

REPORT on a MEETING between representatives of the SCOTTISH POTATO TRADE ASSOCIATION with NICHOLAS FAIRBAIRN, ESQ., Q.C., M.P., at 19 George Street, PERTH at Noon on MONDAY, 30th SEPTEMBER, 1985.

PRESENT: Mr. Nicholas Fairbairn, Messrs. J.R. McArthur and J. Smillie, with R. David Hunter (Secretary) and D. Blackmore (Assistant) in attendance.

HARVEST: During opening conversation concerning the current Scottish harvesting conditions, Mr. Fairbairn confirmed he had flown over his constituency for a first hand view. He agreed an extremely serious situation is in prospect and something must be done. In reply, Mr. McArthur stated more than half his planted acreage had still to be harvested, while Mr. Smillie had lifted only 35% to date (one of his growers had five of his seven tractors bogged in the field). Both agreed some 10% of crops would never be lifted and in-store losses in harvested crops are expected to be abnormally high. Mr. Fairbairn noted these points.

N.I.C. ON CASUAL HARVEST WAGES: Mr. Hunter explained Council of the Association had carefully considered Baroness Trumpington's letter in reply to Mr. Fairbairn's enquiry. While the letter is helpful in several respects, it does not resolve the problem. Council had decided to pursue the matter through both political and legal avenues. Mr. Fairbairn's advice on the former was sought today and a formal Memorial for his Opinion on the latter is about to be submitted through the usual channels.

Mr. McArthur explained that in addition to N.I.C. problems, Customs and Excise officials are also investigating misuse of diesel fuel in tractors engaged in field and road working on the harvest. He stressed the harassing effect of these investigative pressures coming at the time of probably the worst harvest conditions in living memory.

In the political context Mr. Fairbairn suggested he contact the Scottish Office to solicit pressure on the Treasury to suspend these pressures during this critical time. He pointed out that if successful this would have only an interim effect. The Association representatives agreed this would be a very helpful move indeed.

Mr. Fairbairn asked if Mr. Smillie had taken up the offer contained in the last paragraph of Baroness Trumpington's reply letter. In the event that he had not, Mr. Fairbairn accepted copies of various papers for perusal. Mr. McArthur also explained further correspondence which had revealed that the Inland Revenue Audit Branch had rejected the claim that definition (a) in Baroness Trumpington's letter applied to casual potato harvest workers. In his own view this depends essentially on whether such a worker is "known" or "unknown" to the employer.

Mr. Hunter pointed out that these latter points form part of the Memorial for Counsel's Opinion. Mr. Fairbairn agreed to accept the Memorial in due course. The Meeting was then concluded.