



**Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru
The National Assembly for Wales**

**Y Pwyllgor Deisebau
The Petitions Committee**

**Dydd Mercher, 11 Mehefin 2008
Wednesday, 11 June 2008**

Cynnwys
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Cofnodir y trafodion hyn yn yr iaith y llefarwyd hwy ynddi yn y pwyllgor. Yn ogystal,
cynhwysir cyfieithiad Saesneg o gyfraniadau yn y Gymraeg.

These proceedings are reported in the language in which they were spoken in the committee.
In addition, an English translation of Welsh speeches is included.

Aelodau'r pwyllgor yn bresennol
Committee members in attendance

Andrew R.T. Davies	Ceidwadwyr Cymreig Welsh Conservatives
Val Lloyd	Llafur (Cadeirydd y Pwyllgor) Labour (Committee Chair)
Kirsty Williams	Democratiaid Rhyddfrydol Cymru (yn dirprwyo ar ran Michael German) Welsh Liberal Democrats (substitute for Michael German)

Swyddogion Gwasanaeth Seneddol y Cynulliad yn bresennol
Assembly Parliamentary Service officials in attendance

Alun Davidson	Dirprwy Glerc Deputy Clerk
Joanest Jackson	Cynghorydd Cyfreithiol Legal Adviser
Stefan Sanchez	Clerc Clerk

Dechreuodd y cyfarfod am 9.02 a.m.
The meeting began at 9.02 a.m.

Cyflwyniad, Ymddiheuriadau a Dirprwyon
Introduction, Apologies and Substitutions

[1] **Val Lloyd:** Good morning everyone and welcome to this morning's meeting. I welcome Kirsty Williams, who is substituting for Michael German.

[2] The usual housekeeping rules apply. We are not expecting a fire alarm test, so if you hear an alarm, please make your way out of the building. Please ensure that all your electronic devices are turned off so that they do not interfere with the broadcast. I know that you are all familiar with the use of the headsets for translation or amplification.

[3] I have not received any further apologies.

9.03 a.m.

Deisebau Newydd
New Petitions

[4] **Val Lloyd:** We have four new petitions. The first is a petition against fluoridation. It was an e-petition, submitted by Mr John Warman from Neath, calling on the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government to stop the fluoridation of public water supplies. I will open that up to discussion.

[5] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It is a contentious issue, but one would like to think that one could be open-minded in order to gather more evidence on this. I suggest that we get a more governmental view on it in the first instance, so that we can see what is happening on the official side of things. I suggest that we write to the relevant Minister to get a bit of background on where we stand and then we could consider inviting the petitioner to give

evidence if that were the agreed course of action.

[6] **Val Lloyd:** That sounds like the right approach. Kirsty, do you have any comments on this?

[7] **Kirsty Williams:** I agree with Andrew. I am not aware that the Government intends to introduce a policy of fluoridation, so a letter explaining the Government's position could be the quickest way of establishing whether it intends to do so.

[8] **Val Lloyd:** I agree; that is the sound way forward. So, we will write to the Minister to ask for the Assembly Government's position and we will take it from there.

[9] Our second new petition is another e-petition, which shows that that system is picking up, submitted by Mr Alun Evans from Hengoed. It says:

[10] 'We the undersigned call upon the National Assembly for Wales to request that the Welsh Assembly Government makes available, for free download, the Windows version of the Cysgliad Welsh dictionary/thesaurus.'

[11] Again, I will open that up for discussion.

[12] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Not being the most computer-literate of individuals, I would recommend any facility that increases people's ability to use a computer, especially in the Welsh language. We need some background information on this. Obviously, we are at the initial stage, and the petition calls for a specific model to be used—Bangor University holds the rights to this, so perhaps we need background information from the university to ascertain what is involved.

[13] **Kirsty Williams:** I agree with that.

[14] **Val Lloyd:** I agree that that is the right way forward. In terms of having more background information, the university seems to be funded from the Welsh Language Board for it to be available just to Apple Mac users, which is a little bit odd. Fine, we will take that way forward.

[15] The third petition is quite interesting—'Psychological Traffic Calming'—which comes from an e-petition by Nick Tregoning and John Newbury. I suppose that I had better declare an interest, in that I know these two gentlemen.

[16] **Kirsty Williams:** I also know them very well. [*Laughter.*]

[17] **Val Lloyd:** Kirsty knows them in a slightly different way, but I know them because they live in my locality. They are calling upon the National Assembly for Wales:

[18] 'to request that the Welsh Assembly Government funds a pilot scheme in Dunvant, Swansea to examine the effectiveness of a psychological traffic calming scheme in the village'.

[19] Hands up those who know exactly what a psychological traffic calming scheme is?

[20] **Kirsty Williams:** I will have a stab at it, Chair. It is timely, given the One Wales Government's publication on speed limits yesterday, that there is a desire to look at issues of road safety and pedestrian safety. However, I admit that I am not particularly au fait with all of the elements of psychological traffic calming, so I would be more comfortable with having more information before making any further recommendations about what we could do with

the petition. So, perhaps a briefing would be appropriate.

[21] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I concur. It sounds as if much more research needs to be done on this, and I think that a briefing from the Members' research service would be beneficial for all concerned.

[22] **Val Lloyd:** I agree, so we will move ahead on that. For your information, we have received a message that the translation system is not working at the moment. Given that this petition is also an e-petition, we have clearly made a good move in moving to e-petitions.

[23] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It depends on the workload. [*Laughter.*]

[24] **Val Lloyd:** We have never been short of petitions. The final new petition is regarding a care home in Seven Sisters in the Neath valley. It is an e-petition—which received 1,700 signatures—and a traditional paper petition from Mr Gary James in Seven Sisters. He calls upon the National Assembly for Wales:

[25] 'to examine the circumstances surrounding the proposed siting of a Castle Care home at...Dulais Road, Seven Sisters, Neath'.

[26] **Kirsty Williams:** The petition has been put together very well, but the petition states as fact things that I believe you could only surmise. So, it would be interesting to hear from the people who have gathered this petition together to test some of the assertions that they make in the petition. It might also be useful to hear from the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government to see what the Government's views are on the provision of this type of service. My understanding is that this would be a decision for a local authority planning committee, so we must be careful that we do not subvert the natural progress of a planning application. However, it would be useful to hear from the Minister about the policy context in which a planning application may be submitted, so I would ask to see the petitioners to give them an opportunity to air some of their concerns and to test some of the assertions that they have made in their petition, and to hear from the Minister, if that is acceptable.

9.10 a.m.

[27] **Val Lloyd:** I agree in principle, but would it be wise to get a ministerial view first and then have the petitioners in?

[28] **Kirsty Williams:** Yes, and we would also have to be careful with the status of this application, because if we take a view on it, that bit might be prejudicial to any planning process, and I do not think that it is the Petitions Committee's job to intervene in a local government planning process. It would not be appropriate.

[29] **Val Lloyd:** Perhaps we should contact Neath Port Talbot planning authority. Perhaps we should make a call or send an e-mail to check the status of this before we consider it and, at the same time, get a view from the Minister.

[30] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I concur. We have taken a very firm line on planning applications. In our early days, we had to consider whether one or two petitions that came through were in the planning ball game or outside it. We need to ascertain whether this is a live application and get the ministerial view too. We should tread very carefully if it is a live planning application; we should adhere to our principle of not getting involved with it.

[31] **Val Lloyd:** We are all agreed on that, then. So, we will get a view from the Minister and, at the same time, we will establish exactly where the planning issue lies at the moment.

[32] That concludes our consideration of new petitions, but not the meeting of course.

9.11 a.m.

Y Wybodaeth Ddiweddaraf am Ddeisebau Blaenorol Updates on Previous Petitions

[33] **Val Lloyd:** We will begin with the petition on Rhyl flats. Kirsty, as you do not know the background to this, if there are any questions that you want to ask, please ask them.

[34] **Kirsty Williams:** Thank you, Val.

[35] **Val Lloyd:** This was one of the petitions that we took evidence on when we went to north Wales. It was quite emotive and it has quite a lot of background. The secretariat has produced a very helpful briefing paper, which takes us through the questions that arose at that meeting after taking evidence from the petitioners and the local Member. The committee wanted several questions to be addressed to Ministers. All have been answered, except one, namely that on the licence required under the Food and Environmental Protection Act 1985, which we asked of the Minister for Rural Affairs. It was agreed that the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing would answers the others, so the correspondence from her covers all of those. What do committee members want us to do?

[36] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I wish that I could find the paper that I was reading last night but, as usual, having so many petitions, we have so many papers that it is a job to keep them all together. From memory—and please forgive me if I go wrong on this—from the evidence that we took on 6 March, there were various issues. I think that there was an acceptance, which I hope was clear to the petitioners, that we could in no way stop the development of the application because that would not be within our jurisdiction; it is a non-devolved issue because of the size of the scheme. Many local issues were raised, in particular the effect on tourism and flooding, and answers were being sought on that to see how much weight was put on those issues when the application was determined. I noticed that the Countryside Council for Wales had been consulted, but the Environment Agency would have been the lead organisation for determining matters such as those around the flooding issue, would it not?

[37] **Val Lloyd:** The question regarding flooding was on the risk on the Constable bank, and the Minister has replied that the Countryside Council for Wales raised concerns about the dynamics and stability of the Constable bank but did not consider the risk of flooding as an issue. The relevant paper is the response from CCW. There were queries regarding the site exceeding 50 MW, which I think we raised too. The tourism impact has been addressed. The only issue that has not been addressed is the requirement for the licence under the Food and Environmental Protection Act 1985.

[38] As you rightly say, it is outside our jurisdiction, but for the sake of completeness, we should try to get a response on the one outstanding issue; we had a comprehensive response to all the others. At this stage, we need to write to the Minister and ask for the final answer, so that we can give a complete response to the petitioners. Are you content with that?

[39] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I am, and also, when I heard the oral evidence, I wondered whether we should collate all the evidence and ask the petitioners to come back and comment on it. There were such differing views expressed to us during the oral evidence and so many issues were raised. Is that an option—for us to go back to the petitioners and seek their views on the evidence that we have gathered, to see whether it goes some small way towards addressing the petition that they raised? It is a topical issue, and controversial in the area, and I wondered whether we had the opportunity to go back to the petitioners before we even

contemplate closing the petition, to see whether they are happy with the completeness of what we have done, within the constraints of what we can do.

[40] **Val Lloyd:** I hear where you are coming from, but I wonder if that creates a precedent for every application. How do we judge? We have to have a method. We have always tried to be even-handed with petitioners, with the same time limit and the same approach whatever the subject. How would we square this with our treatment of future petitions? We have to have a mechanism. Could we do it by an exchange of letters rather than asking people back?

[41] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** In the first instance, an exchange of letters may be useful. There is a lot of weighty information here that, through the petition system, we have managed to gather together under one umbrella. It would be pertinent for the petitioners to see and digest this information and decide whether we have been complete in what we have done. Then we could take their advice or evidence on board as regards what we have done on their behalf. It is such a broad petition.

[42] **Val Lloyd:** It is, but I think that it will probably be in everyone's interest if we do that by an exchange of correspondence.

[43] **Mr Sanchez:** I should mention that we produce a closure report at the end of each petition, which catalogues the information that we have gathered and shows the petitioners the discussions that have been had on the subject. We send that to them routinely, so they will receive that once the petition has been closed.

[44] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I think that that is very gratefully received by petitioners, but there were so many strands to this particular petition—tourism, flooding, the impact on the local economy and so on—and I would like, for completeness, to contact the petitioners before we close it. Once it is closed, there is no recourse to come back, other than with a new petition, so I would like the petitioners to see that we have been complete in what we have done on their behalf. We also need to reiterate the point that this application is outside our remit, because we do not have the powers to get involved with this kind of project.

[45] **Val Lloyd:** That is a good point, and is worth reiterating. In this instance, perhaps the petitioners' expectations of what we could do were out of step—I will not say with reality, because that would be a harsh way of putting it—but with what we can do. We could get underneath many of the issues for them, but we could not reverse the decision. So, we will do that.

[46] Our next petition is another that was of huge interest—the petition on the regional waste plan. This related predominantly to the Caerphilly region, where the first group of petitioners came from. We have now had a response from Jane Davidson, the Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing, and it is very comprehensive—each issue is identified and her response goes into some depth. Would anyone like to comment?

[47] **Kirsty Williams:** Coming to this late, I am not quite sure how much further you could take it.

9.20 a.m.

[48] The Minister has addressed the issues that were raised. Being new to the committee, I will take advice, but I do not think that we can go much further with it.

[49] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** The Minister has addressed it fully in her letter. We have discussed this before: the level of consultation is enough for some, but there will never be

enough for others. It is a case of trying to strike that happy medium. It was telling that the Minister pointed out that nearly £250,000 has been spent so far on the consultation exercise, which is not an inconsiderable sum of money. I wonder where we can take this. I am happy with the Minister's response. While it might not meet the expectation of the petitioners, I cannot see that we will be able to take the petition much further.

[50] **Val Lloyd:** I completely agree. We have had a comprehensive report from the Minister; it was over and above what we could have expected. I think that we should close that petition as no further progress can be made. I see that that is agreed.

[51] Our next update is on the Pride in Barry petition. Again, the petitioners came to give evidence to the committee. We now have the ministerial response from the Deputy First Minister in his position as Minister for the Economy and Transport. Again, it is a comprehensive response. He has identified the amount of money that Barry has received for projects. He has also identified, to some extent, the money received from the sale of land. However, he has also pointed out that it is not a quid pro quo; otherwise certain areas of the country would be disadvantaged. The money that you get for the sale of property or assets in one area does not necessarily return to that area; that is not quite the way it works. Does anyone have a view on this?

[52] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I recall the petition very well. Two regional Members—David Melding and Chris Franks—came in to support this petition. I believe that we referred it to the Enterprise and Learning Committee; that was one of the action points that was recommended, as well as referring it to the Minister. Although I appreciate the Deputy First Minister's reply, at the close of the meeting in which we discussed the petition, we referred it to the Enterprise and Learning Committee for further scrutiny on the basis that there was an issue over the regeneration of towns per se, but particularly with regard to Barry because it fell outside the Objective 1 criteria. There were also other issues that Members felt would benefit from further scrutiny.

[53] **Val Lloyd:** I will have to take advice on that. I do not remember it, but I am not for a minute saying that you are wrong. Please bear with us.

[54] **Mr Sanchez:** I cannot remember either. I am just looking back in my notebook to see what we agreed. Unless you know offhand, Alun, I will carry on looking.

[55] **Kirsty Williams:** I am not aware that there has been any consideration of it in the Enterprise and Learning Committee, but that does not mean that we are doing nothing on it. I think that we might be doing something on regeneration later on, in September, but I do not know if that is a result of this.

[56] **Val Lloyd:** We had better look at the transcript. I do not think that we can just say yea or nay. I honestly do not remember it, but that is not to say that it did not happen, because memory is imperfect.

[57] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I think that I proposed referring it.

[58] **Val Lloyd:** We will not take a decision today. We will look at the Record of Proceedings.

[59] **Mr Sanchez:** I have some of the transcripts here, and I think that I have the transcript for the meeting at which this was discussed. I will have a brief look now. Perhaps we could move on to another petition, and, if I find something, we can return to this petition.

[60] **Val Lloyd:** We will hold this one in abeyance.

[61] The next petition is the Welsh language daily newspaper. We now have a response from the Minister for Heritage. Do Members have comments?

[62] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I note the Minister's response to this, and although it has been debated quite fully in Plenary, it is still a very topical issue. I do not know how this would fit into our evidence-gathering session at the Royal Welsh Show or indeed the Eisteddfod. Are we going to the Eisteddfod, or just to the Royal Welsh Show?

[63] **Val Lloyd:** From memory, I think that it is just the Royal Welsh Show. We had to make a choice, and we decided on the Royal Welsh Show, with a view that we could well hold a meeting at the Eisteddfod next time.

[64] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I think that we decided that on the basis that the Eisteddfod is in Cardiff this year.

[65] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, and we want to go out and meet more people, although we have done that a little bit. We are doing more in Pembrokeshire in July.

[66] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Could I suggest that this may be a topical issue for the petitioners to give us evidence at our evidence-gathering session at the Royal Welsh Show, given that it is a national issue?

[67] **Val Lloyd:** I am not for or against that; I just wonder what more we can do, that is all. If you remember, when we first discussed it, Bethan, who is not here—she must be delayed, otherwise she would have let us know that she would not be attending—said that the Minister was about to make an announcement and she asked us to wait for that. The Minister has now made his announcement on the level of funding. What would we gain by having the petitioners come in, and what would the petitioners gain from coming in?

[68] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Hopefully, they would have the opportunity to expand on their petition, as they obviously believe that there is a sufficient market to sustain a Welsh-language national newspaper. I take the Minister at his word when he says that he and his officials have looked comprehensively at the issue and have put together a package of the support that they can offer and for which they believe there is justification.

[69] **Val Lloyd:** I think that the reason why the Minister did not follow the petitioners' suggested path was simply because of the market—independent market research was done and that found that the market for it did not exist. That is how I understood the Minister to have arrived at his decision.

[70] **Kirsty Williams:** I would like to support Andrew. The committee delayed making a decision because it was awaiting the Minister's announcement. The Minister has now made his announcement, and my understanding is that the money has been allocated to an organisation to take the project forward. The grant has been awarded. Could we not at the very least write to the petitioners asking whether they still feel that their petition is relevant, given that the Minister has made his announcement and the way forward is now clear? If you are having a session at the Royal Welsh Show, I cannot think of a better subject for discussion than a national subject such as this. The showground will be full of people who have a direct interest in Welsh-language print media, so I am sure that you would have a good response. At the very least, we could ask the petitioners whether, in the light of the Minister's announcement, they feel that their petition is still relevant or whether they are happy or unhappy. They can give evidence on that.

[71] **Val Lloyd:** I am advised that we have already received an e-mail on this.

[72] **Kirsty Williams:** Have you?

[73] **Val Lloyd:** Yes. I have only just heard about it. That e-mail states that the petitioners would like the petition to continue. I am perfectly content for that to happen, but I am concerned that expectations might be raised over and above what the committee could meet.

[74] **Kirsty Williams:** I am sure that you could put that caveat in the letter.

[75] **Val Lloyd:** Okay. I think that we need to do that, otherwise expectations will be raised, and the last thing that I want to do is to bring the committee into disrepute. As a committee, we have always given every petitioner due regard and our best endeavours, whatever our personal views. Knowing that we are highly unlikely to change the Minister's decision, however, I would not want to give the petitioners the wrong impression. So, we need to make it clear to them that we would be delighted to hear their case, but we are hamstrung to some extent.

[76] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I think that that is a valid point, Chair. Equally, for the petitions system, a very interesting aspect of this is that we have a firm point on one side, and another point on another side. Surely, part of what the petitions system is about is trying to extract information that could be useful in future and could be fed into the Communities and Culture Committee or whatever. It might not change the situation today, but who knows about the future?

[77] **Kirsty Williams:** The budget round will begin again, so we might come up with something that would be passed on to the Communities and Culture Committee or the Finance Committee for when they consider the budget round next year.

9.30 a.m.

[78] **Val Lloyd:** Fine. That was my concern and it has been aired publicly. Provided that we express that to the petitioners, that is fine. It will be an interesting discussion at the Royal Welsh Show. We were talking earlier this week about how we are going to get there, traffic wise.

[79] **Kirsty Williams:** For goodness' sake, it is hardly the ends of the earth, is it? We are only going to Llanelwedd. You can stay at my house. By asking, 'How are we going to get there?', you make it sound as if we are at the ends of the earth. *[Laughter.]*

[80] **Val Lloyd:** You misunderstood me.

[81] **Kirsty Williams:** You could go on the train.

[82] **Val Lloyd:** I know; I do, normally.

[83] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Val is a great supporter of the railway.

[84] **Kirsty Williams:** You could go on the Heart of Wales line.

[85] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** We were thinking more about Bethan, were we not? She was worried about how she could get there.

[86] **Val Lloyd:** I always go on the Heart of Wales line to the Royal Welsh Show.

[87] To return to Pride in Barry, it is over to Stefan, because he has his notes.

[88] **Mr Sanchez:** I have an answer for you, Andrew. My memory is not great at the moment. We referred the petitions to the Enterprise and Learning Committee. That was one of our actions. We did not do so formally. I spoke to the clerk and she brought it to the Chair's attention and told me that the committee would bear it in mind, but she also told me that I should speak to the Audit Committee clerk, because his committee might be interested in it. He commented that the auditor general might be interested in looking at that sort of issue, so that action was taken forward. I have not heard any more in relation to that, but we can certainly ask more questions.

[89] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** So, that matter is still being progressed.

[90] **Mr Sanchez:** Yes, it is. I can find out if anything is being planned by the Enterprise and Learning Committee or the Audit Committee.

[91] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Please do so.

[92] **Mr Sanchez:** No problem.

[93] **Val Lloyd:** Thank you very much for reminding us of that; I said that my memory was imperfect. We will not close that petition, as we need to wait until we have a satisfactory or definitive response from the auditor general and possibly the Audit Committee and Enterprise and Learning Committee.

[94] Safe Roads for Schools is a petition from the pupils of Whitchurch High School, who believe that the Assembly should make roads outside schools safer. As we know, this is normally a function directed by local authorities, which make a bid to the Assembly for specific money. I do not know whether you watched the television last night, but there was an item about how the Assembly Government is launching a consultation on whether traffic should go slower around schools and in areas with vulnerable road users, with the idea of possibly cutting the speed limit around schools to 20 mph. We need to take that into the equation as we decide where to go with this petition.

[95] **Kirsty Williams:** Forgive me, as I am new, I am not sure of the remit of this committee, but could you not draw the attention of the petitioners to that consultation exercise and encourage them to participate in that consultation, or could we send this petition as a response to the consultation?

[96] **Val Lloyd:** I think that we could take both actions. We could draw the consultation to the attention of Whitchurch High School and we could write to the Minister.

[97] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I agree with both courses of action, but I think that a far more satisfactory outcome for the petitioners might be for them to come in and give us evidence, and that evidence could be fed into the consultation process.

[98] **Kirsty Williams:** That is much better.

[99] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I am not sure how our timetable would fit in with the consultation timetable, because consultations tend to last 12 weeks, do they not?

[100] **Mr Sanchez:** We can ask that question and ensure that there is a fit. If there is not, we can go with the former suggestion.

[101] **Val Lloyd:** That would also be in line with our aim of widening our appeal to as many people as possible. It would be good to have the school in.

[102] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** We would be a component of that consultation.

[103] **Val Lloyd:** I wonder whether we could manage to fit this into our next meeting or the following meeting. Do we have two meetings left this term?

[104] **Mr Sanchez:** Yes. I am sure that we can fit it in.

[105] **Val Lloyd:** It should be before the end of term, so that it will be within the consultation period.

[106] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** They are only in Whitchurch, so it is not as if they have to travel far.

[107] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, it will not be so difficult for them to come in.

[108] The last petitions on the agenda are those on dredging in the Bristol channel. We had two petitions on this, which we ran together because they were very similar—Save Sker Beach, and the Gower Petition—Save our Sands, both of which were signed by a large number of people. We have had a letter from the Minister, Jane Davidson, giving us her response, about the monitoring that is taking place. Does anyone wish to comment?

[109] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** To be fair, the Minister is very detailed in her response; many surveys have been conducted, and she alludes to one survey in particular. I bow to your knowledge on this, Chair, as it is in your patch—I appreciate that it is not in your constituency, but it is in your neck of the woods.

[110] **Val Lloyd:** One is—the Gower one.

[111] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Again, there is the opportunity for petitioners to come and give us evidence, but, as I said, not being an expert on this, or having an understanding of the locality to any great depth, I would defer to your good self on this, Chair.

[112] **Val Lloyd:** It is a difficult one, because there are opposing scientific views, and I do not believe that any of us is eligible to comment with any great accuracy on which view is the right one. We can only go on what I would call the expert view, as given to us by the Minister. As she states in her letter:

[113] ‘It is the Assembly Government’s position, based on the scientific advice and information available to it, that there is no confirmed connection between coastal change and dredging. However, a precautionary approach is being taken, and each licence includes provisions for suspension of operations if clear environmental harm, relating to the operation, is discovered. This approach can be shown in the Government View issued for Nash Bank, where dredging is being phased out’.

[114] It is not convinced that there is a connection, and there is independent monitoring of the conditions—the monitoring is not done by those who hold the licence. We need to convey that to the petitioners, because I do not believe that there is anything more that we can do.

[115] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Without closing the petition at this stage, could we convey that to the petitioners? As I said, it is a technical issue, is it not? I am convinced by the Minister’s reply, to a degree, because you have to bow to greater knowledge, and obviously it is an independent survey. However, it is a controversial issue, and these two petitions have sizeable support. I do not know whether, on return of their correspondence, there is mileage in having them in to give evidence.

[116] **Val Lloyd:** I do not think there is, Andrew. The Minister points out in the fourth paragraph of her letter that, for Nash bank and Helwick bank, reports are sent to the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science for an independent review—it is paid for by the dredging company, but it is not done by it. She has said that they are taking a precautionary approach. I am not an expert, but an equal body of evidence says that this is caused by the natural tidal flow.

[117] I accept that there are many signatories to these petitions—I am sure that they could get even more people to sign them if they went down any of the local high streets. However, I do not believe that there is anything more that we can do, because we are not in a position to stop the dredging—the Minister has said that there is a limit on the one on Nash bank, which is being closed in 2010. I do not see what more we can do. What I am saying is that we may be raising some degree of false hope should we invite them in. I do not believe that there is anything that we could fairly and squarely take forward. Do you have a view on this, Kirsty?

[118] **Kirsty Williams:** It is difficult, coming to this late, and I am not sure what the past form is by the committee.

[119] **Val Lloyd:** Nothing really—it is as you see.

9.40 a.m.

[120] **Kirsty Williams:** Can we do anything more that would be useful? I can imagine that committee members tend to want to give people as many opportunities as they can, but the system would become unsustainable if we did that. So, if the advice is that we cannot do anything further, I think that we should draw it to a close.

[121] **Val Lloyd:** That is where I was coming from. The Minister has been quite frank and open, and has told it like it is, and we would just be raising expectations far above what is possible. What is the purpose of asking the petitioners to come back?

[122] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I defer to you, Chair.

[123] **Val Lloyd:** It is a difficult call. I go to the same areas and see the changes made since I was a little girl—some considerable time ago—but I am not in a position to argue against the scientific evidence. So, under the circumstances, the petition is best closed.

[124] We now move to the updates. The committee's secretariat have asked that we tell them in advance of these so that they can prepare for them—and we are getting more and more on our books—but is there anything that you want to raise now? I am sure that we will allow you some latitude if you have not on this occasion made your wishes known beforehand.

[125] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I apologise for not indicating this beforehand but, to be honest, it was only last night that I was reading the papers.

[126] **Val Lloyd:** I understand that.

[127] **Mr Sanchez:** I will give you my mobile number, Andrew. [*Laughter.*]

[128] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I notice, on page 2, that a holding reply on the children's commissioner petition to amend the law in respect of his legal duties was received by us back in October. How could we gee that one along?

[129] **Mr Sanchez:** You may remember that there are some complex issues surrounding this, and we are awaiting advice from Government officials before we take that forward.

[130] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Can we gee them up?

[131] **Mr Sanchez:** I have been on the telephone, but I have not managed to speak to the relevant people yet, but I am chasing it.

[132] **Kirsty Williams:** Does the new vulnerable children LCO not cover that? No, I see that it does not. Fine. Sorry, I will be quiet.

[133] **Val Lloyd:** Are there any more comments?

[134] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I also wanted to comment on the number of e-petitions at the end of the paper and of petitions submitted in the old-fashioned way. If you put all those together, you see that there is a fair workload building up for us.

[135] **Val Lloyd:** We have never been short of work since we started.

[136] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** Could we not pull the plug or something? [*Laughter.*]

[137] **Kirsty Williams:** I want to ask a question—and I must declare an interest because the petitioner is a constituent of mine—about the path in Talybont-on-Usk. The update says that we are awaiting a response from the Minister once the new design becomes available, but whose new design is that? Is it the Minister's?

[138] **Val Lloyd:** I think, from memory, that we left it open because there was a glimmer of hope in the Minister's letter, which was mostly very polite. However, it will be there for us should the situation change. We thought that, on that ground alone, it was worth keeping. I am sure that you could get a written response to that outside the meeting.

[139] **Kirsty Williams:** Thank you. That would be great.

[140] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** I think that what happened was that—[*Inaudible.*]—highlighted the sheer cost of implementation, but the Minister was happy for some officials to work along the lines of beefing up a brief and perhaps a more compatible design, and so we left it at that.

[141] **Val Lloyd:** Yes, and if funds became available, the design would be ready to go, so we thought that it was positive enough not to close the petition. You have a very good memory, Andrew.

[142] **Andrew R.T. Davies:** It is just that time of the morning.

[143] **Val Lloyd:** If there are no further comments, I will close the meeting. I thank everyone for being here, including Joanest, although her services were not called upon today. Thank you, Kirsty, for being such a good substitute. We will have the pleasure of your company until the end of term, I believe.

[144] **Kirsty Williams:** Yes, until the end of term.

[145] **Andrew R. T. Davies:** Before we shut down, I just want to ask Stefan about the e-mail that was sent about the anniversary celebrations. Are we going to discuss that now or after the meeting?

[146] **Val Lloyd:** That is for our informal discussion. I have great pleasure in closing this meeting of the Petitions Committee.

Daeth y cyfarfod i ben am 9.45 a.m.
The meeting ended at 9.45 a.m.