

NORTH EAST SCOTLAND AGRICULTURE ADVISORY GROUP**VIRTUAL TEAMS MEETING****WEDNESDAY, 26 JANUARY 2022****Present:**

Aberdeenshire Council – Provost W Howatson (Chair), Councillors S Duncan, J Hutchison, J Ingram, D Robertson, I Taylor and J Whyte.
Aberdeen City Council – Councillor A MacKenzie.
Angus Council – Councillors K Braes and B Myles.
Bank of Scotland – P Reid.
Confor – J Farquhar, A Leitch.
Food and Drink Federation Scotland – M Stalker.
James Hutton Institute – D Roberts and L Sutherland
LANTRA – S Howden.
Moray Council – Councillor D Bremner.
NFUS – K Gilbert, L Paterson and A Simpson.
Press & Journal – G Mackie.
RSPB Scotland – K Cunningham.
Scottish Forestry – D Howieson.
Scottish Government – S Voas.
Scottish Land and Estates – D Fyffe and F Van Aardt.
Strutt and Parker – L Irwin.
The Courier – N Nicolson.

Apologies:

Aberdeen City Council – Councillors B Crocket, N MacGregor and A Scott.
Aberdeenshire Council – J Savege
Angus Council – Councillors C Brown and M Douglas.
LANTRA – L Barron-Majerik.
Moray Council – Councillor T Eagle.
NFUS – C Adam and A Connon.
RSPB Scotland – H Maggs.
SAOS – J Booth.
Scottish Forestry Grampian Conservancy – J Mackie
Scottish Enterprise – J Bell.
SEPA – P Wright
SGRPID – J Stuart.
VisitScotland – C Warburton.

Officers:

Aberdeenshire Council – N Chidester, Assistant Committee Officer; J Davidson, Environment Planner; P Macari, Head of Planning & Environment; D McDonald, Industry Support Executive; and A Mcleod, Committee Officer

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair welcomed everyone present to the meeting. Members were asked if they had interests to declare. No declarations of interest were intimated.

2. EQUALITIES

In taking decisions on the undernoted items of business, the Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010:-

- (1) to have due regard to the need to:-
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - (b) advance equality and opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
- (2) to consider, where an equality impact assessment has been provided, its contents and to take those into consideration when reaching a decision.

3. MINUTES OF MEETING 24 NOVEMBER 2021

The Minute of Meeting of the North East Scotland Agricultural Advisory Group (NESAAG) of 24 November, 2021 was circulated and approved as a correct record.

4. MATTERS ARISING

The Industry Support Executive advised all matters arising from the last meeting had been actioned.

5. PRESENTATION: ANIMAL HEALTH RESILIENCE BY SHEILA M VOAS, BVM&S, ARAGS, FRCVS, CHIEF VETERINARY OFFICER (SCOTLAND), ANIMAL HEALTH AND WELFARE DIVISION, SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

The Chair introduced Sheila M Voas (Chief Veterinary Officer for Scotland, Animal Health and Welfare Division, Scottish Government) to the meeting. Members **noted** her presentation on animal health. Ms Voas first focussed her remarks on avian flu emphasising the impact on trade and current bio-security responses to avian flu. Though spread was mainly through avian excrement and respiratory droplets, Ms Voas highlighted human behaviours that increased the spread of the disease. She then discussed African Swine Fever. This virus is circulating throughout Europe, though not currently present in the UK. Spread is by direct contact, through ticks, and via contaminated meat (including cured/processed pigmeat). Prevention measures include border control and education about not feeding waste meat to pigs/poultry. She briefly highlighted work around TB and Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD). Ms Voas concluded her presentation by reviewing the challenges arising from Brexit including additional animal health certification and sanitary controls when trading, and the acute shortage of veterinarians within the UK to regulate the meat processing sector. To address the shortage of specialist vet skills, the Scottish Animal Health and Welfare Division is creating a Scottish Veterinarian Service while SRUC is currently developing a new Vet School and an innovative curriculum at its new Craibstone campus. Following a question and answer session, the Chair

thanked Ms Voas for making time in her busy schedule to attend and for her insightful presentation.

6. BULLETIN: THE IMPACT OF STORM ARWEN UPON NE SCOTLAND

Members **noted** a bulletin on the Impact of Storm Arwen by the Industry Sector Executive. Mr McDonald explained the severe impact of the storm was caused by the high intensity and unusual direction of the wind. The bulletin highlighted both the impact of the storm (destruction and loss of power) and underscored the response of the Council and partners. A more comprehensive assessment of the response was presented to the meeting of Aberdeenshire Full Council on 13 January 2022.

7. PRESENTATION: STORM ARWEN WINDBLOW RECOVERY BY DOUG HOWIESON MICFOR, INTERIM HEAD OF OPERATIONAL DELIVERY, SCOTTISH FORESTRY AND ANDY LEITCH, DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE, CONFOR

The Chair introduced Mr Andy Leitch (Deputy Chief Executive, Confor) to the meeting. Mr Doug Howieson (Interim Head of Operational Delivery, Scottish Forestry) had been due to co-present with Mr Leitch but had been called away at short notice to attend a ministerial meeting, so Mr Leitch presented on his behalf. Members **noted** a presentation on the forest industry's response to Storm Arwen.

Mr Leitch's presentation highlighted the impact of the storm on forest owners and timber processors. The industry had adopted a safety-first, collaborative approach involving power companies, timber harvesting operators, local authorities, haulage and logistics, overseen by Scottish Forestry (formerly Forestry Commission Scotland) which coordinated work across the supply chain. Over 3,500 hectares of windblow had been reported (to date) in Scotland. This was expected to increase. Harvesting windblown timber presents safety, technical and operational challenges, which increases costs and results in lower volumes of utilisable timber compared to normal harvesting operations, eg due to snapped and and damaged stems. The supply chain was confident it could absorb most of the excess timber over the next two years. Mr Leitch commented on the short 'shelf life' of pine timber after windblow - before it develops blue stain (fungus) - and the need to prioritise pine harvesting. Assistance was being extended to landowners lacking resources and knowledge of current regulatory requirements (felling licences), marketing and re-planting. Timber processing representatives from sawmills, panel board factories, fencing and wood energy suppliers and timber exporters (roundwood) had met separately to explore how to maximise capacity to effectively absorb excess supply into the market. The national windblow action group continued to meet, to validate and update damage assessments, identify key strategic issues and address these collaboratively.

Mr Leitch, a colleague of Mr Howieson within Forestry Commission Scotland for many years prior to his move in 2020 to Confor, went on to present Mr Howieson's slides. He began by exploring the role of the Scottish Forestry (SF) which is responsible for policy, support, and regulation of the sector. Noting that Storm Arwen was the first major windblow since 2019, he advised that the forestry sector is not a level 1 emergency responder but nevertheless plays a key role in such situations. In response to Storm Arwen, SF 'fast tracked' felling licence applications

and provided additional flexibility within long term forest plans. SF also coordinated its sector-wide response with Confor to coordinate timber marketing, liaise with public highways authorities, provided advice on health and safety, and procured satellite data to help establish the extent and location of windblow. SF and Confor is currently creating guidance for farmers and small landowners to help them respond to windblow damage. Following a question and answer session, the Chair thanked Mr Leitch for his valuable input to the meeting. It was then **agreed** the presentations would be shared with members and posted on the NESAAG webpage, along with the Council's own emergency response.

8. BULLETIN: AGRICULTURAL POLICY UPDATE

Members **noted** the bulletin which provided an update on agricultural policy in Scotland. Mr McDonald highlighted the two main policy priorities - tangible progress towards net zero and meeting biodiversity objectives. Members were reminded of the recent AgriTransition Consultation which NESAAG had responded to - available for viewing on the NESAAG webpage. An overarching framework for Agricultural support in the UK was imminent and a new Agriculture Bill is anticipated in 2023.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Councillor Bremner requested information about the cost and other implications of gulls eating food from outdoor pig unit feeding stations. It was **agreed** Derek McDonald would raise this query with Scottish Pig Producers. Councillor Bremner thanked the group and stated this was consistently one of the most interesting groups he attends.

The Chair shared similar notes of gratitude for the privilege of working with the group, the remit for which had expanded over the years. Councillor Braes, MacGregor and Derek McDonald praised the quality of presentations, convenorship, active member participation and the high standard of debate generated at NESAAG.

Professor Lee-Ann Sutherland (JHI) noted that the Lantra Scotland website had further information on the Women in Agriculture Practical Training Fund, which included an additional £75,000 pounds of funding.

10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS:

- 10.00 on Wednesday 7 September 2022
- 10.00 on Wednesday 23 November 2022

ACTION 1: Derek McDonald to post the Council's emergency Response procedures and presentation materials to the NESAAG webpage

ACTION 2: Derek McDonald to work with Scottish Pig Producers to identify how much feed is lost from gulls.