

RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Tuesday 1 May 2001
(*Afternoon*)

Session 1

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RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE **12th Meeting 2001, Session 1**

CONVENER

*Alex Johnstone (North-East Scotland) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Mrs Margaret Ewing (Moray) (SNP)

*Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con)

*Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

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

*Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP)

*George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD)

*Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab)

*Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Richard Davies

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Tracey Hawe

ASSISTANT CLERK

Jake Thomas

Neil Stewart

LOCATION

Committee Room 4

Scottish Parliament

Rural Development Committee

Tuesday 1 May 2001

(Afternoon)

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

The Convener (Alex Johnstone): Ladies and gentlemen, we are now quorate. I welcome you all to the meeting. We have not received apologies from anyone, although not everyone is present.

Dr Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): Elaine Smith sends her apologies.

The Convener: Thank you.

Rural Employment

The Convener: Item 1 on the agenda relates to the "Report on the Impact of Changing Employment Patterns in Rural Scotland". A paper has been circulated suggesting a motion for debate in the Parliament in committee time on Thursday. I am looking for comments on that. Our duty is to approve a motion for debate.

Richard Lochhead (North-East Scotland) (SNP): I found the Government's response to our report bizarre. The Executive took the report in wholly the wrong way. The response was very defensive, which suggests that the Executive believed that the committee was just attacking it and asking for more to be done, whereas we were simply reporting what we found during our investigation. It may be worth mentioning in the motion our surprise at the Executive's response.

The Convener: The suggested motion was drawn up by the committee clerk, Richard Davies, on my behalf. There was obviously a likelihood that some people would think it too strong and others would think it not strong enough. We tried to hit the middle ground. I remind members that our opportunity to discuss the issues that the report raises will be during the debate on Thursday, rather than now. It is important that the committee should take forward the report and debate it under a motion that can find broad support in the chamber rather than cause division.

Mr Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): I heartily agree with everything that you have said, convener. We can discuss the issues during the debate. I, too, was disappointed with the Executive's response to our report, as I shall be making clear in the chamber. However, I believe that the suggested motion is couched in the right terms and I hope that committee members will support it, as it provides a useful way forward.

The Convener: Are we generally content with the wording of the motion in my name and that it should be submitted?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: We must also decide who should make the opening and closing speeches on behalf of the committee. The usual practice is for the convener to open and for the deputy convener to close. However, the deputy convener, Fergus Ewing, takes the view that, as he was not greatly involved in the collection of the data in the initial part of the investigation, he should perhaps not make the closing speech. Do members have a view on who should make the closing speech?

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): It is important that the person who makes the closing speech should have been involved in drawing up the report. Several members who are present were involved.

The Convener: I would like to give Fergus Ewing first refusal. I have given his view as it was reported to me, but he is not here to confirm whether what I said is right. Normally, I would ask him to make the closing speech on behalf of the committee. If he decides not to take up my invitation, who do members think would be appropriate to close on the committee's behalf?

George Lyon: I nominate my colleague Mike Rumbles.

Mr Rumbles: The deputy convener should close for the committee, but I am happy to do so if Fergus Ewing does not want to.

The Convener: Are we content to leave it at that for the moment? If Fergus Ewing confirms that he does not want to close for the committee, we will act according to the suggestion that has been made.

Alex Fergusson (South of Scotland) (Con): I am quite happy with that.

Richard Lochhead: I would like some clarification. How many committee members will get to speak?

The Convener: Only two members are speaking for the committee. Other speakers will be allocated by the parties, as is usual.

George Lyon: How long is the debate?

The Convener: It will last 90 minutes. We will formalise the decision on who will close for the committee at the earliest possible opportunity.

I see that Fergus Ewing has now arrived. We can now deal with the issue properly. Fergus, we agreed that we would formally offer you the opportunity to close the debate in Parliament on the committee's report. I was told that you were considering not making the closing speech.

Fergus Ewing (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP): I had not fully considered the matter, but perhaps we could discuss it later.

The Convener: I take it that you are still considering the issue.

Fergus Ewing: I certainly am.

The Convener: Okay. That brings us to the end of item 1. We have already agreed to take items 2 and 3 in private.

14:10

Meeting continued in private until 17:00.

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