

MINUTE of MEETING with OFFICIALS  
of POTATO MARKETING BOARD held at  
INGLIESTON, EDINBURGH, at 2.30  
p.m. on WEDNESDAY, 23rd MARCH,  
1994.

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PRESENT: P.M.B. - J. Heading (Chairman), A.C. Fairburn (Chief Executive, A. Keay and J.S. Cruickshank (Board Members);

S.P.T.A. - Messrs. R. Doig, D. Stewart, J. McKenzie and G. Smillie, along with R.D. Hunter, Secretary.

P.M.B. POLL: Mr. Heading welcomed the opportunity of meeting representatives of S.P.T.A. to discuss S.P.T.A.'s letter addressed to him, dated 11th March, 1994. He added that the aims of the P.M.B. were very much in line with the views expressed by S.P.T.A. in that letter. During discussion Mr. Heading undertook that the Board would arrange for a Referendum of Producers to be carried out by an independent Market Research Organisation not later than Christmas 1994. S.P.T.A. Members stated that the Referendum would have to be carried out much earlier than that. The Board Members stated that they did not think that it would be appropriate to ask Producers to vote regarding a possible "successor Body" without being told what that successor Body would be. They considered that before carrying out a Referendum the form of the successor Body must be identified. They added that they were presently working on this matter. Mr. Keay said that it could not be assumed that the Government would agree to a statutory successor Body being set up. Mr. Heading stated that the chances of the Government agreeing to a statutory successor Body being set up would be much greater if the Potato Marketing Board transferred itself into the new Body rather than a completely new Body having to be set up.

Mr. Fairbairn reported that the Board was actively working on putting its "house in order" and that on the previous day at a Board Meeting decisions had been made to further implement the Board's Strategy Plan.

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The S.P.T.A. representatives stated that the successor Body must be up and running prior to the 1995 crop. It was also pointed out to the Board that S.P.T.A. had received in excess of 400 signatures representing well in excess of 4,000 hectares, demanding that a Poll regarding the immediate future of the Potato Marketing Board be carried out. Mr. Doig pointed out that Producers who were demanding a Poll would not allow matters to drag on and would require to be assured that a Referendum would be completed within the six months referred to in S.P.T.A.'s letter of 11th March otherwise they would expect the demand for a Poll to be made. S.P.T.A. representatives stated that they did not see any reason why the Referendum which S.P.T.A. is seeking should not be completed within said period of six months. There was detailed discussion but no positive solution was agreed. Reference was made to the Conference being convened by the Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Fairbairn stated that all sections of the Potato Industry would be invited to that meeting and the indications were that it would be only a half day Conference which would not allow detailed discussion to take place. Mr. Fairbairn stated that the indications were that the Conference would be held towards the end of April, 1994. Mr. Fairbairn hoped that at the Conference further clarification would be given of the Government's attitude to the setting up of a successor Body. Mr. Doig repeated that the Producers demanding a Poll would not allow matters to drag on but agreed, out of courtesy to the Minister of Agriculture, that the Demand for a Poll would not be submitted before the Ministry Conference. The P.M.B. representatives undertook to meet S.P.T.A. again immediately after the Ministry Conference. In the meantime it was agreed to continue negotiations with regard to the wording of the questions to be asked in the Referendum. In that connection Mr. Fairbairn is to contact Mr. Hunter, Secretary of S.P.T.A. Mr. Cruickshank suggested that a solution might be to restrict the Referendum to the one question, namely, "Do Producers want the Potato Marketing Scheme to continue until 1997 or do they want it discontinued forthwith." The Board Members agreed in principle that the Referendum would include that question although the actual wording would require to be considered. Mr. Heading stated that S.P.T.A. would be entitled to carry out a Referendum itself and to determine the questions to be put to Producers, but for the P.M.B. to carry out the Referendum they must first consult all Organisations concerned the questions to be included, which would take time.

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In response to questions from S.P.T.A. the Board Members confirmed that the Board's finances were being closely monitored and were in a satisfactory state. Mr. Heading pointed out that the Board's finances would be all the more secure if it was not would up prematurely and allowed to "hand over" to a successor Body. Mr. Fairbairn stated that Levy payments from Producers for the current year were coming in at a satisfactory level, slightly better than in the previous year.

It was agreed that Mr. Fairbairn would write to Mr. Hunter, Secretary of S.P.T.A., stating "Headings" of what the P.M.B. considered had been agreed at the meeting.