

National Assembly for Wales
EU Office

Europe Matters

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Cynulliad
Cenedlaethol
Cymru

National
Assembly for
Wales



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Introduction



Dame Rosemary Butler AM
Presiding Officer

I am delighted to introduce the 31st issue of Europe Matters, our update on the work of the National Assembly for Wales on European issues. Despite the pressure on Committees due to the high volume of legislation on their agendas, it is pleasing to see an active engagement in EU-related matters across the Assembly.

Environment and Sustainability Committee undertook an inquiry into the EU proposals on Organic Products, responded to the proposals to ban use of driftnets, as well as scrutinising Welsh Government preparations for implementation of the CAP and fisheries reforms. Enterprise and Business Committee this month holds a Ministerial scrutiny session on Welsh Government preparations for the new Structural Funds Programmes, and follow up to its inquiries on Horizon 2020 and EU Funding Opportunities. The Committee will discuss European Commission President Juncker's priorities, with David Hughes, Head of the Commission Office in Wales. Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee continues its monitoring of EU subsidiarity issues, and Chair David Melding AM attended the EC-UK Forum meeting of the Chairs of the UK/Devolved Legislatures in December, hosted by the Scottish Parliament. Children Young People and Education Committee visited the OECD in Paris to discuss the Wales PISA results, whilst Health and Social Care Committee's inquiry into New Psychoactive Substances considered the relevance of draft EU legislation in this area to Wales.

During the autumn there were a number of plenary debates on important EU related matters, including the TTIP trade negotiations between the EU and US, and scope for EU funding support for workers affected by the Murco oil refinery closure in Pembrokeshire.

The Assembly Commission plans to visit Brussels later this year for high level meetings with the European Parliament and European Commission, and a delegation of Assembly officials will visit Brussels later this month for awareness training, financed and organised by the European Commission's Office in Wales.

We have welcomed a number of distinguished guests to the Assembly over the past few months, notably the Irish President Michael D Higgins as part of his visit to Wales to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Dylan Thomas, as well as Ambassadors to the UK from Italy, Croatia and Hungary. We look forward to the visit of a delegation from the Fijian Parliament led by the speaker Dr Jiko Luveni, and the Latvian Ambassador to the UK who will discuss his country's first Presidency of the EU with Committee Chairs at the end of February.

I wish you a positive and fruitful 2015.

EU related topics in the Assembly's Committees

Environment and Sustainability Committee

- In light of the volume of Welsh legislation that will occupy the Committee's time over the next 12 to 18 months the Committee has agreed to adopt a new approach to its European work. It will be tracking and seeking to influence EU proposals of interest to the Committee through written consultation and informal engagement with stakeholders. Any issues identified for Wales will be pursued through written communication with the EU institutions and Welsh Government. Some of the key EU areas of interest to the Committee are set out below. A full list can be found on the Committee's website.
- **Inquiry into the organic production and labelling of organic products:** This inquiry has looked at the potential impacts on Wales of the European Commission's proposals for a Regulation on organic production and the labelling of organic products and the proposals published in 2014. The inquiry is: considering the potential impacts of the proposals on the organics sector in Wales; considering recommendations for changes to the legal proposals published; acting as a forum for stakeholders in Wales to engage with the debate on the future of organic production in the EU. The Committee held an oral evidence session on 13 November and has written to the European Commission and Parliament outlining its key proposals for amendments to the text of the draft regulation.
- **Marine policy and fisheries:** The Committee has continued to keep development of the Welsh Government's marine and fisheries policy under review including delivery of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and the Common Fisheries Policy in Wales. Further follow-up sessions will be held in early 2015.
- **Cultivation of GMOs:** Following on from the Council of the European Union's ('Council') agreement on a negotiation position on proposals to amend the authorisation process for the cultivation of GMO's, the Committee held factual briefing sessions with Welsh Government and European Commission officials on the content of the proposed amendments. The Committee intends to continue to monitor and track the negotiations on this proposal.
- **Ban on driftnets:** Following the publication by the European Commission of a regulation to prohibit the ban on driftnets the Environment and Sustainability Committee wrote to the Welsh Government to clarify its response to the proposals. The Committee intends to engage with Welsh stakeholders on their views on the proposals and recommendations for amendments and will write to the European institutions on the basis of the evidence it gathers.

Enterprise and Business Committee

- **Inquiry into the Welsh Government's approach to the promotion of trade and inward investment:** This inquiry looked at the effectiveness of the Welsh Government's current support structures to promote exports by Welsh businesses and facilitate foreign direct investment, including cross-government working within the UK. The report was published in October and was debated in plenary on 3 December. The Minister agreed to reconsider her response to the Committee's report on trade and inward investment following the plenary debate. In particular, the Minister agreed to look again at what further information can be made available about the effectiveness of the Welsh Government's support for exporters. The Minister also agreed to refresh the detail on the Welsh Government's approach to trade and inward investment that is in the existing policy document, 'Economic renewal: a new direction', published in 2010.

- **Inquiries into (i) Employment opportunities for older people; (ii) Assisting Young People into Work; (iii) Inquiry into Tourism:** While the main foci of these three inquiries are Welsh and UK actions, each inquiry includes consideration of the impact and value-for-money of European funding. The Tourism report was published in November and will be debated in plenary on 21 January. The Committee will hold a further evidence session with the Minister in January.
- **EU scrutiny session:** the Committee will hold a scrutiny session with the Minister for Finance and Government Business on 21 January focusing on the Welsh Government’s preparations for the new Structural Funds Programmes for 2014-2020, and in follow up to the Committee’s inquiries into Horizon 2020 and EU Funding Opportunities 2014-2020. The Committee will also hold an update session with the Head of the European Commission’s Office in Wales, David Hughes, and the Assembly’s EU Office, focusing in particular on the European Commission’s Work Programme for 2015 and the priorities of the new European Commission.

Children, Young People and Education Committee

- **Inquiry into Educational Outcomes for Children from Low Income Households:** The Committee held evidence sessions in autumn 2013 and went on to undertake focused work on the importance of parental engagement in 2014. A further evidence session with the Minister was held in December 2014 to conclude the inquiry.
- **OECD visit:** The Committee chair, Ann Jones AM, and other Committee members visited the OECD in Paris in September to discuss the Wales PISA results, the OECD’s review of the education system in Wales, Early Childhood Education and Care and financial education. The visit has informed the Committee’s scrutiny of the Welsh Government’s new Education Improvement Plan *Qualified for Life*.

Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee

- **Report on Subsidiarity:** The monitoring report on relevant subsidiarity issues to Wales coming out of draft EU legislative proposals, covering the period May to December 2014, will be considered during the spring term.
- **EC-UK Forum:** The Chair of the Constitutional and Legislative Affairs Committee and Deputy Presiding Officer David Melding AM attended the most recent meeting of the Chairs of the EU (or equivalent) Committees in the UK and Devolved Legislatures, which was held on 8 December in the Scottish Parliament.
- **Driftnets:** In November the Committee identified a proposal for EU legislation on Driftnet Fishing as an issue of proportionality and subsequently wrote to EU Commissioner and the Chair of the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee. The Committee has since noted updates from the EU Commissioner on this issue.
- **UK Government Balance of Competences Review:** in June 2014 the Committee responded to the UK Government Review of Balance of Competences on subsidiarity and proportionality.

Health and Social Care Committee

- **Inquiry into new psychoactive substances (“legal highs”):** The Committee held evidence sessions and undertook engagement activity during autumn and winter 2014. The terms of reference for this Inquiry include consideration of international evidence on approaches taken to New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) in other countries. The Committee has received information that the European Commission has prepared draft legislation which would regulate NPS at EU level (over and above the current limited EU regulation). This new EU

approach has been questioned by the UK Government. The Committee took evidence from Home Office officials in January 2015.

- **Inquiry into progress made to date on implementing the Welsh Government's Cancer Delivery Plan:** The Committee reported in October 2014. During the inquiry, issues were raised about the implications of the draft EU Data Protection Regulations, specifically the amendments which were agreed to Articles 81 and 83, on the use of data to support NHS service delivery and health and scientific research in Wales. The Committee wrote to the Secretary of State for Justice to urge him to ensure that a suitable balance is struck between respecting individuals' privacy and protecting research in the EU level negotiations on the proposals.

Plenary business with dedicated sessions on European issues

- 11 November: the Minister for Finance and Government Business gave an update on the 2014-2020 European Structural Funds programme, followed by a debate.
- 3 December: the Assembly noted the Report from Enterprise and Business Committee's inquiry into the Welsh Government's Approach to the Promotion of Trade and Inward Investment.
- 3 December: the Assembly debated the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership.
- 10 December: the Assembly Noted the Report from the Health and Social Care Committee's inquiry into progress made on implementing the Welsh Government's Cancer Delivery Plan.
- 10 December: a short debate on Securing the future of Welsh farming - What Wales can learn from EU partners to ensure that the next generation of farmers are able to access land, build their businesses, and maximise the benefits of European development funds.

Note: in addition to the above European issues feature in Ministerial Statements and in questions to Ministers on a regular basis.

External activities of Members on Assembly business

- 3 October: Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM was in Brussels for a meeting of the Natural Resources Commission in the Committee of the Regions.
- 7-8 October: Mick Antoniw AM and Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM attended the plenary session of the Committee of the Regions in Brussels.
- 9 October: Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM chaired a panel session (including speakers from the European Investment Bank) on Financial Instruments in the EU 2014-2020, at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels during the Open Days 2014 Week of Cities and Regions.
- 16-17 October: the Presiding Officer Dame Rosemary Butler AM, Sandy Mewies AM and Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM participated in a commemoration of the First World War in West Flanders organised by the Flemish Parliament.
- 19-21 October: Deputy Presiding Officer David Melding AM lead a delegation of Assembly Members to the 49th British Irish Parliamentary Assembly Plenary to be held in Ashford, Kent and in Ypres Salient, Flanders to commemorate the anniversary of the First World War.
- 27-31 October: Presiding Officer Dame Rosemary Butler AM lead a delegation of Assembly Commissioners on the Assembly's first outward visit to Canada. The visit included official visits to both the Federal Parliament in Ottawa as well as the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick in Fredericton.
- 5-8 November: Presiding Officer Dame Rosemary Butler AM attended the CALRE General Assembly meeting which was held at the Galician Parliament in Santiago de Compostela (Spain).
- 20 November: Deputy Presiding Officer David Melding AM and Chair of the House of Lords European Committee Lord Tim Boswell both spoke at a conference on the role of National Parliaments in the EU organised by Cardiff University's European Documentation Centre.
- 27 November: Committee of the Regions representatives Mick Antoniw AM and Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM chaired workshop sessions at an EU conference on youth employment organised by the Welsh Government in Cardiff.
- 19 January: Lindsay Whittle AM represented the Assembly at the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, Economic Matters meeting on their current inquiry into the role of 'Youth Unemployment' in Belfast.
- 6-8 February: Commonwealth Parliament Assembly (CPA) Wales Branch Chair, Joyce Watson AM will lead a small delegation to attend the 2nd meeting of the Regional Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians to be hosted by the Gibraltar Parliament.
- 11-13 February: Mick Antoniw AM will attend the inaugural plenary of the new mandate of the Committee of the Regions in Brussels
- 22-24 February: Deputy Presiding Officer David Melding AM will lead a delegation of Assembly Members to the 50th British Irish Parliamentary Assembly Plenary to be held in Dublin.

International and other VIPs visiting the Senedd

- 16 October: The Italian Ambassador, His Excellency Pasquale Q Terracciano visited the Assembly and give evidence to the Assembly's Committee Chairs on Italy's priorities during its Presidency of the Council of the European Union.
- 27 October: Deputy Presiding Officer David Melding AM met the Irish President Michael D Higgins as part of his visit to Wales to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Dylan Thomas.
- 12 November: Presiding Officer Dame Rosemary Butler AM met the Croatian Ambassador, His Excellency Dr Ivan Grdešić.
- 19 November: Presiding Officer Dame Rosemary Butler AM met the Hungarian Ambassador, His Excellency Mr Peter Szabadhegy.
- 19 November: Presiding Officer Dame Rosemary Butler AM met the British Ambassador to Argentina, Dr John Freeman.
- 2-3 February: The National Assembly for Wales will host an official visit by the Fijian Parliament, led by Speaker Dr. Jiko Luveni.
- 26 February: The Latvian Ambassador, His Excellency Mr Andris Teikmanis will visit the Assembly where he will meet the Presiding Officer and Assembly Committee Chairs to discuss Latvia's priorities during its six-month EU Presidency of the Council.

Links

- [National Assembly for Wales homepage](#)
- [Assembly Business Notice](#)
- [Committee pages](#)
- [Research Service pages](#)
- [Research Service blog: Inbrief](#)

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We welcome communication in either English or Welsh.

We hope you find this report of interest. If you do not wish to receive future editions of this newsletter, or if you have not received this directly and would like to add your name to the mailing list, please email Gregg Jones.



