbying by the NFU and people in my constituency, I am well aware of the difficulties faced by farmers and I genuinely want us to make progress on the issue. However, I do not want us to agree to something we cannot deliver. Ben Wallace's point about that is important.

On the convener's second recommendation, we should ask the Scottish Executive to examine the issue across all sectors, because other industries have suffered in that respect.

David Mundell: Although I support both petitions in principle—indeed, the committee could give such support today—another step must be taken if the matter is to be concluded to the farmers' satisfaction. There is clearly a reason why the action they want is not being taken.

Ms MacDonald: Aye.

Dr Ewing: We know the reason.

David Mundell: We need to find out why the Scottish Executive is not taking that action. We can pass all the resolutions that we want, but unless we deal with petitions reasonably, the committee system will be devalued. Although I am

happy to support the petition in principle, it should be referred to the Rural Affairs Committee, which is dealing with the other six petitions: the two petitions before us are from a series of eight. The petition can then be dealt with in context, instead of the committee taking it in isolation and passing on a meaningless message of support for it.

Tavish Scott: I am a farmer, but I do not have any cattle. If members have read as far as Richard Henton's briefing note, they will notice that for the years 1999, 2000 and 2001 it refers to compensation payments for suckler cows, bulls and steers.

Jim Walker, the president of the National Farmers Union in Scotland, presented the petitions to John McAllion, the convener of the Public Petitions Committee, in Parliament Square. Colleagues who were there heard Jim Walker say clearly that the NFU and the industry want the Parliament to make clear that it cares about rural issues. They want the Parliament to put rural issues at the heart of its debates and, crucially, to put pressure on Westminster. The point that Jim Walker made is that this is a matter on which the Westminster Government and the Chancellor of the Exchequer must decide.

David Mundell's point about the Rural Affairs Committee is right. It is dealing with a range of petitions that have been presented to the Parliament and relate to its work. It is important to find out the Scottish Executive's line on the petitions. It would be in the interests of all members to know what the Executive thinks. If the Executive supports the aims of the petitions, presumably members will agree with it. If not, however, presumably they will disagree. We need to give the appropriate committee the chance to deal with these petitions correctly.

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I agree with Tavish, but I have just realised that another six petitions were submitted. We need to ask the farmers whether they will consider targeting particular areas, as I notice that the petitions deal in averages or worst possible scenarios. Presumably, their other petitions are the same. It might be a good idea to tease out where money should be directed. If average earnings are zero, some people are still making money and others are losing a lot. We need to find out where the areas of greatest need are.

The Convener: If the Rural Affairs Committee is to consider the issue in a broader context, what you suggest will probably be done best as part of that debate.

Ms MacDonald: We have enough information in the petitions that we have in front of us. Even someone such as me, in whose constituency there are not many farms, understands that there is a

crisis in the farming industry. It would not be out of order for us to do what David Mundell suggested and give our general support to what is being asked for. The petitions seem to be about a very basic question, which is—if you will excuse me for mentioning it—additionality. Is not it simply a case of the committee saying to the British Government that the rules of the game demand that once the European Union has allocated money for whatever purpose, the Government must match that? Is not it as basic as that?

Ben Wallace: I agree with what Tavish Scott said. We must do what is within our power. I also agree with Winnie Ewing that, for the purposes of Westminster, we are a lobbying committee. Far be it from me to correct members of the NFU, but there is some inaccuracy in the petitions. The ratio of matched funding is now 71 per cent to 29 per cent, 71 per cent being provided by the UK Government.

Dr Ewing: That is not true.

Ben Wallace: Under the Fontainebleau agreement, the ratio was 50:50 after the first payment. It was then reduced to 71:29—which is a concession, as in most cases it is 75:25. The bulk of the money to aid our farmers will come from the UK Government at Westminster and the Treasury—29 per cent will come from the European Union.

Ms MacDonald: We need to tell the farmers that.

Ben Wallace: I agree with Tavish Scott that the right way to proceed is to lobby the ministry at Westminster, through the Rural Affairs Committee. As the chairman of the NFU said, that is where the funding will come from. We should not think that there is a pot of European money that amounts to 50 per cent of the total to save our farmers. I would love there to be one, but there is not.

Allan Wilson: Tavish Scott and Ben Wallace have made their point effectively and I support their proposition. If the Rural Affairs Committee were to be the lead committee in such matters, it would be appropriate to refer back to it the information that was sought. I agree with you, convener, that we need first to seek and receive the information, so that we can make a judgment on the merits of the petitions.

There is also merit in what Ben Wallace, Margo MacDonald and others have suggested—that we look more generally at the issue of additionality. I do not believe that anything is being hidden in respect of Scotland's interests, so I support fully examinations of additionality, the Barnett formula and how public expenditure works in Scotland's favour—possibly with John Reid or another representative of the Scotland Office. However, that is a matter for future consideration. I support

the convener's recommendations on how we dispose of the two petitions that are before us.

15:15

The Convener: I do not know whether anything that we can add to those recommendations has come out of the discussion. We have a slightly different view—

Bruce Crawford: I want to respond to some of the things that have been said and to make a suggestion. I accept that the Rural Affairs Committee must take a more holistic approach than this committee can to the various petitions that have been submitted. However, petitions PE 61 and PE 62 have been referred to the European Committee because they raise specific issues about matched funding and the euro. This committee should take a view on those petitions. I accept that we might have to return to this issue because members have different information and different understandings of the processes involved but because of the time constraints, I suggest that we consider the petition again in two weeks' time, with the information to hand. We can then act as a lobbying group—if necessary, as Ben Wallace says, we can directly lobby John Reid. I recognise that this is a reserved matter, so I would be happy if the committee could get straight to John Reid without going through the Executive. We could agree to proceed in that way.

Allan Wilson's last point was about additionality and the Barnett formula. I would be grateful if you would agree to that being put on the agenda shortly, convener, as a formal piece of business.

The Convener: We will consider that separately.

There are two separate issues. First, we need to consider what we should do immediately in response to the crisis in our rural communities and industries. As Tavish Scott and others have said, the Rural Affairs Committee is considering that crisis broadly and should investigate the issues that are raised in the petitions that we have discussed.

Secondly, I suggest that we change the wording of our recommendation and ask the Scottish Executive "to provide the European Committee with information on forms of support available to sectors of the economy affected by fluctuations in the value of the euro". We should deal with the specific issue of the effects of such fluctuations on farmers by referring the petitions to the Rural Affairs Committee, as I do not think that that issue can wait.

To sum up, all the issues relating to fluctuations in the euro should come back to this committee, but the first paragraph of my recommendation

should stand and the petitions should be referred to the Rural Affairs Committee. Is that agreed?

Bruce Crawford: I am with you almost 100 per cent. However, David Mundell raised the issue of the lobbying role of the committee. While the Rural Affairs Committee might be examining the issue in depth, there is nothing to stop the European Committee coming back in two weeks to say, "Here is the issue fleshed out and here are the facts." As Ben Wallace said, we want to press John Reid to find a way forward on the issue of matched funding.

The Convener: That is the second part of it.

Bruce Crawford: Explain that to me.

The Convener: We will consider those issues as they affect every sector in this country, not just the rural sector.

Bruce Crawford: I accept that.

The Convener: If there is an issue that we need to take up with the Scottish Executive, we will do so. If there is an issue that we think is a matter for the Scotland Office and John Reid, we shall refer it to them. This committee will return to the problems caused by the fluctuations of the euro. On the first point, however, we will ask the Scottish Executive what its proposals are, specifically in relation to the rural sector and the effect on arable producers and farmers. Once the Rural Affairs Committee has that information, we shall ask that committee to take it into consideration in examining the broader problem.

Bruce Crawford: In that case, I am afraid that I do not agree with you.

Ms MacDonald: If your recommendation is accepted—and I assume that it will be, with a small amendment—it must be dealt with in a realistic time scale. It would not be unfair to ask the Scottish Executive to respond before the next meeting of this committee. It will be able to take information such as this down off the shelf from the departments in Westminster that are already dealing with it; it is not as if it is entirely new territory.

The Convener: We will work on that as soon as we can; I shall ask Stephen Imrie to get on to it this afternoon. If the information on the second part is available for our next meeting, we will consider it then. However, we are also asking the Scottish Executive to stipulate proposals in relation to arable producers and farmers, and we are asking for that information to be sent to the Rural Affairs Committee. With the amendment that I have proposed, is that agreed, or is there an alternative that—

Bruce Crawford: I am sorry to interrupt. May I suggest an alternative to the committee?

The Convener: You may.

Bruce Crawford: I understand that we need to consider the effects of fluctuations on all sectors of the Scottish economy. That must be considered in a progressive way in the longer term. However, compensation for farmers under the matched funding scheme is a matter of such importance to Scottish farmers that we could not do it justice by considering it only in the longer term.

I suggest that we bring back to the next committee meeting a paper that shows the position of the UK Government, through the Scottish Executive, on the whole issue of the euro fluctuations, so that we can discuss that and, if necessary, take up a lobbying position on behalf of Scottish farmers.

The Convener: The point that we have tried to make is that it is not just farmers who are affected by the problem. I accept your point that this committee should have a lobbying role if we feel that there are problems caused by fluctuations in the value of the euro. The committee intends to consider that very point. We will make those points both to the Scottish Executive and to Westminster, if appropriate.

On the first part of the proposal, we are asking for the views of the Scottish Executive, and we are asking the Rural Affairs Committee to take the matter into account as part of its consideration of other petitions. I believe that we are dealing with the petition appropriately by asking the Scottish Executive for further information on producers and farmers. We believe that the matter is best dealt with by the Rural Affairs Committee, but we do not have the information at present to comment on that. This committee will consider the problems caused by fluctuations in the value of the euro in all sectors of the economy.

Bruce Crawford: I do not accept that.

Dennis Canavan: Bruce Crawford's point was about timing. All that he is asking for, as I understand it, is that the position papers be submitted by the Scottish Executive in time for our next meeting so that we can come to a view on the matter.

The Convener: I addressed that point. In fact, I addressed it before Bruce spoke. I said that, if the information was available, the matter would be on the agenda for our next meeting. However, we do not control the Executive. We cannot guarantee—

Dennis Canavan: We are supposed to.

The Convener: No. We are here to hold the Executive to account.

Dennis Canavan: Yes.

The Convener: But we do not manage it. You may manage them separately, but that is a

different issue. We do not manage the staff of the Scottish Executive, so I cannot promise that the information will be available in two weeks. As soon as it is available, it will be back on our agenda. This discussion is going round in circles.

Dennis Canavan: But will you ask for that specific information to be available for our next meeting?

The Convener: Yes, we will ask for it to be available.

Bruce Crawford: That is clearer, convener.

Dr Ewing: Convener, we are asking for specific information. We know about that information already and we think that the time scale is one of horrendous urgency. With the greatest respect, convener, rather than following the mealy-mouthed approach that you suggest, we could ask the Scottish Executive about the time scale. We can say, "This is absolutely urgent, in respect of this sector, so when we meet in two weeks, we would like to have your answer." What is wrong with that sort of approach? Are we so mealy-mouthed that we cannot even do that? If we cannot, we are wasting our time.

The Convener: No, we are not wasting our time. We are asking for the information to be brought back to the committee. If it is available, we will have it at the next meeting. You are asking me to guarantee that it will be available, and I am sorry—

Dr Ewing: No. I am asking you to ask the Executive to bring forward the time scale, which is entirely different.

The Convener: Winnie, I have said about three times that we will ask for that.

Dr Ewing: No, you have not.

The Convener: Committee members have before them my recommendation, as amended. I now ask whether that recommendation is agreed to, or are there—

Dr Ewing: No.

The Convener: Right—we will put it to a vote. What is the procedure for a vote?

Bruce Crawford: Convener, perhaps I am being slow on the uptake—it could be the process of interpreting what you are saying. Your explanation of the position to the committee was not clear. Although I am clear about the situation now, your explanation was not clear—it was not clear that information would be coming back to the next meeting. You have now said that you will attempt to get that information to the next meeting. I am sorry, convener, but the two recommendations in the paper, to which you have continually referred, do not reflect that position.

The Convener: I have said on a number of occasions that we will attempt to get that information. I do not know whether it will definitely be available, as we are in someone else's hands.

Bruce Crawford: I am trying to help you, convener, and I accept that point.

The Convener: Right. Are we going with the recommendation?

Dennis Canavan: Convener, may I be helpful?

The Convener: That would be a first, Dennis, but never mind.

Dennis Canavan: It may help to bring unanimity to the committee if we were simply to add a third sentence to your recommendations. The first recommendation begins:

"To ask the Scottish Executive to stipulate its proposals".

The second recommendation begins:

"To ask the Scottish Executive to also provide the European Committee with information".

I suggest that we add a third recommendation, asking for the above information to be in the hands of the committee for consideration at our next meeting.

The Convener: I have already said that.

Dr Ewing: No, you did not.

Dennis Canavan: I think that we should put it in writing.

The Convener: Fine. We can specify that if you think that it would help that the information requested in the second recommendation should be before the committee at our next meeting. We will do so in our letter to the Scottish Executive. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We are agreeing that we will ask the Scottish Executive to stipulate its proposals for use of funds to compensate eligible sectors for the effects of fluctuations in the value of the euro and for it to discuss with the Rural Affairs Committee any proposals that affect arable producers and farmers.

We are also asking the Scottish Executive to provide the committee with information on forms of support available to all sectors of the economy affected by fluctuations in the value of the euro and to outline what plans there are for the use of any available funds. As far as the committee is concerned, we are asking for that information to be available for our next meeting.

Ms MacDonald: Dearie me—I am awful sorry, convener, but you have broadened your second recommendation, which referred to

"other sectors of the economy".

Our point was that information on the sector referred to in the petitions is required urgently—more urgently, perhaps, than information on the other sectors. While I am in favour of Cathy Jamieson's suggestion that we broaden out our request, we want an answer on this particular sector now.

The Convener: Wait a minute, Margo.

I apologise if I have misled the committee. However, right at the beginning, we said that we should consider how fluctuations in the value of the euro affect other sectors of the economy. I said that consistently, as did other committee members. That is what we said, Margo.

Ms MacDonald: I know, but my point is that we do not need that information for our next meeting.

Allan Wilson: Is it being proposed that we should take decisions on the relative merits of the farmers' petition and the effect of the euro on other sectors of the economy without the relevant information being available on what those precise effects might be?

I do not see myself principally as a lobbyist for the National Farmers Union. I want to take a balanced and considered approach, on the basis of information that is available on the effects of the euro on the economy as a whole. I believe that the action that you propose to take, convener, would give us that information.

The Convener: I intend to stick with that recommendation, and we will move to a vote if one is required. Is a vote required?

Irene Oldfather: I wish to make a suggestion that might assist matters with regard to paragraph 2. You said that we should ask the Scottish Executive to provide the European Committee with information on any other forms of support available to other sectors. If we said "all sectors", which would include a comprehensive cross-section of all sectors, that would mean that farmers could be considered in relation to structural funds, for example. Would that be agreeable to committee members?

The Convener: I thought that that was what we said—that the text would refer to all sectors of the economy. Is a vote required?

Ben Wallace: Fluctuations will be a Treasury issue, so one size will fit all. I will support you on "other sectors".

15:30

Irene Oldfather: Are we voting on "all sectors" or "other sectors"?

The Convener: The wording that I read out was

“all other sectors”. We will take out “other” and make it “all sectors”.

Dr Ewing: I was agreeable to that but, listening to what is being said, I am not sure where I am now.

The Convener: Is there an alternative to that? Are we agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Convener's Report

The Convener: Item 4 on the agenda is the convener's report. There are a number of matters to be addressed. The first is the European Commission's action programme on the promotion of market-quality beef and veal. I recommend that we note this opportunity, and ask the Executive to give to the Rural Affairs Committee the details of any plans to access the programmes. In other words, if the Executive intends to do something about these programmes—and we believe that it should—the plans should go to the Rural Affairs Committee for its consideration.

Maureen Macmillan: Sylvia Jackson asked me to ask whether there are already Scottish promotion measures. She thought that guidelines were announced on Friday, and that the Rural Affairs Committee might know something about that.

The Convener: We need to look into that. Are we agreed that we should ask the Executive to give to the Rural Affairs Committee any plans to access the programmes?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: The next issue is the newsletter “Europe Matters”. Members are asked to note that we produce it electronically on a regular basis. I thank members of the clerking team for their efforts. It is an excellent initiative. If members wish to contribute to “Europe Matters”—for example, to give their opinions—or if they wish to circulate information on European activities, they should contact the clerk to the committee.

We circulated a private paper of provisional dates—I stress provisional—and main items of business for future meetings. The details are subject to change, depending on other factors. However, members should note the topics that we wish to address.

Dennis Canavan: Convener, on the matter of future agendas, I intend to request formally that the item to which I referred earlier be included on the agenda for the next meeting. Is the next meeting on 22 February?

The Convener: Yes.

Dennis Canavan: Could you clarify for us what you would like us to do if we want to have an item included on a future agenda?

The Convener: Yes. I will clarify that, and I will write to the committee once we have taken advice on some of the issues that you raised today.

The final issue to be addressed is the selection of a representative to attend the conference on equal opportunities and structural funds, which will

take place at the offices of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities in Edinburgh on 14 February. If anyone is available, they should see the clerk to the committee at the end of the meeting.

Thank you for an interesting meeting. No doubt our colleague will take a detailed report of it back to the Cabinet Office.

Meeting closed at 15:34.

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