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*The Parliamentary Update is a record of recent and upcoming events in the Scottish Parliament, Westminster and the European Parliament, including committee work, debates and questions, both written and oral, to the Scottish and UK governments. For further information about any aspect of this document please contact Sarah Anderson on 0131 472 4108 or e-mail sarah.anderson@nfus.org.uk*

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## SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

### IN THE CHAMBER - DEBATES

On Thursday 25 February a debate took place on the “Inquiry into Future Support for Agriculture in Scotland.” To read the debate, you can follow this link or call Sarah Anderson and she will send you a copy.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-10/sor0225-02.htm#Col24055>

On Wednesday 3 February a debate took place on Broadband availability. To read the debate, you can follow this link or call Sarah Anderson and she will send you a copy.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/officialReports/meetingsParliament/or-10/sor0203-02.htm#Col23425>

## ORAL QUESTIONS

Thursday 25 February

### Single Farm Payment (Livestock Numbers)



**Nicol Stephen (Aberdeen South) (LD):** To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has to ensure that any recommendations regarding the future of the single farm payment will address the decline in livestock in Scotland.



**The Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment (Richard Lochhead):** The inquiry into future support for agriculture in Scotland is looking at all aspects of farm support and it recently published its interim report. A public consultation exercise is ongoing and the inquiry's final report and recommendations are due to be published in June.

**Nicol Stephen:** Can the cabinet secretary guarantee that, in Brian Pack's inquiry and in the context of this afternoon's parliamentary debate, the issue will now receive the highest priority? To use Stewart Stevenson's words this morning, will the issue receive "very active consideration" by the Scottish Government?

**Richard Lochhead:** I can certainly give the member a guarantee that the issue that he raises goes to the heart of the Brian Pack inquiry, and I hope that he will be able to attend the debate on it after question time and make the relevant points.

It is clear that there has been a decline in livestock numbers in Scotland and across much of Europe since support was decoupled from production—the issue is not unique to Scotland. Thankfully, there are some signs of optimism in the livestock sector so, fingers crossed, the decline that has taken place over recent years since decoupling may bottom out. Time will tell. That decline is one reason why we must reform the common agricultural policy. That is on the agenda and we must ensure that Scotland's priorities are reflected in the new CAP.



**Alasdair Allan (Western Isles) (SNP):** Does the Scottish Government agree that crofters and farmers in most of the Highlands and Islands operate in an unusually harsh environment, and that that deserves to be recognised in any changes to the existing subsidy regime?

**Richard Lochhead:** I agree that our crofters largely work in environments that are harsher than those elsewhere in Europe, and that that should be taken into account in the agriculture support system. The less favoured area support scheme payments that we make take that into account, and many crofters in Scotland benefit from those arrangements and from other support mechanisms. The issue will certainly be at the forefront of our minds when we consider the recommendations that we receive from the Brian Pack inquiry.

## WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Thursday 25 February

### Agricultural Support



**George Foulkes (Lothians) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive how much EU funding was paid to Scottish farmers for agricultural support in 2008-09.

**Richard Lochhead:** In financial year 2008-09, the European Commission contributed £486 million towards the cost of support paid to farmers. The schemes involved both measures fully funded by the EC and those co-funded in partnership with the Scottish Government but, for the avoidance of doubt, the figure quoted represents solely the amount of EC funding.

Friday 12 February

### Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill



**Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con):** To ask the Scottish Executive how often the Minister for Environment has consulted Crofters Commission commissioners regarding the Crofting Reform (Scotland) Bill since her appointment.



**Roseanna Cunningham:** Since my appointment on 12 February 2009 to Minister for Environment, I have met with Crofters Commission commissioners on four separate occasions, during which the Crofting Reform Scotland Bill was discussed. Scottish Government officials have been in regular contact with officials working for the Crofters Commission throughout the development of the bill.

### Bull Hire Scheme

**Jamie McGrigor:** To ask the Scottish Executive whether it will confirm that the Bull Hire Scheme does not contravene state aid rules and, if so, whether it will retain the scheme.

**Roseanna Cunningham:** State Aid rules do not allow for either support for livestock production or the means of production where that support would exceed €7,500 over a three year period for each individual. The Bull Hire Scheme has been operating on that basis and will continue to do so. The Scottish Government announced on 8 February 2010 that the scheme is being retained.

**Jamie McGrigor:** To ask the Scottish Executive what plans it has for the two Crofters Commission-owned farms near Inverness formerly used in connection with the Bull Hire Scheme that remain unsold.

**Roseanna Cunningham:** The two farms in question are owned by Scottish Ministers. The Bull Hire Scheme will continue to be operated from upgraded facilities on a part of these premises, with some surplus land being sold.

Monday 8 February



**Peter Peacock (Highlands and Islands) (Lab):** To ask the Scottish Executive when it will publish the report of the Bull Hire Review Group.

**Roseanna Cunningham:** I have carefully considered the report and have decided that in the interests of delivery timescales and efficiency that the scheme should continue from a streamlined government owned stud based at Inverness. The report and minutes of the Bull Hire Review Group will now be published on the Scottish Government website.

**Peter Peacock:** To ask the Scottish Executive, with reference to the future of the Bull Hire Scheme, whether it is considering an option of tendering for the provision of the service.

**Roseanna Cunningham:** The very informative and detailed report presented to me by the Bull Hire Review Group on 30 November 2009 presented a number of options. One of these related to tendering for the provision of the service. I have, however, decided in the interests of delivery timescales and efficiency to streamline the existing government stud farm at Inverness with the long-term view ideally being one of communities keeping and owning the bulls where they are needed.

## **RURAL AFFAIRS AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

On Wednesday 10 February NFUS Head of Rural Policy Jonathan Hall gave evidence to the Rural Affairs and the Environment Committee. For a verbatim report of the meeting and a copy of NFU Scotland's submission to the Committee, please follow this link: <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/s3/committees/rae/meetings.htm>

## **CROSS PARTY GROUPS**

**The Cross-Party Group on Climate change will next meet Wednesday 17 March** in Committee Room 6 at 6.00pm. For further information, please visit <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/msp/crossPartyGroups/groups/cpg-climate.htm> or contact the Secretary of the group, Gail Wilson, on 0131 311 6512 or [gail@stopclimatechaosscotland.org](mailto:gail@stopclimatechaosscotland.org).

## **UK PARLIAMENT - MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**

Friday 26 February **Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative**

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Jim Fitzpatrick):** I have today deposited copies of the report giving the proportion of UK produce supplied to Government Departments and the armed forces, as well as the proportions supplied to prisons and hospitals under contracts negotiated by HM Prison Service and NHS supply chain. A copy of the report is available on the PSFPI web site at: <http://defraweb/foodfarm/policy/publicsectorfood/awareness.htm>

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dan Norris):** I would like to announce the publication today of a public consultation on the implementation of two key pieces of European pesticides legislation.

In September 2009 the European Council of Ministers agreed two new pieces of legislation: the Plant Protection Products Regulation <sup>(1)</sup> (the Regulation) and the Directive on the Sustainable Use of Pesticides <sup>(2)</sup> (The Directive). These are part of the EU's thematic strategy on pesticides which aims to minimise the risks to health and the environment from the use of pesticides.

This consultation is the first of a two-stage consultation process; its purpose is to seek views on the transposition of the Directive, and two measures relating to the provision of public information on pesticides under the Regulation. We are also seeking views on how the UK should use charging arrangements provided by this legislation and another regulation on maximum residue levels of pesticides in food and feed. The second stage will be to consult on the draft legislation transposing the Directive.

*Sustainable Use Directive 2009/128/EC*

This directive will need to be transposed and implemented by member states by November 2011. Its overall objective is to establish "... a framework to achieve a sustainable use of pesticides by reducing the risks and impacts of pesticide use on human health and the environment and promoting the use of integrated pest management and of alternative approaches or techniques such as non-chemical alternatives to pesticides".

Key features of the Directive include: the establishment of national action plans; compulsory testing of application equipment, certification of operators and distributors, and access to certification for advisors; a ban (subject to derogations) on aerial spraying; special measures to protect the aquatic environment, public spaces and conservation areas; minimising the risks to human health and the environment through handling, storage and disposal; and the promotion of low-input regimes, including integrated pest management.

*Plant Protection Products Regulation (EC) No 1107/2009*

The Regulation is essentially a revision of directive 91/414/EEC that currently governs the approvals regime for plant protection products, but with some new elements. The Regulation's overall objective is to "... lay down rules for the authorisation of plant protection products in commercial form and for their placing on the market, use and control within the Community [and] ... ensure a high level of protection of both human and animal health and the environment and to improve the functioning of the internal market through the harmonisation of the rules on the placing on the market of plant protection products including active substances, while improving agricultural production."

The Regulation updates the existing regime and aims to increase the level of protection for people and the environment as well as speeding up decision making and providing clearer rules. The majority of the Regulation is directly binding and is not therefore included in this consultation. There are, however, two discretionary provisions in the Regulation where we have undertaken to consult.

The two provisions are:

Article 31: Authorisations-Notification of Neighbours

Article 67: Recording and Disclosing Information on pesticides

They concern the provision of information in two main categories: advance notification to neighbours who could be exposed to crop-spraying activity; and making available records of plant protection products used, on request by the competent authority.

I believe that there should be a high level of transparency and public access to information about the approval system. The Regulation provides an opportunity to consider the introduction of

measures that would provide greater transparency of pesticides use post-approval. Despite the precautionary nature of the approval system and the high level of protection that it affords people, animals and the environment, people may wish to know about pesticides that they see being used. This section of the consultation explores the costs and benefits of options for providing access to this information.

#### *Charging arrangements*

The Regulation, the Directive and regulation (EC) No 396/2005 on maximum residue levels (the MRLs regulation) all provide for member states to recover the costs of work carried out under that legislation. The Regulation introduces new requirements to the regulatory regime that will be charged to pesticide authorisation holders. All three pieces of legislation provide for member states to recover certain costs that are not currently recoverable.

The consultation invites views on how charging arrangements in the UK should operate in future, and our top priority will continue to be the protection of human health and the environment.

The chemicals regulation directorate of the Health and Safety Executive is the delivery body for DEFRA's responsibilities for pesticides and is undertaking this consultation on behalf of DEFRA. The consultation covers England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Each administration will consider its own approach to the outcome of the consultation.

I will be holding meetings with key stakeholder groups during the consultation period to listen to their views. A copy of the consultation has been deposited in the libraries of both Houses and is available on DEFRA's website at:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/pesticides/index.htm>

<sup>(1)</sup><http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:309:0001:0050:EN:PDF>

<sup>(2)</sup><http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:309:0071:0086:EN:PDF>

## **DEBATES**

### **Calman Commission**

On Wednesday 24 February a debate was held on the Calman Commission report. For the full text of the debate, please follow this link:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm100224/debtext/100224-0001.htm#10022460000022>

## **ORAL QUESTIONS**

**Thursday 4 February**      **Food Labelling**

*The Secretary of State was asked-*

**Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con):** When he last met representatives of the food retail industry to discuss country of origin food labelling; and if he will make a statement. [315361]

**Mr. Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con):** When he last met representatives of the food retail industry to discuss country of origin food labelling; and if he will make a statement. [315382]

**Mr. David Evennett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con):** When he last met representatives of the food retail industry to discuss country of origin food labelling; and if he will make a statement. [315386]

**Mr. Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** When he last met representatives of the food retail industry to discuss country of origin food labelling; and if he will make a statement. [315387]

**The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Jim Fitzpatrick):** I met retailers, processors, producers and representatives of the food service industry on Monday, when I chaired the pigmeat supply chain taskforce, which agreed a voluntary code of practice on labelling for pork and pork products. That code will ensure that consumers have clear and unambiguous origin information when buying pork products.

**Michael Fabricant:** That is good news, partly. Has the Minister also met the Consumers Association? He will know that it recently conducted a survey showing that 80 per cent. of people want to know the origin of meat and poultry and 77 per cent. that of fruit. It is incredible and surprising to me that that is not mandatory on labelling. Will he push for that in the European Council?

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** I am sorry that I have not met the Consumers Association, but I am aware of its survey and the one conducted by the Food Standards Agency, which came out with somewhat different conclusions. Country of origin is an important aspect for consumers, as are price and food safety. All those matters should be addressed in labelling to ensure that the consumer can make an informed choice.

**Mr. Harper:** I am pleased to hear about the progress that has been made so far. We in Gloucestershire have excellent food and drink producers, and it is important for consumers to know where their food comes from. Is the FSA, whose survey the Minister referred to, absolutely at one with him on the importance of food labelling, and will the Government take forward that view in the negotiations with European partners?

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** We are in negotiations in Europe about the food information regulations, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware. Those discussions have been taking place for some months and will continue this year, with a view to producing regulations next year for implementation, I believe, in 2013. The Government are very much involved in trying to ensure that we have accurate country of origin labelling on products that the British consumer is interested in buying.

**Mr. Evennett:** I am pleased with the Minister's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant). However, several Government Departments and agencies have registered a fall in the proportion of British food that they buy. The latest figures that I can find are for 2007-08, when the Department for Children, Schools and Families, for instance, imported an awful lot of lamb and bacon and did not purchase many British apples. Can the Minister say why the latest figures have been delayed? Is he trying to bury bad news?

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** Maybe it is only me, but sometimes answering these questions makes me feel that I am playing Jim Hacker in the episode of "Yes Minister" in which he defends the British sausage. He was, of course, attempting to save his own bacon at the time.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the latest figures will be published shortly. Last year's figures showed a 2 per cent. increase in public sector procurement of British food products, and I hope that we will see the same this year.

**Mr. Hollobone:** Britain's best breakfast cereal, Weetabix, is made in the Kettering constituency, and the wheat for it comes from farms within a 50-mile radius. Why cannot Weetabix proclaim on every box that British breakfast cereals for British breakfasts are the best in the world?

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** I must confess that I was not aware that Weetabix is produced in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. However, that does explain why he has three Weetabix for his breakfast every morning in the Members' Tea Room-I have seen the latest advert for Weetabix in which the jockey beats all the horses. I am sure that Weetabix will be listening to the hon. Gentleman. It is for producers to determine what they include in the way of labelling, but we are trying to encourage accurate country of origin labelling at the same time.

**Jane Kennedy (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab):** Will my hon. Friend give my greetings to the taskforce, and will he come shopping with me when I visit my local Sainsbury's, Aldi, Tesco and Co-op? [ *Interruption.* ] If there were a Waitrose I would shop there, too. All

those supermarkets now have on their shelves products across the whole range that have their origin on the label, in some cases including the county of origin. No discerning shopper these days can seriously claim that there is not a choice. The voluntary approach is the way to go, and it is working. Will he encourage the supermarkets even further down that route?

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for the date that she has offered me. I am sure that my wife will read *Hansard* with interest to confirm that it is a business appointment.

I commend my right hon. Friend because, as my predecessor, she started discussions on country of origin labelling with the retailers and officials in the Department as far back as January 2009. I congratulate her on that. Her activities pioneered the success that we have seen and that will come in future, and I will be happy to engage with her in terms of shopping.

**Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West) (Lab):** One difficulty shoppers have is avoiding illegally produced goods from Israeli colonies, often called settlements, in the west bank. What are the Government doing to ensure that that illegally produced and exported food either does not enter the United Kingdom or, if it does, is properly labelled so that consumers like me can avoid it?

**Jim Fitzpatrick:** If my hon. Friend has not seen it-he may well have seen it-I can tell him that on 10 December the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs issued advice to retailers and importers who wished to respond to consumer demand for information about the origin of food produced in the occupied Palestinian territories. That means that consumers who buy food products that originate there will be able to distinguish between the produce of Palestinian farmers and that from the Israeli settlements. One of the largest retailers is already putting our advice into practice, and we hope that the rest will follow soon.

## EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Next week in the European Parliament

16 March

AGRI ctte. vote on Dorfmann LFA report (INI)

AGRI ctte. vote on Ashworth Simplification of the CAP report (INI)

ENVI ctte. vote on Sommer food labelling report (COD)

17 March

AGRI ctte. vote on Paulsen animal welfare report (INI)

AGRI ctte. vote on LeFoll agriculture and climate change report (INI)

Ends