

MINUTE of SPECIAL MEETING of COUNCIL  
of THE SCOTTISH POTATO TRADE  
ASSOCIATION in the Wheel Inn Motor  
Hotel, SCONE at 2 p.m. on Tuesday,  
22nd MARCH, 1988.

PRESENT:

Messrs. W.P. Balfour, J.H. Barr, A. Bayne, G.S. Brass, J.G.H. Fenton, D.H. Lindsay, D. Maxwell, I. Melrose, J.R. McArthur, K.A. McKenzie, J.O. Robertson and J.M. Swinton, with D. Blackmore (Assistant Secretary) in attendance.

The President, Mr. G.S. Brass, took the Chair and welcomed those present to the meeting.

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Messrs. J.E. Cook, P. Miller, T. McClung, A.S. Whitehead and R. David Hunter (Secretary).

FUTURE OF  
THE P.M.B.:

The Chairman confirmed that today's Special Meeting had been arranged solely to discuss the Association's views and recommendations in readiness for the forthcoming review of the future of the Potato Marketing Board after 1990. In this light, all normal Council business would be deferred. In addition to the tabled Papers prepared by Messrs. Lindsay and McArthur, the Chairman read out a letter from Dalgety Seed Potatoes summarising the points discussed during a recent informal meeting with the Chairman and the Secretary.

Speaking to his own Paper (put together as "openers"), Mr. McArthur explained there are numerous precedents for its Scottish exclusivity. The statistical comparisons it contained strongly emphasised the disproportionate cost of the Board's non-support expenditure. He felt it to be essential to retain acreage control (which for good reasons should be attached to land) and for a Scottish Authority to administer it more sympathetically. He was opposed to a "free" market that meant control being passed to a handful of "big-money" multi-national interests.

The ensuing prolonged and lively discussion revealed both support for and opposition to the concept of a unified Scottish Authority. While it was felt that difficulty would be met in winning necessary ware grower support and in any event solely Scottish-sourced financing would be inadequate to ensure viability, possible access to a Scottish share of P.M.B. reserves on disbandment and/or access to E.E.C. Grant funding were proposed and discussed.

Mr. Lindsay explained his Paper was prepared from a U.K.-wide, philosophical point of view. He felt that crop-support should not be sourced entirely by producers to the exclusion of many other important interests within the industry. He felt there to be unanimous U.K.-wide support for a drastic slimming down of the P.M.B. if it is to continue in being after 1990. He recognised Scotland's disadvantages compared with English and Dutch yields and distance from Markets as facts of life and viewed a continuation of production controls as an essential requirement after 1990.

This Paper also stimulated much further discussion, increasingly mixing various aspects of both Papers. In summary, Mr. McKenzie felt that Council had to decide between the following options (a) the "triple zero" option (No P.M.B., no acreage control, no crop support); (b) a slimmed-down version of the P.M.B.; (c) a combined Scottish Authority. On good authority he believed the Government intention was option (a), but Council agreed unanimously that this would not be acceptable to the industry. Further discussion of (b) and/

and (c) did not reveal a clear cut preference for either. It was recognised that the outcome would be determined by "the art of the possible" and that without import barriers Scotland could not be an island. A voice of caution for Scotland not to cut itself off from English grower-funded support enjoyed in past surplus years was discounted by the likelihood of no buying-in programmes after 1990. There was support for expanding Mr. McArthur's Paper and adopting option (c) with (b) as a fall back. At the same time it was pointed out that growers in the High Grade Seed Area could vote the P.M.B. out and this is reason enough to ensure a strong seed representation on any post 1990 Regulatory Body.

Summarising these discussions the Chairman proposed Council should address the question of what the S.P.T.A. would want in the two possible situations after 1990:- (First) with continuation of a P.M.B., (Second) without any P.M.B. Council agreed to consider these in turn.

It was assumed that the Board's Income of approximately £15m. per annum would continue and that the overall requirement would be to reduce present costs by at least 50%, all savings achieved being added to reserve funds available for crop support. Principal areas of costs reductions identified included divestment of Sutton Bridge establishment and operations; reduction of staff (including area offices) by at least 40% to pre-set cash limits; reduce the Board to 12 Members, with not more than 6 other co-opted representatives of other interests (whether involving contributions to Funds by those interests was not resolved) thereby removing the need for dependant Committees; the principle of Basic Area and Quota to be retained; expenditure on publicity, R. & D. and Grants to be reduced by 50%; retention of a minimum standard for ware; simplify collection of statistics, retaining crop-check weighings and Merchants Returns and recovery of costs of statistics supplied to government; seed crop support equivalent (on hectare basis) to Ware Crop support and a part-levy refund incentive for exports.

In replies the Chairman explained that a final decision on the Seed Support Proposals is to be made at the next Board meeting in London on 29th March. In readiness, the Seed Working Party had arranged to meet all Scottish members of the Board following the Scottish Advisory Committee meeting in Edinburgh on 24th March. He remained pessimistic about the outcome.

Under pressure of time it was agreed the (Second) option above warranted a further meeting of Council, which it was decided would be held in Scone at 2 p.m. on Thursday, 31st March. The Chairman explained this would allow the Seed Support decision to be known and Council's full consideration of the post-1990 scenarios to be completed in readiness for expected publication of the Board's own views shortly after Easter (early April). In further reply the Chairman envisaged S.P.T.A.'s response thereto being submitted to the Scottish Office by the end of May, 1988 with publication of the Government's own views not expected until the end of June, 1988 and the whole consultative process concluding in October, 1988.

In conclusion, the Chairman thanked all those present for their valued and very stimulating contributions to the discussions.

The meeting then closed with a Vote of Thanks to the Chair.