

ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 5 May 2004
(*Morning*)

Session 2

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CONTENTS

Wednesday 5 May 2004

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| | |
|--|-----|
| SUBORDINATE LEGISLATION | 983 |
| Organic Aid (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (SSI 2004/143) | 983 |
| Organic Aid (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2004 (SSI 2004/174) | 983 |
| WORK PROGRAMME | 984 |

ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

12th Meeting 2004, Session 2

CONVENER

*Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Eleanor Scott (Highlands and Islands) (Green)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP)

*Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

*Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab)

*Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con)

*Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

*Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab)

*Nora Radcliffe (Gordon) (LD)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Alex Fergusson (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale) (Con)

Janis Hughes (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)

Jim Mather (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Etrick and Lauderdale) (LD)

Mr Mark Ruskell (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)

*attended

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Tracey Hawe

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Mark Brough

ASSISTANT CLERK

Catherine Johnstone

LOCATION

Committee Room 3

Scottish Parliament

Environment and Rural Development Committee

Wednesday 5 May 2004

(Morning)

[THE CONVENER opened the meeting at 10:39]

Subordinate Legislation

Organic Aid (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (SSI 2004/143)

Organic Aid (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2004 (SSI 2004/174)

The Convener (Sarah Boyack): I welcome committee members and members of the press and public to the meeting. We have no apologies—I think that we are all here. I remind everyone to turn off their mobile phones.

We have two Scottish statutory instruments to consider—the Organic Aid (Scotland) Regulations 2004 (SSI 2004/143) and the Organic Aid (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2004 (SSI 2004/174). The Subordinate Legislation Committee has considered and commented on both sets of regulations and an extract from its report has been circulated.

Members have probably picked up on the fact that the second set of regulations is an amendment to the first set. I must commend the Executive for its efficiency in correcting the original regulations, as the process usually takes a bit longer. It is helpful that mistakes were spotted and corrected instantly.

Alex Johnstone (North East Scotland) (Con): The Executive is getting used to the process.

The Convener: That saves us picking up the mistakes and kicking back the SSI.

Are colleagues content to make no recommendation to Parliament on the regulations?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: On this occasion, our consideration is straightforward. From the policy perspective, we welcome the regulations, which will introduce the new organic aid scheme for Scotland as approved by the European Commission. That is very good news.

Work Programme

10:41

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is consideration of our work programme. I will go through the recommendations and, if anyone wants to comment as I do so, they should feel free to shout.

I ask members to note the likely timeframes for undertaking our work on Executive legislation. We will include the relevant dates in the minutes so that members of the public can see what those timescales are likely to be.

I also ask members to note our time commitments in relation to other business such as subordinate legislation, budget scrutiny, European matters and petitions. In particular, I highlight the fact that we will be seeking written comments from some key stakeholders on the piece of subordinate legislation on strategic environmental assessment. We must decide whether we want to request to take oral evidence from the Minister for Environment and Rural Development, once we have considered stakeholders' views. Are members happy to do that?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: That makes sense.

I seek the committee's agreement that we extend the contract of our advisers for stage 2 of the budget process. That will allow us to go into that in depth. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you.

The next item for consideration is whether we as a committee want to respond formally to the United Kingdom Government's consultation on sustainable development, which should fit in nicely with our research on sustainable development. It would be good to put into the system any specifically Scottish conclusions. Do colleagues agree?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Next, I seek the committee's agreement to our making a bid for a parliamentary debate on our report on the implementation of common agricultural policy reform, once that report has been finalised and agreed to. Things will have moved on slightly by the time that such a debate takes place, as I imagine that it will be some time before we secure it, but it would be good to take our key conclusions to the Parliament and to let other members discuss them.

Mr Alasdair Morrison (Western Isles) (Lab): Would that debate take place this side of the recess?

The Convener: No, it would be held after the recess. I do not think that our prospects of securing a debate this side of the recess would be great.

Mr Morrison: I thought that that would be ambitious.

The Convener: The purpose of our consideration of the matter is to enable me to say, when a slot for a committee debate is offered at the Conveners Group, that the Environment and Rural Development Committee is very keen to take up the offer and to put in a bid for a debate.

Mr Morrison: I wager that that committee debate will be held on the first Wednesday back after the recess.

The Convener: Put it in your diaries.

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I suggest that we identify the size of the sums of money that will be involved. That will indicate to the Executive that the implementation of CAP reform is of some importance to the whole economy. We are talking about quite a lot of money. That might open doors to our getting a debate at an early stage, which is especially important if the situation is going to change.

The Convener: The debate would be entirely an issue for the Parliament. The Conveners Group will decide which committees get the first couple of slots for committee debates and your point is probably not so much an issue for that group. I think that the big picture sums will be in our report.

Roseanna Cunningham (Perth) (SNP): Has the Executive indicated the timescale within which it is likely to respond to our report?

The Convener: We know that the spending review takes place this summer and that that will have some impact on future spending on agriculture and the rural economy. Tracey Hawe would like to comment.

Tracey Hawe (Clerk): The standard timescale within which the Executive responds to committee reports is two months. That two-month period will run over the recess, so we should have the response by the end of the summer.

The Convener: Thank you. Does the committee agree to seek a debate on our report on CAP reform?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: I suggest that we seek an informal briefing from the Deer Commission for Scotland, to bring us up to speed on current issues. Is that agreed?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Members know that we have had brief discussions with Aberdeen City Council about the possibility of a visit to Aberdeen, which would take place over a Monday and perhaps a Tuesday morning. That could coincide with a visit to Aberdeen by the UK Environmental Audit Committee. I will not seek agreement to our making a bid for funding from the Conveners Group until I have circulated details of a programme. I want to have a proper programme before I seek such permission.

Roseanna Cunningham: Do we have any indication of what we would be talking about on that day?

The Convener: Yes—I circulated a description of that to members.

Roseanna Cunningham: I missed that.

The Convener: About two or three bulletins ago, I circulated a copy of a letter from me to Aberdeen City Council about issues that we would be particularly interested in. If you have any questions about that, please come back to me afterwards.

Rob Gibson: Can we make some arrangements to speak to our colleagues in the National Assembly for Wales at some point after that?

The Convener: That would make a lot of sense. We will ask Tracey Hawe to contact her opposite number in the Welsh Assembly about that.

The final issue is to decide whether to include in our work programme consideration of wider rural development issues and to ask the clerks to come back to us with a report that picks up some of the issues that I know members are keen to explore in relation to budget scrutiny. We need some suggestions on how we might do that in the next budget process. There is also the question of general scrutiny of rural development issues in the Parliament. Are members happy with that?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: Thank you.

We will ensure that information on the decisions that have been taken forms part of our minutes, so that people outside the committee can see what our future work programme is. That will enable them to get involved and to look out for our discussions.

At our last committee meeting, we agreed to hold discussion of two draft reports in private session.

10:47

Meeting continued in private until 12:39.

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