

EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

Tuesday 16 January 2001
(*Afternoon*)

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EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

1st Meeting 2001, Session 1

CONVENER

*Hugh Henry (Paisley South) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West)

*Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab)

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab)

*Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

*Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP)

*Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

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

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

ASSISTANT CLERK

David Simpson

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

European Committee

Tuesday 16 January 2001

(Afternoon)

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 14:02*]

Interests

The Convener (Hugh Henry): Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the first meeting of the European Committee in 2001. I welcome our new members. Unfortunately, John Home Robertson has sent apologies that he cannot be here today, but I welcome Colin Campbell. Colin and I were together in Renfrewshire Council for a time—I shall say no more about that. I also welcome Helen Eadie from Fife, and Nora Radcliffe, who is one of the Liberal Democrat members. Lloyd Quinan, who has just arrived, has already attended meetings. We have no other apologies. Do our new members have anything that they need to declare?

Colin Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP): No, other than the fact that I drive a Volkswagen. I have nothing to declare other than an interest in Europe.

Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD): I have nothing to declare.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I have declared everything already at previous meetings and in the "Register of Interests of Members of the Scottish Parliament". I am a member of the Scottish council of the European Movement, but I do not know if that needs to be mentioned.

The Convener: We will deal with John Home Robertson's declaration at the next meeting.

Do we agree to take item 6, on Dennis Canavan's report on the European charter of fundamental rights, in private?

Members indicated agreement.

Convener's Report

The Convener: The next item on the agenda is the convener's report. The first issue is objective 3 European structural funds. Members will be aware that there is considerable concern in the voluntary sector about the application of objective 3 funds and that we have raised that issue with the Scottish Executive. The Executive's response addresses some of our concerns, which is to be welcomed, but leaves some issues unanswered.

The clerk has prepared a draft report on objective 3 funding, which has been circulated. I suggest that we discuss the report at the next meeting, as that would allow members to consider it in detail and to take soundings from organisations in their areas. If there is anything that members want to address at that meeting, they should let the clerk know as soon as possible. Are we content to leave this matter until the next meeting?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We have circulated a letter from Angus MacKay, the Minister for Finance and Local Government, on the first round of awards in the objective 3 programme, and a letter from Peter Peacock, on the Highlands and Islands special transition programme. Does anybody wish to raise anything? Shall we note the contents?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We have also circulated a letter from the European Commissioner for the Internal Market regarding our representations on the changes to the postal service directive. I am pleased to report the outcome of our lobbying, and the changes that the Commission is proposing. MEPs have also taken up some of the issues that we raised and, in December, they defeated the Commission's proposal.

However, I am advised that the issue may run for some time during the Swedish presidency; we should be on our guard that the Swedish view, which potentially is for greater market liberalisation, is not pushed through in the six months of that presidency to the disadvantage of the postal service in Scotland. Our concern is that, although we have a concentrated urban population, many remote parts of Scotland rely heavily on the postal service and might be significantly disadvantaged if liberalisation goes too far. Do we agree to continue to monitor the situation and to ask the clerk to bring the matter back to us if any issues are identified?

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): Convener, your recommendation in document EU/01/01/1 is:

"We note these developments and thank the

Commissioner for the time taken to respond to our letter.”

Is that your intended reply to the commissioner?

The Convener: Yes.

Dennis Canavan: I suggest that we toughen that up a bit by saying that we are disappointed, or even very disappointed, with the commissioner's response and that, in view of the protests that are being made not just by the European Parliament and our committee, but by the relevant trade unions and the UK Post Office, we hope that this matter can be given further consideration.

The Convener: Yes, that can be incorporated to reiterate our view.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): The European Union Committee of the Regions adopted an opinion on this matter in December. Its response was drafted by commission 6, of which I was a member, and I managed to get a few amendments into it. The opinion of the Committee of the Regions reflects the view taken by this committee. There is widespread agreement on how to take this matter forward, at least in relation to the Commission.

The Convener: It would be worth our while keeping in contact with our MEP colleagues, who are closer to what is happening and could feed back information.

I ask the committee to note the Commission's news releases on the DAPHNE programme—I am advised that the City of Edinburgh Council has a project—and on green week and young citizens. Do we agree to follow the recommendations outlined in the convener's report?

Members indicated agreement.

Scrutiny

The Convener: We move to the scrutiny of documents. On page 1 of the package of documents for scrutiny, you will see that there are no documents for priority scrutiny, and on page 2 you will see that there are no documents for referral to other committees.

Page 3 contains a list of documents on which we await information. I suggest that we defer decision on these documents, although the clerk will speak about document SP 1582 (EC Ref No COM(2000) 574).

Stephen Imrie (Clerk): There has been correspondence over the past month on document SP 1582, which relates to health rules on animal by-products not intended for human consumption. Members will recall that this regulation was proposed in the EC's white paper on food safety.

The key issue that we have identified is that it is proposed to prohibit recycling certain animal by-products—dead and condemned animal material—into the feed chain. Members should look at pages 4 to 8 of the legal briefing notes—document EU/01/01/4. The explanatory memorandum that has been provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food shows that the UK Government has noted that a potential impact of the proposed regulation is a ban on burial in all circumstances and that that is not practical. The Government has asked for derogation from that aspect of the regulation, particularly for remote areas and for emergency disease situations.

We wrote to the Scottish Executive to ask whether it shared the UK Government's concern about that aspect of the regulation and its impact on rural areas. Members will see on page 8 of the legal briefing notes that the Scottish Executive recognises that derogation is the best way forward.

Our recommendation is set out in the second and third bullet points on page 8. We recommend that the committee should continue to interact with the Scottish Executive on this document and ask for further information on the proposed line of argument for requesting a derogation and on any contingency plans for the worst-case scenario if no such derogation can be secured. We are thinking about farmers on islands in particular, who might have to take dead cattle to the mainland and so incur costs that are arguably excessive. We are asking the Executive to keep members informed of developments in this area.

The Convener: Are there any comments? Does the committee agree to the recommendation, taking into account what the clerk has said?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: The recommendation is that we defer decision on the other documents on page 3:

SP 1586 (EC Ref No 12646/00 COM(2000) 573 final)
 SP 1622 (EC Ref No 13075/00 COM(2000) 627 final)
 SP 1671 (EC Ref No 13394/00 COM(2000) 724 final)
 SP 1693 (EC Ref No 13289/00)
 SP 1702 (EC Ref No 13635/00 COM(2000) 694 final)
 SP 1707 (EC Ref No Brussels 8/11/2000 COM(2000) 716 final)

Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: It is recommended that no further action be taken on SP 1649 (EC Ref No 12629/00 COM(2000) 653 final), but that we copy it to the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: It is recommended that no further action be taken on the documents on pages 5 to 10:

SP 1669 (EC Ref No 13238/00 COM(2000) 670 final)
 SP 1699 (EC Ref No 13847/00 COM(2000) 746 final)
 SP 1640 (EC Ref No 13374/00 COM(2000) 707 final)
 SP 1641 (EC Ref No 13369/00 COM(2000) 709 final)
 SP 1642 (EC Ref No 13371/00 COM(2000) 711 final)
 SP 1643 (EC Ref No 13358/00 COM(2000) 700 final)
 SP 1644 (EC Ref No 12629/00 ADD 1 SEC(2000) 1826)
 SP 1645 (EC Ref No 13396/00 COM(2000) 725 final)
 SP 1646 (EC Ref No 12868/00 COM(2000) 721 final)
 SP 1647 (EC Ref No 13589/00 COM(2000) 737 final)
 SP 1648 (EC Ref No 12763/00 COR 1 COM(2000) 690 final 2)
 SP 1650 (EC Ref No 13527/00 COM(2000) 722 final)
 SP 1651 (EC Ref No 13412/00 SEC(2000) 1813 final)
 SP 1652 (EC Ref No 13255/00 COM(2000) 693 final 2000/0135 (CNS))
 SP 1653 (EC Ref No 13242/00 COM(2000) 696 final)
 SP 1654 (EC Ref No 13059/00 COM(2000) 680 final)
 SP 1655 (EC Ref No Brussels 18/10/2000 SEC(2000) 1717 final)
 SP 1656 (EC Ref No Brussels 22/11/2000 COM(2000) 757 final)
 SP 1657 (EC Ref No 13420/00 COM(2000) 507 final COD 2000/0260)
 SP 1658 (EC Ref No 13021/00 COM(2000) 687 final)
 SP 1659 (EC Ref No 12794/00 COM(2000) 699 final)
 SP 1660 (EC Ref No 12822/00 COM(2000) 717 final)

SP 1661 (EC Ref No 13366/00 COM(2000) 702 final)
 SP 1662 (EC Ref No 13368/00 COM(2000) 705 final)
 SP 1663 (EC Ref No 13373/00 COM(2000) 704 final)
 SP 1664 (EC Ref No 13377/00 COM(2000) 712 final)
 SP 1665 (EC Ref No 13375/00 COM(2000) 701 final)
 SP 1666 (EC Ref No 13491/00)
 SP 1667 (EC Ref No 13378/00 COM(2000) 713 final)
 SP 1668 (EC Ref No 13376/00 COM(2000) 703 final)
 SP 1670 (EC Ref No 13379/00 COM(2000) 714 final)
 SP 1672 (EC Ref No 13188/00 COM(2000) 695 final)
 SP 1673 (EC Ref No Brussels 18/07/2000 SEC(2000) 1222 final)
 SP 1674 (EC Ref No Brussels 06/07/2000 SEC(2000) 1126 final)
 SP 1675 (EC Ref No Brussels 17/07/2000 SEC(2000) 1231 final)
 SP 1676 (EC Ref No 13056/00 ECOFIN 321)
 SP 1677 (EC Ref No Brussels 11/07/2000 SEC(2000) 1141 final)
 SP 1678 (EC Ref No Brussels 11/07/2000 SEC(2000) 1127 final)
 SP 1679 (EC Ref No Brussels 21/09/2000 SEC(2000) 1568 final)
 SP 1680 (EC Ref No Brussels 07/09/2000 SEC(2000) 1376 final)
 SP 1681 (EC Ref No Brussels 19/09/2000 SEC(2000) 1558 final)
 SP 1682 (EC Ref No Brussels SEC(2000) 1378 final)
 SP 1683 (EC Ref No Brussels 25/07/2000 SEC(2000) 1277 final)
 SP 1684 (EC Ref No Brussels SEC(2000) 1575 final)
 SP 1685 (EC Ref No Brussels 13/09/2000 SEC(2000) 1522 final)
 SP 1686 (EC Ref No Brussels 14/09/2000 SEC(2000) 1523 final)
 SP 1687 (EC Ref No Brussels 19/09/2000 SEC(2000) 1563 final)
 SP 1688 (EC Ref No Brussels 19/09/2000 SEC(2000) 1546 final)
 SP 1689 (EC Ref No Brussels 19/09/2000 SEC(2000) 1562 final)
 SP 1690 (EC Ref No 13372/00 COM(2000) 706 final)
 SP 1691 (EC Ref No 13370/00 COM(2000) 710 final)
 SP 1692 (EC Ref No 13367/00 COM(2000) 708 final)
 SP 1694 (EC Ref No 13632/00 COM(2000) 729 final)
 SP 1695 (EC Ref No 13562/00 COM(2000) 650 final)
 SP 1696 (EC Ref No 13716/00 COM(2000) 617 final COD 2000/0249)
 SP 1697 (EC Ref No 14074/00)
 SP 1698 (EC Ref No 13510/00)
 SP 1700 (EC Ref No 13549/00 COM(2000) 730 final)

SP 1701 (EC Ref No 13625/00 COM(2000) 1953 final)

SP 1703 (EC Ref No provisional edition European Court of Auditors)

SP 1704 (EC Ref No information note European Court of Auditors)

SP 1705 (EC Ref No 13576/00 COM(2000) 664 final)

SP 1706 (EC Ref No 13572/00 COM(2000) 718 final)

Is that agreed?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: I invite members to note the contents of the public document, "Correspondence Report: exchange of letters with the Scottish Executive on proposals for EC/EU legislation", which shows the nature of our discussion with the Executive and its responses to particular items of EC regulation. Do members agree that we note that document?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Common Fisheries Policy Inquiry

14:15

The Convener: The next item is the inquiry into the reform of the common fisheries policy and a review of the written evidence that has been received. A substantial body of opinion has been presented to us and I thank those organisations that have taken the time to give us detailed contributions. Given that events took place over the holiday period, I recognise the effort that has been made.

The committee has noted the significance of fisheries to the Scottish economy. We should not underestimate the consequences of changes to our fishing communities. We will have to strike a balance. I understand that the Rural Development Committee has a different set of responsibilities, but nevertheless there will be overlap between the work of the two committees. In this meeting and the next we should focus on the European perspective and what reform means for Scotland.

It has been said that it may be too early for us to enter a debate on this. However, if we do not start the work now, we may find that, as usual, we will be running very fast to catch up when the proposals are published. Therefore, I do not think that the time that we spend on the issue will be wasted. We want to examine the principles, which we can easily do from the information that has been published. I am sure that there will be some interest from other MSPs and the industry. We will need to exercise discipline so that we look at the big picture, concentrate on the principles and do not duplicate the work of another committee.

Before I ask Stephen Imrie to update us on the evidence that we have received, are there any comments on the process?

Irene Oldfather: I agree 100 per cent that it is important that in the inquiry we keep a tight focus and adhere rigidly to our remit.

Stephen Imrie: I thought that it would be beneficial to the committee to provide members with an update. I am conscious that some of the evidence has reached you only in the past few days and that you may not have been able to consider it all in detail. The clerks and legal adviser will try to provide a summary of all the evidence that we have received.

I remind the committee of the time scales that we are operating under. I have been in discussion with some contacts in the European Commission, who advise us that the green paper that will set out the general principles for reform is likely to be

published in March or April. The draft agenda issued by the Swedish presidency for the fisheries council of June 2001 includes the policy debate on the green paper. Those dates should be borne in mind.

The committee will recall that we have invited submissions of evidence based around seven key areas. Those were published in our terms of reference, which were issued on 29 November. Most of the submissions that we have received have focused on those seven issues and provided us with further information.

Let me remind members of the seven issues. The first is zonal management or the regionalisation of the common fisheries policy. The question relates to the extent to which the management of fisheries can be decentralised, how to involve a wide range of stakeholders in the process of managing fisheries, and who those stakeholders might be.

The second issue relates to governance and the structures that may be put in place to manage the CFP in the future. It also involves improving communication between the various groups that have an interest—fisheries bodies, member states, the Commission, non-governmental organisations and the scientific community.

The third issue concerns the wider socioeconomic impact of the common fisheries policy. We asked how the policy can be used to promote both sustainable fishing and the protection of local communities.

The fourth issue relates to the precautionary principle, how it can be applied, how consistent it is with the current rules on total allowable catches or quotas, and what alternatives there are to total allowable catches.

The fifth issue relates to fisheries limits, zones and access. In particular, we mentioned the six-mile and 12-mile limits, the retention of the Shetland box, closed boxes and the potential disaggregation between inshore and offshore fishing.

The penultimate issue relates to technical or conservation measures and the integration of environmental policy into the CFP. It also involves issues relating to zoning, mesh sizes, nursery zones, discards and bycatch solutions.

The final issue is whether aquaculture should be an integral part of the CFP.

We have been advised that those seven issues are the main ones on which to focus. We have received 29 items of evidence, which, as members will see, are extremely detailed and rigorous. We have received evidence from the vast majority of fishing bodies from north and south of the border and from the majority of environmental groups that

have an interest in the area. We have also had evidence from members of the European Parliament and from members of the academic community.

We will try to keep members abreast of the outcome of the December fisheries council and the current discussions that are taking place in Brussels. Those talks will affect the situation that members will be attempting to review. I remind members that the terms of reference focus on a medium or long-term overall review of the CFP. As I said, the clerks will produce within the next few working days a summation of all the evidence that we have received so far and of what, in our opinion, the emerging issues are.

The Convener: Thank you, Stephen. That is extremely useful.

Irene Oldfather: I have not read every submission, but I have read a number of them. A common thread of concern among fishermen is that UK enforcement of regulations seems to be far stricter than that of other countries. That relates not only to overfishing, but to the application of guidelines and regulations.

I recall that we spoke at a previous meeting about hygiene and monitoring in Shetland and the fact that we apply strict controls. There are people who strictly monitor how we go about loading and unloading fish, which obviously contributes to the cost of the fishing industry. That thread runs through a number of the submissions, and I wonder whether, when we are taking evidence, we could consider auditing that and questioning the Commission about it. That is an area in which we could have a value-added impact, over and above anything that could be done in relation to rural development; it is the sort of area that we should concentrate on.

The Convener: The Commission has already said that it is keen to give oral evidence, so we could take that opportunity to ask about those issues. If we do, we should highlight them in advance, so that the witnesses are prepared for our questions. I ask the clerks to note that and to find out when the Commission might be available.

Mr Lloyd Quinan (West of Scotland) (SNP): I am glad to hear that the Commission is prepared to provide oral evidence, but why did it decline to provide written evidence?

Stephen Imrie: I have received a letter outlining the reasons. I believe that the Commission does not want to provide written material while it is still finalising plans for the green paper. However, the letter indicated that the Commission would be more than happy to discuss whether officials could come to the committee. I shall provide copies of that letter to members.

Mr Quinan: I just wondered whether there was a problem of recognition, but there seems not to be.

I agree up to a point with what Irene Oldfather said, but I have a concern about what are frequently mythologies. I would like to see evidence that backs up what I read in the submissions about the enforcement regime in the UK being different from regimes elsewhere. Nobody tells me about their experience of other places, and I am sick to the back teeth of hearing that all those bad things go on in Europe and that we do not do them. There is no evidence to back that up. If we are to question the Commissioners about rigorous enforcement in the UK, we will run the risk of looking like little Britons if we do not have evidence of how vigorous enforcement is elsewhere in Europe.

I whole-heartedly agree that it is never early enough to start looking at this issue, but I make a suggestion about how we handle the debate. All the evidence that we have received is from people in the UK and outlines their concerns. When we discuss issues such as the common agricultural policy and common fisheries policy, we frequently have little or no understanding of the appreciation of the CAP and CFP by people in similar situations to ours. The Galician and Basque autonomous communities both depend on fishing to almost the same degree as Scotland does. The Basque people are the biggest eaters of cod in the whole of Europe, so I would like to know what they have to say.

I noticed that, last week, the pre-meeting to the fisheries meeting consisted of a discussion between the Commission fishery officials and the Norwegians, who put forward their views on conservation. It is incumbent on us to communicate with the fishery adviser to the Basque autonomous community and ask what the Basque approach is. We should consider the matter from the perspective of a Parliament that is operating on the same level as we are and that has a similar dependency on the fishing industry. The Basque Parliament has a slightly different interaction with the EU from ours, but that is a Spanish constitutional issue. Rather than simply hearing the results of the meetings, we would find it useful to have an idea of Basque thinking on the issue.

14:30

The Convener: There are two separate issues. When the witnesses come before the committee, we have an opportunity to ask them to provide the evidence and information. That would be a useful line of questioning. We can make contact with other areas of Europe and I will speak to the clerk to see what we can usefully obtain quickly.

However, I would want to avoid a protracted inquiry that seeks to do the work of other well-resourced institutions. We are a small committee with limited resources. We must stick to our remit. However, some of the general background information that Lloyd Quinan referred to might be useful.

Colin Campbell: Do we know whether the criteria on fish handling and so on that are applied in Europe are universal? Do we know that the criteria that determine how the fishery protection fleets or the navy work are consistent? Is there a uniform set of standards to which all fishery enforcement and protection agencies must work or are there differences between countries? It might be worth knowing that before we take evidence.

The Convener: We will see what information we can get on that.

Irene Oldfather: I want to follow up Lloyd Quinan's point. I agree that we should not be parochial about the issue. I am not saying that UK enforcement of regulations is different, but that is a common allegation. We should investigate that matter. That is something in which the committee could play an important role. We could find out what is happening and either nail it on the head or clarify the situation.

Helen Eadie: I agree with Irene Oldfather about trying to measure the extent of the problem. Some years ago, I read an EU information document that set out information about different member states and compared the extent to which each member state polices the fishery zones within its territory. It was interesting to note that at that time—about three years ago—the UK had a high level of policing. However, things may have changed. It would be interesting to know whether that is subject to monitoring and whether a similar, more current, document exists. That would be useful information, in addition to the oral evidence.

Ben Wallace (North-East Scotland) (Con): The timetable is very focused and our primary aim must be to establish what is the best deal we can get for Scotland in terms of common fisheries policy reform. If we were to go off at a tangent and take too much time considering Spanish and Danish interests, and even some of the enforcement issues, we might not achieve that. We are looking to prepare a position to help influence negotiation in March and beyond. Perhaps an adviser to the committee or an appointed expert would be able to go out and seek that information and evidence for us. That would allow the committee to stay focused. A meeting every fortnight between now and March does not give us much time.

The Convener: Perhaps members could leave the question of an adviser and how to seek

information from other areas to me. I will discuss that with the clerk and ensure that we do not lose sight of it. We will come back to the committee with information and proposals.

Dennis Canavan: The paper that Stephen Imrie has prepared clearly summarises the main areas that we should cover in our inquiry. I take the point about our resources being rather limited, but perhaps we should think about getting an adviser. I do not know whether that would be hugely expensive, but I am sure that it would be helpful. In any event, with or without an expert adviser, we should ensure that we get expert witnesses to come before the committee and put on record their views.

We have received many written submissions from individuals and organisations. I hope that we can prioritise and decide which people would be willing to come and give oral evidence. There may also be some who have not submitted written evidence—the Commission is an obvious example. We should start that process as early as possible.

The Convener: As I said to Ben Wallace, I will come back to the committee on that.

The next part of the discussion is the suggested programme of witnesses. Before I move on to that, one of the things that we might want to explore is the idea of the committee or a delegation from the committee visiting some fishing communities and meeting the people who are directly involved. Again, I will talk to Stephen Imrie and bring back some proposals on how to do that. The issue is a practical one and would justify a committee visit to meet relevant organisations and individuals.

Dennis Canavan made the point about expert evidence. There is a suggested programme of witnesses that the clerk and I have been considering. If members have other suggestions, they should feed those in before the next meeting.

On 30 January, we had thought to have someone from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, the Scottish White Fish Producers Association, the Scottish Fishermen's Organisation—there seem to be quite a few fishing organisations—the Shetland sea food centre, the Mallaig and North West Fishermen's Association, the Fishermen's Association and Scottish Environment LINK, of which both the RSPB and the World Wide Fund for Nature have membership. Although some of the organisations are linked, there are also geographical perspectives that must be balanced. Those were just some of the names to think about.

We thought that we might best start by talking to the industry. We might not necessarily ask for a detailed submission, as the industry has already presented written evidence, but we would want to

use the opportunity to ask questions. Lloyd Quinan has already identified a useful line of questioning in that regard. After that, it might be useful if we talked to someone from an academic background.

The European Commission has already been mentioned. We would need to negotiate about when we could get its representatives before the committee. Scottish Natural Heritage would have some legitimate comment to make, as would officials from the Scottish Executive rural affairs department—we want to question the minister but we should also get some technical information from officials, as opposed to political comment.

Mr Quinan: Irrespective of what happens with the conservation procedure, we know that jobs will be lost. Is it within our remit to consider support and training for people who are likely to lose their jobs? The Scottish Executive rural affairs department is examining that already. Would we be able to examine the Executive's position on the decommissioning and laying-up of the fleet and on whether it will operate a compensation scheme?

The Convener: We need to be careful. We are trying to examine European policy to ensure that Scotland and its industry get the best deal from that policy. We might want to comment on the ramifications of the application of that policy, but it would not be for this committee to think about how it impacts on communities. We might want to ask Highlands and Islands Enterprise for its comments on the job implications of European policy and for suggestions about what Europe should or should not be doing. There are issues to do with the application of structural funds that are also—

Mr Quinan: On the question of compensation—

The Convener: I will come to that.

Mr Quinan: It would be administered by the EU, would it not?

The Convener: Yes. We could consider compensation within our remit, but we would want to avoid doing what the Rural Development Committee or the Enterprise and Lifelong Learning Committee should be doing. All sorts of trails could flow from the issue and we need to stay focused. We need Highlands and Islands Enterprise to address some issues, such as the application of structural funds, so we can ask about other issues at the same time.

Dennis Canavan: I agree with your earlier comments about the people from whom we should seek evidence, such as the fishing organisations, academia, SNH, the Executive, the European Commission and environmental bodies, but a considerable number of fishing organisations have already submitted written evidence. I am not sure about the relative size of the organisations or about who and what they represent. Perhaps we

should seek advice on that, if we have not already done so. If we talk to one association and not another, we might lay ourselves open to charges of not hearing all the evidence or of showing favouritism.

The Convener: A number of the associations are members of an umbrella organisation but have different perspectives. I take the point that you make and assure you that we will take further advice.

At the first stage, those whom we invite would not necessarily give oral evidence; we would question them on the basis of their written evidence. We will take further soundings to ensure that we get the fairest possible cross-section of witnesses.

Nora Radcliffe: If we took evidence from Highlands and Islands Enterprise, would we get a different perspective from other enterprise companies, such as Scottish Enterprise Grampian, on north-east fishing interests? The funding regime for those organisations differs, and it might be interesting to get a different perspective.

The Convener: We will take advice on that. Highlands and Islands Enterprise has a specific issue concerning European funding and what might or might not be done. Nevertheless, we can also ask Grampian about the ramifications of such funding for local communities.

14:45

Helen Eadie: If we invited Scottish Enterprise Grampian, I presume that Ann Bell would come, as she is already linked into the North Sea Commission's specialist fisheries group. If local government in Scotland was linked into the North Sea Commission, which embraces other countries across the North sea, we might be in a better position to get some comparative information from some of our colleagues in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Belgium, for example. They might be able to give us some pointers in the specialist fisheries group. Has that idea featured in the discussions that the clerks have had with Scottish Enterprise Grampian—in the thinking about who might be invited, who could give that helicopter-down, comparative view of the policy that is being shaped across the North sea area?

The Convener: We have contacted the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities but have not received a response. I hope that your points will be addressed in COSLA's response. We might seek written evidence from the local enterprise companies first, after which we can determine how to proceed.

Irene Oldfather: Following up Dennis Canavan's point, I would be happy for you and the

clerks to consider the evidence and determine which organisations differ in their views on the fishing industry. There is much agreement in the submissions, and we do not want to hear the same evidence four or five times. On the basis of the written evidence, you could whittle down the number of fishing industry organisations that we would ask to give oral evidence.

The Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions has quite a strong fishing lobby throughout Europe and would be able to give written or oral evidence that would represent a wide range of regions in Europe. That might take account of some of the points that Lloyd Quinan raised and would allow us to consider the matter from a broader perspective.

The Convener: We will write to the CPMR for information. The Scottish Parliament information centre also has expertise in the fishing industry; the clerks will liaise with its researchers. We have tried to focus on organisations with slightly different views that need to be represented, and we will reconsider the matter carefully before we finalise the witness list.

Ben Wallace: PESCA was the scheme whereby European money was given to ports and harbours. It is worth asking whether the Scottish Executive thinks that scheme was successful and whether the aid schemes that were in place achieved what they were supposed to achieve so that, when we talk about reform we can know whether whatever package is put together is the same as the old model that the Government felt did or did not work.

Stephen Imrie: The Community initiative—known as PESCA—was indeed one of the European funding packages for those aspects. I would be pleased if the committee agreed to return to some of the bodies that administered that fund, to ask them about their experience.

Members will be aware that one of the ramifications of the agenda 2000 process was to make one of the key structural funds, the financial instrument for fisheries guidance, available for certain of those aspects. A number of the written submissions that we have received make that point. I would be happy to highlight that in the document that we will produce for members and to ensure that the bodies that we agree to contact, such as the enterprise companies, comment on the administration of those funds.

The Convener: Are there any further comments? If not, does the committee agree to invite witnesses for the meeting on 30 January?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I shall liaise with the clerks in drawing up the witness list for that meeting.

The committee has agreed to take the next item in private. I thank the members of the public for attending the committee and now ask them to leave.

14:50

Meeting continued in private until 16:00.

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