

MINUTE of MEETING of COUNCIL of the
SCOTTISH POTATO TRADE ASSOCIATION held
at the Station Hotel, PERTH, at 12.30p.m.
on Thursday, 19th APRIL, 1979

PRESENT: Messrs. A. J. Allan, J.H. Barr, G. Brass, J. Cook, R. Doig, J.G.H. Fenton, J. Fordyce, B. Fulton, W. Gordon, J. Henderson, D.H. Lindsay, J.R. McArthur, T. McClung, K.A. McKenzie, D. Maxwell, J.M. Waddell, and A.D. Williamson with R. David Hunter (Secretary) and D. Blackmore (Assistant) in attendance.

The President, Mr. J.H. Barr, occupied the Chair.

APOLOGIES: Mr. Blackmore intimated apologies on behalf of Messrs. J.P. Deuchar, J. George and J.O. Robertson. It was reported that Mr. Deuchar was recovering from a recent sudden illness. Council shared spontaneous sincere concern and instructed the Secretariat to convey sympathy and best wishes to Mr. Deuchar.

MINUTES: The Minute of Meeting of Council held in Perth on 8th March, 1979 (copies of which had been pre-circulated to each Member of Council) was taken as read. It was formally approved and signed to this effect by the Chairman.

MATTERS ARISING: (a) British Rail - Mr. Blackmore reported that British Rail's reply had confirmed that potato traffic demands had been given priority over "new-customer" traffic, but had not commented on age-selection rather than condition-selection of vans for withdrawal from service. During brief discussion Council felt that British Rail had done its best in exceptionally difficult circumstances.

(b) Sealing of Bulk Loads and Consultative Panel - In reply to the Chair, Members reported no fresh bulk-load difficulties being encountered. The Secretariat reported DAFS had agreed to substitution of Panel representatives if necessary.

(c) Plant Royalty Bureau and (d) Conditions of Sale - these two matters were deferred for discussion later in the Agenda.

(e) Sack Specifications - Mr. Blackmore reported two enquiries from sack manufacturers for Association recommendations to assist them in deciding their manufacturing and stocking policy, following the lapse of the former specified standard. After brief discussion it was felt that while Council could recommend adherence to the former standard to assist improvement of presentation individual Members would make up their own minds, and circularisation of the matter could hinder improvement in presentation.

This led on to a proposal to try to standardise riddle sizes with NASPM, NFUS and DAFS. It was agreed to circularise all Members strongly recommending immediate adoption of a minimum dressing size of 35mm and to move resolutely towards discontinuation of a top riddle size of 57mm. The Secretariat was instructed to advise NASPM and NFUS of this circularisation.

(f) Late soil samples - In reply to the Chair it was reported that results were coming forward timeously, the earlier problem being also alleviated by the lateness of the current planting season. It was reported that, to counter the effect of the current strike action, DAFS were trying to withdraw inspection applications from computer handling but without total success up to a few days ago.

(g) Membership and Subscriptions - Mr. Blackmore reported that John Bryden, Esq., suspended from membership last year, had now paid his subscriptions for 1978 and for the current (1979) year, the Roll now totalling 116 members.

Of only three subscriptions outstanding two were in course of post and he had not yet been able to contact the third member by telephone. Total indicated receipts of £4,927.25 are £100 higher than estimated.

Following the recent updated reissue of the P.M.B. Register of licensed?

licensed Merchants, he suggested a "recruiting campaign" be considered. It was agreed a list of possible new members be prepared and submitted for consideration at the next Meeting of Council.

(h) "Bodmin" case - Mr. Blackmore reported that the case had so far not been included in either set of monthly publications received in his office. He believed a transcript could prove expensive and Council agreed he should continue his enquiries in this direction.

PRESS sub-
COMMITTEE:

Mr. Lindsay next reported on the Meeting held in Perth on 20th March, 1979 the first occasion on which the new Press Officer, Mr. W. Kemp, had formally met the sub-Committee. Following consideration of analyses of past season's Royalties a Press Release had been prepared. Mr. Kemp had secured a very satisfactory published coverage of this item.

Mr. Kemp had explained he received payment for his material from the various publications but had agreed to accept payment of his Association expenses on a month-by-month basis, the first such payment to account (of £20 for March 1979) having then been paid. In reply at this point in the Report, the Secretariat explained all "second period" Contributions to the Press Fund were still on interest - bearing Deposit (of £1130) with the Bank and could confidently be anticipated to suffice for about two years' activity. Brief reference was again made to the small number of renewing Contributors and the possibility of including further Press funding in annual Membership Subscriptions, (in which latter event it was noted due relief should be given to past and present Press Fund Contributors).

In conclusion Mr. Lindsay explained the Association had not published comment on the lifting of the ban on maincrop imports or replied to certain misleading aspects of a recent article in the "Scotsman". He appealed to Council Members to propose topics and items at all times for the sub-Committee's attention particularly (as now) when material is in very short supply.

SCOTTISH
ADVISORY
COMMITTEE:

Mr. Fenton reported on the meeting he and Mr. Lindsay had attended in Edinburgh on 22nd March, 1979. Detailed market situation (prices, supplies etc.) reports had been given and it had been concluded that price improvements at a usually weak time had been due to the effect of both transport strike action and prolonged adverse weather being intensified by dressing and loading against the Board's Stockfeed programme. Detailed updating of both buying programmes was also given, along with announcement of a review of past procedures for future guidance, particularly for early production and for processors.

After offsetting frost damage losses in January and February with lower than estimated movement into human consumption, the estimated surplus for the 1978 Season remained only marginally changed at 480,000 tonnes.

Prospects of 30,000 tonnes of new potato imports less than last year, with earlier arrivals than usual from Egypt and Cyprus, were reported. Only some 2,800 hectares had been planted in the U.K., with earlies mostly more forward than last year but delay occurring in the follow-up early and the maincrop plantings.

Despatches from Scotland to England and Wales by end-February had been 25% lower than last year. The eventual out-turn was expected to be about 200,000 tonnes (perhaps more if the planting season is prolonged), about 15% lower than 1978. 30,000 tonnes of Ware Potatoes had been exported as well as 40,000 tonnes of seed. Already the highest tonnage ever recorded for seed, the eventual total for 1978/79 is expected to reach 44,000 tonnes, compared with 25,720 tonnes in the previous year.

SEED POTATO
ADVISORY
COMMITTEE:

Mr. Lindsay next explained that due to flight delays (timeously advised to the Board) he and Messrs. Douglas Hall and Craig Davie had not been present for the timed start of the meeting of the Seed Potato Advisory Committee in London at/

at 1.45p.m. on 27th March, 1979. In fact, on their arrival at 2.15p.m. they learned the meeting had commenced 15 minutes early, at 1.30p.m. with a talk by Mr. Gordon Lyall on the proposals to form a Scottish Seed Potato Association (item 6 on the Agenda) at which both Messrs. Grantham and Andrew Arbuckle (Chairman of the Scottish Advisory Committee had both been present. Mr. Lindsay had conveyed Council's view (that each individual producer must make his own decision) and had had to agree that the larger merchant-growers appeared reluctant to support the proposals.

The meeting had then dealt with the earlier (formality) items of the Agenda, DAFS proposals re tolerance changes (Item 4) followed by a report on Movements (Item 5) (already reported above). Mr. Lindsay explained to Council that the English representatives remained silent and seemed un-interested in the outstanding achievements of the exporters of Scotch seed.

Under Item 7 of the Agenda (changes in the English Certification Scheme) discontinuation of the Tuber Indexing Scheme was announced. Mr. Lindsay understood this reflected the scientific view that the Scheme had not worked. In brief discussion Council agreed the Press sub-Committee should use this information and its bearing on the usefulness of the Dutch scheme.

Item 8 had reviewed recent Scientific News Letters and included a complex scientific explanation of the "Meristem" accelerated propagation system. Finally, under Item 9, the Committee's annual visit had been announced for early July to Bavaria. Council formally approved Mr. Lindsay's participation on behalf of the Association.

ENTERTAINMENTS
COMMITTEE:

Mr. Lindsay continued by reporting briefly on the meetings held in Perth on 30th March and 19th April. All arrangements for the Association's annual Golf Outing at Gleneagles on Thursday, 17th May were now in hand, the draw being scheduled to take place at the next Committee meeting on Friday, 11th May.

Further discussion of arrangements for the 1979 Dinner-Dance had also taken place and a maximum effort was being directed into organising an outstanding function. The Committee had agreed to co-opt an additional member to represent the younger point of view and Mr. K.A. McKenzie accepted an invitation to serve in this capacity.

ANY OTHER
COMPETENT
BUSINESS:

(1) Proposed Scottish Seed Potato Association - The Chairman first read out a letter received from Mr. Gordon Lyall and, in commenting upon it, also drew attention to the similarity between the present situation and that which had obtained at the time of the original formation of the Potato Marketing Board. He felt the outcome of the present initiative must be one of only three possibilities - collapse, from lack of support, progress with sufficient SPTA - Members' support to ensure equal SPTA voice in control; or progress without such support, perhaps with non-SPTA grower-merchant representation. In the light of the latter possibility he questioned whether the SPTA could justify continuation of its present "watching-brief" policy.

The following wideranging discussion was, as on earlier occasions, severely handicapped by the limitations imposed by a very fluid, hypothetical, future situation. One view was that as an association of merchants, not grower-merchants, the SPTA ought to sit and watch; another, that the Association should give a lead to registered producers before their support decisions must be made. One calculation indicated that a levy of £40 per hectare would guarantee support for only 10% of the seed potato crop for only one year at a time, another that worth-while support (£70 per tonne) would not be possible below a £75 - £80 per acre level. One opinion was that effective control of the proposed new Association's activities could only be mounted from within it, not from without, another held that being NFU-dominated from the outset, even if the proposed new Association is formed, any SPTA representation will be non-effective anyway and the proposed new Association would provide yet another vehicle whereby the efficient producers/

producers would "carry" the inefficient ones.

In further and prolonged discussion the SPTA dilemma was crystallised in the view that the Chairman's third possibility appeared to be the most likely prospect and that although, basically, grower-merchants do not want the proposed scheme, they want even less to be bereft of an effective voice if the proposals are, in fact, steam-rolled into being. This view was felt to be supported by indications that Mr. Lyall's very recent change of stance/approach indicated that his remit had been extended to take account of the main fear that the producer support vote would be non-definitive.

A suggestion that the SPTA should issue a Press Release detailing the proposals' drawbacks was felt to conflict with a "watching brief" policy. A suggestion to circularise Mr. Lyall's latest letter to all registered producer members of SPTA, along with a simple questionnaire to pre-determine voting intentions for earliest circularisation for Council Members' guidance, also failed to achieve unanimous support.

(2) European Union - The Chairman next read a letter from the Consortium explaining the financial problems of the European Union and seeking Constituent Members' views and comment on indicated contribution increases. Council felt opposed to authorising a "blank cheque" situation and agreed that consideration of the Union's financial statements would be assisted if they were prepared in a single currency, rather than several currencies as at present. The Secretariat was instructed to convey these comments to the Consortium with a copy to Mr. Douglas Smith for his information.

(3) NASPM - proposed revision of Conditions of Sale - The Chairman explained the present position (that six further amendments had been referred back by NASPM Council to its Legal Committee for consideration), the Secretary adding that NASPM had not responded to his request for earliest SPTA discussion and involvement. Council noted that finally amended proposals were still expected and instructed these be considered by the Conditions sub-Committee as soon as possible. To take account of the Secretary's impending absence on holiday the members of the Conditions sub-Committee thereupon agreed to meet in the Secretary's office at 2p.m. on Friday 18th May, 1979.

(3) Royalty Rates - The Secretary next reported the content of a letter from NSDO regarding its proposals for Royalties to be levied on State-bred varieties for the 1980 Crop and suggesting the formation of a consultative Committee.

Mr. Blackmore pointed out that although the proposed rates were purported to represent a reduction, the overall effect (based on the 1978 crop results) would be to increase the levied total by 4½%. After a short discussion Council instructed the Secretariat to protest against any increase in the rates and to agree to conjoin in the consultative proposals.

(4) Date of next meeting - It was agreed to hold the next Meeting of Council in the Station Hotel, Perth at -2.30p.m. on Thursday, 7th June, 1979 the Secretariat being instructed to make the usual necessary arrangements.

The Meeting was thereupon formally concluded with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

