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KEY POINTS FROM VISIT OF NI ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT TO NETHERLANDS 1-3 APRIL 2009

A delegation from the NI Assembly Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development met with their counterparts in the Netherlands House of Representatives and with staff at the BMC Moerdijk poultry waste incineration plant (which was not in operation on the day of the visit), to discuss issues relating to the incineration of poultry litter.

Research Papers are compiled for the benefit of Members of The Assembly and their personal staff. Authors are available to discuss the contents of these papers with Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public

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1. INTRODUCTION

A delegation from the NI Assembly Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development met with their counterparts in the NL Parliament on 2 April 2009, and with staff at the BMC Moerdijk poultry waste incineration plant (which was not in operation on the day of the visit) on 3 April 2009, to discuss issues relating to the incineration of poultry litter.

The delegation was supported by their Committee Clerk, the Assistant Clerk of the Committee for the Environment, and a member of the Research and Library Service.

The following Members of the NI Assembly Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development were present throughout:

- P J Bradley MLA (SDLP).
- Thomas Burns MLA (SDLP).
- Trevor Clarke MLA (DUP).
- Willie Clarke MLA (SF).
- Tom Elliott MLA (UUP).
- William Irwin MLA (DUP).
- Francie Molloy MLA (SF).
- George Savage MLA (UUP).

2. MEETING WITH MEMBERS OF THE NETHERLANDS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE FOR AGRICULTURE, NATURE AND FOOD QUALITY

2.1 The NI Assembly delegation met with the following Members of the Standing Committee for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality:

- J J Atsma (Christian Democratic Appeal), Chair of the Committee.
- H E Waalkens (Labour Party), Deputy Chair of the Committee, Chair of the European Affairs Committee and an organic farmer.
- Esther Ouwehand (Party for the Animals).
- G P J Koopmans (Christian Democratic Appeal), Chair of the Spatial Planning and Environment Committee.
- Janneke Snijder-Hazelhoff (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy), a dairy farmer.

The meeting began with position statements by the Netherlands Committee Members, after which MLAs made comments/asked questions.

2.2 Position statements by Members of Netherlands House of Representatives Standing Committee for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality

H E Waalkens (Labour Party) made the following points:

- The Netherlands is not just complying with the Nitrates Directive, but also challenging wider environmental pressures. The Netherlands position is of eco-responsibility, considering environmental effects across the whole life-cycle.
- If a policy is not holistically-good, then it would be stupid to do it.
- The Netherlands believes that such developments can relieve pressures, both at the micro/on-farm scale, and centralized.
- The poultry incineration industry is not yet fully profitable, and there have been disappointments.
- On locations, it is not sufficient to just have acceptance; plants should be located where they are beneficial.
- The Netherlands Government subsidises 'green investments' but does not directly invest in such plants: facilitation, not delivery.

Esther Ouwehand (Party for the Animals) made the following points:

- The Party for the Animals is opposed to incineration, but as a part of a broader argument on production of food.
- The party believes that removing phosphorus from the cycle will reduce food production.
- There is an underlying problem of how to reduce consumption of animals.

G P J Koopmans (Christian Democratic Appeal) made the following points:

- The Netherlands is proud of its poultry industry, and still improving animal welfare standards.
- Incineration is a good solution, but not the only option.
- The BMC Moerdijk plant is working well, but he advocates a wide range of fuels – diversify.

Janneke Snijder-Hazelhoff (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) made the following points:

- The Netherlands is a small state with a relatively large agricultural sector.
- Possible problems arise where such plants are in populated areas.
- There is a possible preference for anaerobic digestion (AD) on small scale (noting the deaths of 2 employees from gas inhalation in slurry tank).

2.3 Responses to MLA questions by Members of Netherlands House of Representatives Standing Committee for Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality

H E Waalkens (Labour Party) remarked, in response to MLA questions, that:

- Litter is processed (perhaps filtered/sorted) prior to arrival at the plant.
- The Netherlands has discussed using litter as fertilizer substitute; thus, incinerator product as both energy source and fertilizer.
- There are major societal concerns about environmental pressures from animal husbandry.
- Plants also fire animal protein streams.
- Export is a possible alternative solution; there are risks, however, when agri-food crises (such as BSE) prevent export, and there is no internal alternative.

Esther Ouwehand (Party for the Animals) remarked, in response to MLA questions, that:

- The problem is over-production, import and export.
- There have been emissions problems from the plant; this underlines that Western levels of meat consumption are unsustainable.

G P J Koopmans (Christian Democratic Appeal) remarked, in response to MLA questions, that:

- The Netherlands would export if there was no internal solution; for example, to the French wine industry.
- It would be idiotic not to use the product as fertilizer; UK and the Netherlands should push the EC to allow this.
- When the litter is separated, the phosphorus should be usable.
- The Netherlands has strong environmental emission controls, and subsidises biogas (up to EURO200M pa).
- UK must help to press EC to stop battery farming by 2012, as many Euro-states have not yet done so.

Janneke Snijder-Hazelhoff (People's Party for Freedom and Democracy) remarked, in response to MLA questions, that it is not good to burn animal protein; it should be fed back into the chain, otherwise it is wasted.

3. MEETING WITH BMC MOERDIJK

3.1 The NI Assembly delegation met with the following members of staff at the BMC Moerdijk poultry litter incineration plant:

- Freddy Meesters (BMC Moerdijk).

- Werner Dietl (Austrian Energy and Environment (AE&E) GmbH).
- Other BMC/AE&E staff.

The meeting began with presentations by BMC Moerdijk and AE&E, after which MLAs made comments/asked questions.

3.2 Main points made by Freddy Meesters (BMC Moerdijk).

BMC Moerdijk is working to turn a problem (too much poultry litter) into a solution (production of renewable energy).

He outlined the structure of the project:

- Shareholders: DELTA (energy), DEP (farmers), ZLTO (agriculture), and AE&E (energy).
- Finance: NIBC.
- Fuel: DEP.
- Contractor consortium: SIEMENS, EPCOM, and AE&E.

He emphasized that output was subsidized by a public feed-in tariff, which was critical to the profitability of the plant, in the current market, given the competition for poultry litter on continental Europe.

He stated that the plant was located in Moerdijk Harbour, which:

- Was an industrial zone, surrounded by rural land and close to residential areas (within 3km).
- Provided good infrastructure for such plants.
- Already housed other plants, such as waste incineration, sewage sludge treatment, and other power plants.

BMC Moerdijk is officially categorized as a waste incineration plant, rather than a biomass power plant, and, so, must comply with a strict regulatory scheme.

He described the physical characteristics of the plant, and outlined the key figures relating to its operation:

- An investment of EURO150m.
- 441k tones of poultry litter pa.
- 270GWhe/year.
- Power for more than 90k households.
- 65 trucks per day.

He noted that the ash by-product was sold as fertilizer, and that the plant uses water from the harbour.

He outlined the specification requirements for the litter, and emphasized that no foreign materials could be allowed.

He claimed that positive environmental effects included:

- Reduction in emissions, including of greenhouse gases.
- Minerals remaining available for agricultural use with even higher effectiveness.
- Less requirement for transport of poultry litter, as it would be exported if not incinerated.

He outlined the operating status of the plant:

- In operation since September 2008.
- Operating at about 50% of capacity, due to insufficient quantity of litter meeting correct specification.
- Emissions too high, due to fuel quality and plant design/control.

He outlined the plan to remedy the failings above:

- Work with farmers to improve litter quality.
- Co-fire with bio-mass to compensate for lack of litter volume and enhance net calorific value (NCV).
- Intelligent acceptance and mixing of litter.
- Improve knowledge of plant behaviour with different types of fuel.
- BMC to take full control of what fuel is accepted and fired.

3.3 Main points made by Werner Dietl (AE&E).

AE&E, which is the largest part of the A-TEC Group, had revenue of around EURO1bn in 2007. Europe represented 73% of its revenue, and provided 60% of its employees in 2007.

He outlined the 6 product lines in the AE&E portfolio: power plants, energy from waste, steam generators, flue gas cleaning, services and industrial equipment.

AE&E is involved in 134 energy plants in Europe and 237 world-wide.