

REPORT on POTATO INDUSTRY  
MEETING with THE SCOTTISH  
OFFICE held at Pentland  
House, Edinburgh, at  
2.00p.m. on TUESDAY, 23rd  
MAY, 1995.

PRESENT: S.O.A.F.D. Messrs. I.M. Whitelaw and G. Brown and Ms  
J.A. Campbell.

S.N.F.U. Mr. W. Reid and Ms C. Lang.

S.P.T.A. Messrs. D. Stewart, A. Pullar and R.D.  
Hunter.

S.S.P.D.C. Messrs. J. Stobo and J. Bethell.

V.T.S.C. Messrs. A. Anderson and H. Edmond.

P.M.B. Mr. J. Cruickshank.

CHAIRMAN: Mr. I. Whitelaw occupied the Chair.

Mr. Whitelaw commenced the meeting by stating that The Scottish Office considered that the time was appropriate for a further meeting with representatives of the Potato Industry in Scotland in light of the recent J.C.C. Paper regarding the Successor Body to the P.M.B. and the forthcoming S.S.P.D.C. Review. He added that The Scottish Office were not planning any publicity following the meeting. He explained that the purpose of the meeting was to enable the Industry to air its views and to enable The Scottish Office to pass on these views to the Minister.

P.M.B. SUCCESSOR BODY: Mr. Brown took the meeting through the J.C.C. Paper which he explained had been submitted by Sir Michael Franklin, the Chairman of J.C.C., to Mr. Waldegrave, the Minister of Agriculture. Mr. Whitelaw explained that the Minister through MAAF and The Scottish Office will be merely acknowledging receipt of the Paper and treating it as a report on the progress towards identifying a Successor Body to the P.M.B. He added that for the reason that the Paper was in outline form and did not include detail, the Minister would not be commenting upon the contents of the Paper. Mr. Whitelaw was emphatic that there was no possibility whatsoever of the Government allocating Parliamentary time for new primary legislation to amend the 1947 Act to allow certain of the proposals in the paper to be implemented. Mr. Whitelaw also stated that there was no possibility of the Government agreeing to the new Body being constituted under the Agriculture Marketing Act 1958. He added that a change of Government following a General Election would not alter matters in this respect. There was general discussion regarding the proposals contained in the J.C.C. Paper. During the course of that discussion Jacqueline Campbell stated that although in terms of the 1947 Act a Producer's Levy is the main source of funding there is also provision for the imposition of an "annual charge"

on other bodies in the Industry. Mr. Cruickshank explained that the P.M.B. was presently working with MAFF to investigate how and to what extent the proposals in the J.C.C. Paper can be implemented. He stated that a Paper containing all the relevant detail will eventually be presented to the J.C.C. for its approval prior to submission to the Minister. He added that the detailed proposals with regard to the setting up of the Successor Body will require to be finalised by not later than the end of 1995. In that connection Mr. Brown outlined a timetable which will require to be adhered to for the setting up of the new Body. That timetable was:-

Final proposals by the end of 1995.  
Consultation period during the first quarter of 1996.  
End of March, 1996 for debate in the House of Commons.  
Revocation Order by mid 1996 (bearing in mind that the existing Scheme ends in mid 1997).

In reply to a question by Mr. Whitelaw, Mr. Cruickshank stated that the P.M.B. had not yet decided whether to carry out a Poll of Registered Producers concerning the proposed Successor Body but he felt that such a Poll would be desirable.

During discussion, representatives of S.P.T.A. and of S.N.F.U., along with Mr. Cruickshank on behalf of the P.M.B., underlined the Industry's strong demand for the setting up of Sector Groups within the provisions for the Successor Body. Mr. Cruickshank stated that, as yet, there were no detailed proposals for the setting up of the Seed Potato Sector Group or, for that matter, any of the other Sector Groups.

Mr. Whitelaw reported that currently there were no signs of the watered down Potato Regime being received from Brussels.

S.S.P.D.C. REVIEW: Mr. Stobo, the Chairman of S.S.P.D.C., stated that his Council considers that the Review should be carried out in 1995 and that a Poll should be carried out in connection with that Review.

Mr. Whitelaw explained that a decision regarding the 1995 Review of S.S.P.D.C. must for practical reasons be made by September/October, 1995. Accordingly, The Scottish Office had decided earlier in the day to commence forthwith the Review Procedures and would be consulting the Industry in Scotland for its views. Mr. Whitelaw explained that there were various possibilities which could be implemented, namely:-

- (1) Agreement that S.S.P.D.C. should continue for a further 5 years without a Poll.
- (2) A Poll now to determine whether S.S.P.D.C. should continue or not.
- (3) Agreement to continue Council for a limited period (say 12 to 24 months) with a Poll at the end of that period if necessary.
- (4) Agreement that S.S.P.D.C. should continue without a Poll until such time as wider events become clearer. At this point, the Secretary would step in to initiate a further review of Council.

Mr. Whitelaw confirmed that he would be writing to S.P.T.A., S.N.F.U. and V.T.S.C. explaining the various possibilities and seeking a reponse within a short period of time. He pointed out that the Poll would have to be conducted in the month of July if it is to be carried out this year. He added that The Scottish Office were also proposing to consult S.E. Growers.

Mr. Brown stated that if a Poll is carried out it will be on a "one man one vote" basis without any weighting in respect of the amount of Levy paid by individual Growers. In reply to Mr. Hunter it was confirmed by Ms Campbell that the conduct of the Poll was not a statutory matter and it would, therefore, be legally possible to have the Poll carried out on a "weighted" basis if that was considered to be appropriate. The wording of the Poll Document was also at the discretion of The Scottish Office. Mr. Whitelaw stated that the proposal to carry out the Poll on a "one man one vote" basis was based on what had been done previously and explained that The Scottish Office would be reluctant to involve itself in the complications of a Poll being carried out on a "weighted" basis. He assured the meeting that the Poll would be conducted in a democratic manner.

There was general discussion in which S.P.T.A., S.N.F.U. and V.T.S.C. representatives indicated that they were concerned that the carrying out of a Poll in 1995 may result in S.S.P.D.C. being wound up before the Successor Body to the P.M.B. had been identified. It was also considered that the winding up of S.S.P.D.C. in 1995 would send the wrong signals out from Scotland with regard to the setting up of the Successor Body. Mr. Bethell expressed the opinion that if it was the wish of the Industry for S.S.P.D.C. to be wound up, the sooner it was wound up the better. He added, however, that he considered that it should be possible to canvass voters to make them well aware of the implications of doing away with S.S.P.D.C. now. He explained that there were only 425 names on the S.S.P.D.C. Register which was not a large number to be canvassed. Mr. Bethell advocated that a Poll should be carried out in 1995 on the basis of S.S.P.D.C. being continued for a five year period. He stated that if, in the future, it became clear that the new Successor Body was able to carry out the functions of S.S.P.D.C. it would be open to S.S.P.D.C. to go to the Minister and request that S.S.P.D.C. be wound up then. Mr. Stobo stated that to be effective S.S.P.D.C. must be continued for a minimum period of three years. Mr. Stobo stated that S.S.P.D.C. were currently drawing up a Five Year Plan which would be presented to Growers. Mr. Bethell added that in 1990 a Five Year Plan had been drawn up and, to a very large extent, it had been implemented.

During discussion regarding the carrying out of a Poll it was confirmed that many Seed Potato Growers would not receive a vote for the reason that their potato growing was included in the Register under the name of a Controller who would get the vote.

Gordon Brown enquired what the reaction of S.S.P.D.C. would be to the proposal that the Minister continues S.S.P.D.C. on the basis that the Minister at any time could decide at his discretion to discontinue S.S.P.D.C. Mr. Bethell stated that

S.S.P.D.C. would be prepared to go ahead on that basis only if The Scottish Office accepted responsibility for the administration costs and other costs which would be incurred by S.S.P.D.C. as a result of a continuation on that basis.

In reply to a query, Mr. Whitelaw stated that the result of a Poll would have a very important bearing on the decision of the Minister but would not be the only factor which he took into consideration in arriving at his decision regarding the future of S.S.P.D.C.

Mr. Whitelaw stated that The Scottish Office would be happy to conduct bilateral discussions with any of the parties involved in the consultation procedures.