



# HOUSE OF LORDS

Revised transcript of evidence taken before

## **The Select Committee on the European Union**

Agriculture, Fisheries, Environment and Energy (Sub-Committee D)

Inquiry on

### **CFP REFORM**

*Evidence Session No. 1*

*Heard in Public.*

*Questions 1-20*

THURSDAY 12 JULY 2012

2.30 pm

Witnesses: Richard Benyon MP, John Robbs and Andrew Clayton

Members present

The Earl of Caithness  
Lord Carter of Coles (Chairman)  
The Earl of Courtown  
Lord Giddens  
Baroness Parminter

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**Examination of Witnesses**

**Richard Benyon MP**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Natural Environment and Fisheries; **John Robbs**, Director, Marine and Fisheries, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; and **Andrew Clayton**, Head of CFP Reform Policy, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

**Q1 The Chairman:** Minister, you are indeed very welcome. Thank you for coming today. Mr Clayton and Mr Robbs, thank you also for being here. If I may, I will deal with the formalities before we go into the questions. You should have in front of you a list of interests that have been declared by the Committee members. This is a formal evidence-taking session of our Committee. Full shorthand notes will be taken. They will go on the public record in printed form and on the parliamentary website. We will send you a copy of the transcript and you will be able to revise it in terms of minor errors. The session, as you know, is on the record. It is being webcast live and will be subsequently accessible on the parliamentary website.

I think this is all about overrides. I should start by saying, Minister, that as a Committee in recent times we have been very impressed by your Department's responses. It has had a marked change in tempo and we have been delighted. It is, therefore, doubly sad, I think, that we find that this business of overrides has occurred and we had hoped to see things get back on to the right trajectory that we have been experiencing in the last two years certainly.

If I may I would like to take a group of questions together, which really deal with the overrides. Two occurred on 12 June and then we heard from you on 24 June that another override occurred in March on a Communication relating to the external dimensions of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). First, could you explain why it was felt necessary to override scrutiny in the latter instance and why the Committee had not been explicitly informed that that override took place? Would you prefer me to take them one at a time or would you like me to do them all, because they may overlap? Perhaps I can take them together.

**Richard Benyon MP:** Shall I address that? They are related. Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to explain this. These were very intense negotiations and, straight upfront, I regret if there was any deemed discourtesy or any feeling that we had somehow cut corners in order to get to where we got. We value scrutiny in Defra and we look at it as an opportunity, as a two-way street. If I can just explain that in order to secure the agreement of a balanced and reasonable EU approach to external fisheries, it was important that the UK supported the non-binding Council conclusions that were agreed in March. Those conclusions informed the principles that were included in the general approach in June and, subject to adoption by Council later, will help provide the binding provisions that determine how the EU will engage on international fisheries.

I do recognise the need to keep the Committee informed on progress on this important element in the reform package. Confirmation of these Council conclusions formed part of the update sent to the Chairman of the Select Committee on 1 April after the March Council. In the light of the difficulties in keeping the Committee informed of the developments in the run up to June Council, where the principles formed a key part of the general approach, departmental scrutiny officials have begun discussing with the clerks how

we might make better improvements, how we might improve the way we work to ensure that processes work better in the future.

**Q2 The Chairman:** Is it the case, Minister, that you feel that your negotiating hand may be shown if you were to tell us in advance? We still cannot quite understand why we are not told. Are we not part of the team, or might we ask a question? Can you help us with that?

**Richard Benyon MP:** There are a variety of different indicators as to why an override might be required. There is undoubtedly an element in negotiation where you do not want to lay out your stall in advance. I am sure that is understood by everyone. Obviously you go into negotiations hoping to achieve everything you set out, and I hope we set out our approach properly. We started that in August with the Explanatory Memoranda that we issued. But there is also the question of the speed at which things move. I refer to the people on either side of me, but I think in the case of the June Council we received the paper the day before we went in and there was also the question of Recess. There was not the opportunity to fill in on the day between Recess and going to Council. I hope all of these matters will be picked over by my officials with your Clerk and that we can ensure that where it has to happen, there is a clear explanation and that we do not get into this position of you feeling that we have bypassed the Committee's scrutiny.

**Q3 The Chairman:** Was it not the case that we rather fell off the circulation list? I think it went to the Commons Committee but not to us in the case of the June overrides. Is that correct?

**Richard Benyon MP:** I am not aware of having ever signed a letter to Bill Cash that I have not also signed to Lord Boswell, so I will investigate.

**The Chairman:** We should both check that, because I think that is very important.

**Richard Benyon MP:** I will certainly investigate that, yes. That would be wrong.

**Q4 The Chairman:** I think the question then is that we have had three overrides, which is pretty unusual. The Select Committee keeps track of overrides. This is, by anybody's standards, quite a quantum number of overrides, sort of serial overriding. With your officials, do you think there is any sense that you can do better, or should we steel ourselves for further overrides in the interests of your negotiating position? It seems we have a paradox here in that you cannot tell us because you need flexibility and the system appears to require that you do get these items scrutinised.

**Richard Benyon MP:** We are now at a stage in the negotiations where to an extent it is now in the hands of the European Parliament. They will report back, hopefully by the end of this year, certainly the beginning of next year, and we will then be—not re-engaged, we are fully engaged with colleagues in the European Parliament, but it would come back to me as a member of the Council of Ministers. That is the key stage at which I want to make sure that we are timetabling this more effectively, even if there is a perception that somehow we are trying to avoid the necessary scrutiny, but it was an incredibly intense time.

**The Chairman:** Yes, I think we accept that. We accept there are always going to be moments when the necessity of the negotiations requires you to agree something and not—

**Richard Benyon MP:** For the record, Lord Carter, I get the message very clearly and we want to make sure that we communicate better.

**Q5 The Chairman:** At the risk of pursuing the point too hard, I will leave you with one more question, which is that we had a letter from you on 11 June but actually we had had nothing on fisheries proposals since February. You described this as being a busy and quite intense period, and again we are trying to establish that somehow we are part of your system. It would be very good if you and officials could just confirm that you do regard us as part of the process.

**Richard Benyon MP:** Certainly. The Committee was sent, pre-and post-Fisheries Council Written Ministerial Statements or letters, which provided an indication of the nature of the discussions at Fisheries Council on the reform proposals in March, April and May. I would have been and remain willing to provide additional detail of those written letters or statements if the Committee requires it. I think it makes—

**The Chairman:** I should say that when we came to see you in February we found that very useful, the update. That was very helpful and I reported back to the Committee on that. But I think the point is made now and we are grateful for your assurances that we hope we will not be in this position again.

**Richard Benyon MP:** Can I just check whether my colleagues think I have left anything out?  
No.

**The Chairman:** We will move now to the next interesting subject.

**Q6 Lord Giddens:** I would like to ask you about the discards ban. I have two or three questions on that. We note that agreement was reached to introduce a discards ban but there was no consensus on the urgency of this. How do you hope to overcome the doubts of recalcitrant Member States? What supporting measures have been agreed for the ban in order to make it economically viable for the industry? Finally, there are exemptions from the ban. Can you just explain how they would work?

**Richard Benyon MP:** Certainly. You are absolutely right that not all Member States shared our ambition for urgent action. A commitment to implement a landing obligation also in some cases was not a view that was shared. We wanted that, we wanted a provisional timetable, and we got it, which is a major step in the right direction. As I said earlier, the focus is now on the European Parliament and we are briefing MEPs to make sure that the European Parliament opinion is in support of urgent action on discards. I think that goes with the support of all sides of my end of the Corridor, and I think this end as well.

I entirely agree with you about the matter of political urgency and that is why landing obligations must go hand in hand with the practical means to ensure early delivery. The text that we agreed in the general approach includes practical provisions to ensure landing obligations can work within the quota management system and will help make it more deliverable. This includes quota increases and potential removal of conflicting rules, catch composition rules and such like. So I think that is a vital component of this because then we will be working with the industry to make sure that this is effective.

Multiannual plans are a key part of this. They provide the means to implement the measures on a fishery-by-fishery basis, and provisions include measures to address the complexity of mixed fisheries—this is something that is not understood in other countries because they do not face the degree of mixed fisheries that we face here—with quota-matching clauses and a *de minimis* level where selectivity alone cannot eliminate discarding.

In addition, there are limited exemptions to ensure that species scientifically demonstrated to have a high survivability are exempt. There are plenty of species for which there is evidence—we need to get better evidence—that they survive and we want to make sure that the way we are dealing with this is practical. There is another point on the *de minimis* exemptions. Potentially up to five per cent of the catch with provisions to record the catch where scientific evidence indicates selectivity is very hard to achieve. On the *de minimis*, I heard conversations around the building at the time of negotiations that were talking about *de minimis* provisions that would utterly have destroyed the whole concept of an end to discards and so I think getting a five per cent figure, albeit in—

**Lord Giddens:** Is it in square brackets?

**Richard Benyon MP:** In square brackets, which means that it is up for grabs. I think that was important.

**Q7 Lord Giddens:** Can I just pursue that slightly? The discards issue has been around such a long while. Is there now some realism in this position, do you think? Secondly, when you say there is a provisional timetable, is it the European Parliament that decides if that becomes a real timetable, because provisional timetable itself sounds a bit weak?

**Richard Benyon MP:** Let us go through the timetable. On the basis that we agree something this time next year and that what we agree is on the basis of a general approach, we will then see a discards ban on pelagic stocks coming in in January 2014. That is achievable. Most pelagic stocks are clean fisheries and that would be achievable. Then from 2015 we would start seeing white fish stocks being included and developing those through to 2018. That is not the most ambitious target, not the target that I went into negotiation seeking to achieve, but it is there in the text, albeit in square brackets so up for negotiation. My gut feeling—and it is dangerous stating this in a public forum—is that the European Parliament will want to secure that, but I have no guarantee that that is the case. There are those, as there are around the Council table, who want to kill off this proposal. We will remain at the forefront of pushing hard for it to be achieved so when it comes back, hopefully, from the European Parliament with those dates firmly inked in, we will be in a position to push that. 2015 is not very far away; 2018 is just a few years later than that. I think we can present to the British public that we have negotiated and secured a move to an end to discards and that is what people want.

**Q8 Lord Giddens:** Presumably the same divisions exist in the Parliament as existed in the group that you were involved with, one would imagine.

**Richard Benyon MP:** Yes. A very simplistic way of describing it is northern European states like Britain and Scandinavia and the support of strong, big voting members like Germany have a very ambitious, clear view. Others do not, but within those countries there are forces at work to try to bolster up their politicians at every level to have sustainability at the centre



of their policymaking, just as there are certain interests that counter that. It is important that we work across parties in this place to make sure that the links we have with members of the European Parliament are effectively lobbying in the right direction, and thus far I have been grateful for the help and support I have received across the political spectrum.

**The Chairman:** Well, we wish you luck.

**Q9 The Earl of Courtown:** Turning now to the transferable fishing concessions, you indicated that a majority of the Member States were opposed to the Commission's proposal to introduce mandatory transferable fishing concessions for the over 12-metre fleet. Are you satisfied that Member States across the EU all manage quota rights in an economically rational way, which I think is particularly important, and in a way that keeps it in line with fishing opportunities?

**Richard Benyon MP:** I am pleased that Member States retain the responsibility to manage their quota rights rather than having them centrally imposed in, if you like, a one-size-fits-all system of transferrable fishing concessions. Member States need to apply their own systems in order to meet the requirements of the CFP and Member States' objectives for their fisheries. A system of tradable rights can be appropriate in managing capacity and allowing the industry to make the best use of quota in some sectors in some Member States.

In the UK we have our own mechanisms to manage quota, such as the use of Fixed Quota Allocations (FQAs) in the over 10-metre fleet. The general approach text requires Member States to report each year on capacity and where necessary to report on the measures being taken to address overcapacity. I think that Transferrable Fishing Concessions (TFCs) are a potential winner for conservation if they are applied in the right sector in the right way. I think there are definitely sectors of the UK fishing industry for which it would be wrong. I have looked at how these systems work abroad and I think that they could have their place

but I want to be able to implement such a scheme in an effective way that recognises the particular needs of the UK fishing industry.

**Q10 The Earl of Courtown:** A majority of fleets are opposed to this. Who are our friends on this?

**Richard Benyon MP:** Some countries are keen on it. Whether they were so keen as to want to have a one-size-fits-all TFC imposed, I cannot remember any conversations that I have had but my colleagues may have.

**Andrew Clayton:** I do not think there is a Member State that has been pushing for the one-size-fits-all TFC, applying mandatorily really to its entire fleet. I think there are some Member States that can see the benefit in some cases, but even then not as a one size fits all.

**Richard Benyon MP:** It came principally from the Commission and I think it is regrettable when some people refer to it as a privatisation of our seas. I firmly believe that fishing opportunity is a national resource and what we do in fisheries management with quotas is effectively the allocation of that national resource. I have been interested in the whole concept of TFCs and I would like to see how they can provide that market mechanism to deal with overcapacity, but what we have learned from the failures of the Common Fisheries Policy is that when you impose a single method of fisheries management from the north of the North Sea to somewhere south of Malta you are on a hiding to nothing.

**Q11 The Earl of Courtown:** Just one more matter, going back to the Lord Chairman's questions, I have been speaking—and I do not know if you would comment on it now—to former members of this Committee and other people who have had business dealings with the Department, and they say there is a longstanding problem, that has been with Defra and MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries) in the past, of overrides and communication between the Department and Parliament. Do you have any comments on that?

**Richard Benyon MP:** As I hope I conveyed to Lord Carter, I would regret it if that became an impression and I would like it to be seen as the product of a particularly intense period for my Department and my officials. I think it is one of communication and I think we can improve that. What I gathered from your Lord Chairman was that there was an improved relationship in recent years. That is something I welcome and I remain resolutely committed to ensure that that favourable relationship continues.

**Q12 The Earl of Caithness:** Minister, can I ask you a general question first? Can you just clarify for me how rock solid is the partial agreement? Can it be unravelled and if part of it does unravel does that mean the whole thing is unravelled? I am not clear. I hope you can help me on that.

**Richard Benyon MP:** We have taken efforts not to over-spin this. A failing of politicians down the years, I accept, is to try to overplay. We have deliberately tried not to on this. It was a great achievement. At 2am we were facing the Council of Ministers not being able to have a position on CFP reform and it would have gone to the European Parliament with that appalling sort of cloud hanging over it, "Well, if the Ministers cannot agree, how can we be expected to?" Then we pulled it together and at 4.30am we got a general approach. That is really good news. The direct answer to your question, "Can it all be unravelled?", is yes, it could be. What do I think will happen? I think we will get a reform. Quite what form it will take in terms of dates and the details of it I am not sure, but I think the real wins we have thus far are on discards, on regionalisation and on the external dimension, the source of our earlier conversation. These are potentially big improvements. Lord Caithness, I start right from where I always do on these issues: I say I would not be starting from here, and it is a sort of cop-out in a way but at times you feel you are wading through treacle. But I think that we have the opportunity now with the UK playing a leading role in getting at last a meaningful system of management of our fisheries.

**Q13 The Earl of Caithness:** Good. I think what you have achieved is remarkable. But you mentioned regionalisation, which takes me on to the question that I wanted to ask you: how is this going to work in practice and how are the regional advisory councils going to be involved?

**Richard Benyon MP:** The general approach includes a provision setting out a genuine regionalised process, allowing us to work together regionally to agree the measures appropriate for our fisheries. High-level objectives and multiannual plans would still be agreed at EU level through co-decision, but Member States would be given the opportunity to agree the detailed technical measures that are needed to meet these objectives. This is a big win in terms of discards because regionalisation means more local decision-making, which means that the practical measures will work. It is a big win in terms of the fishing industry, because I lose count of the number times I am told of measures that they feel are decided many miles away from them in Brussels that bear no relation to the particular ecosystem that they are fishing.

But where Member States with a direct interest in a fishery can agree the measures unanimously and bring forward recommendations, there are two potential routes for putting these into legal effect. Firstly, the Commission is empowered to use delegated or implementing acts to put in place only those measures that Member States agree, or Member States can agree to put measures in their own national legislation. Where the process fails to deliver or agree the necessary measures, the Commission can bring forward a proposal for co-decided measures instead. The text recognises the important role that advisory councils play in regionalisation. Member States must consult the relevant advisory councils as a primary stakeholder, and that is written into the text. The advisory councils will put in place, where appropriate, a secretariat and working groups that deal through the regionalised process.

**Q14 The Earl of Caithness:** From your point of view, what is the most important next step for the UK in this?

**Richard Benyon MP:** Just pulling back for a second, there are some countries that are not particularly excited by regionalisation and the proposals that were coming forward initially, you could argue, were a centralising factor, because where Member States, say fishing around the North Sea or fishing in the Irish Sea, could not all agree then the decision-making was going to the Commission, which would arguably have created more powers than they had. It was a proposal from UK officials that suggested the way that I have just described. Moving those forward, I think there is a lot of support in the European Parliament for an end to the centralised top-down management so I hope that they will run with our proposal. Some aspects of them are quite techie and we have a job to do to make sure that MEPs are arguing from a position of knowledge and understanding. When it comes back through the Council of Ministers or through the triologue process that we are sticking resolutely—because it will be a very great disappointment if we do not get regionalisation. It will be a disappointment for so many key stakeholders.

**Q15 The Earl of Caithness:** Sorry, I did not make myself clear. Who are our key other partners for the UK to work with to implement this? Does that include Norway as well, because that will affect us in the north of Scotland?

**Richard Benyon MP:** Absolutely. It is all that fish a particular ecosystem. Obviously the EU-Norway talks are hard-pounding negotiations that currently go on and that will continue. But all the EU countries that fish in the North Sea, for example, will want to agree the details of an overarching policy that is still an EU competence, and that the fishermen themselves and Member States and devolved governments will have much more say in how those measures are implemented. Do you want to say something about how this will work with Norway, John?

**John Robbs:** Yes. Taking the North Sea, first of all there is already an informal group at a senior official level with EU Member States that fish in the North Sea. We worked with them in developing this regionalisation model and we are working with them on other things. If this new model is carried through to the end of next year, as we all very much hope, then we will already have the foundation to build on for a slightly more formal structure. So we are already building it in anticipation.

Norway is, of course, particularly difficult because evidently they are not a party to any of this but equally some aspects of management in the North Sea are agreed jointly with them—a relatively limited number in practice. Those will continue to be discussed between the Community and Norway at regular intervals and what we do to implement regionalisation in the North Sea will have to take account of that relationship. But Norway is not necessarily a part of it. That said, it can be. Another example where we do not fish is in the Skagerrak where Denmark and Sweden have agreed with Norway to introduce a partial discards ban from next year on a totally voluntary basis. When Norway chooses to join in it can but it is not required to. We are required, when we agree to do things, to take account of any Norwegian interest.

**Q16 Baroness Parminter:** Minister, you state that you reluctantly agreed to establishing minimum standards for an EU sustainability label for fisheries. Can you outline why you were reluctant? Secondly, given that reluctance, what are your alternatives for ensuring that consumers can play their part in delivering the sustainable fisheries that we all want?

**Richard Benyon MP:** The Common Market Organisation has brought mandatory labelling requirements mostly in line with other EU labelling requirements set out in the control regulations and in the food information regulations. At the moment the text that we agreed does not include a mandatory labelling scheme, as you say, but we expect further discussion on this, particularly in the European Parliament.

The UK's position is that we would like to move away from an EU sustainability label for fisheries and aquaculture products as a market mechanism already exists for this, that being the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) labelling scheme. Any additional labelling requirements will be burdensome on industry and, what I absolutely believe, would be confusing for consumers. Through all the public debate that existed around the discards issue in particular, sustainable fisheries was a really welcome addition to support for our position on these reforms, and a lot of public knowledge has gone into MSC accreditation. Supermarkets use it and celebrity chefs tell people to buy their fish with MSC accreditation, and that is the standard that people have started to use and adopt and greater numbers of consumers understand. I think that having an EU level of sustainability labelling would be confusing and the wrong direction to go in.

**Q17 Baroness Parminter:** Can I ask a supplementary? I share your enthusiasm, Minister, for the MSC and, of course, in the UK we now have pole and line, we have dolphin friendly and we have MSC. If, as you say, the Government are so supportive of the MSC, what more do you think they could be doing in the meantime to work with retailers and with the industry to ensure that the MSC becomes the gold standard so that consumers understand that is what we should be buying to deliver sustainable fisheries?

**Richard Benyon MP:** At a personal level, I support initiatives such as the one that Sainsbury's adopted recently to encourage people to eat types of fish that are currently being discarded, which are delicious, healthy and have been discarded because there is apparently no market for them. There has been a fantastic uptake in that; it is not by any means where we want it to get to. I think that the Government can continue to support this through projects that we are running, such as fishing for the market, which does precisely that: it tries to identify new markets for fish that are otherwise thrown away.

But particularly on MSC accreditation, I think it is the power of the market and I have no illusions about who is the really powerful player here. I can stand up at the Dispatch Box or come and talk to committees like yours and beat the sustainability drum and we can get our own house in order, as we have, on Government buying standards of sustainability—and we now have Government buying standards that are based on the Olympic standard, which is considered to be the gold standard of sustainability—but the real power comes from the big multiples, the supermarkets. It is a terrible generalisation, but when most people go into a supermarket in their busy lives they sort of invest or park their conscience with that brand. They want to know that that supermarket chain is purchasing its fish—they do not necessarily want to know the great in-depth details about where that fish was caught and how that stock is being managed but if it has an accreditation that they can understand they will feel good about it. So I think the power and the responsibility lies in large measure with the multiples. Government will continue to do its bit, and I am open to any more suggestions of other things we can do to get this across.

**Q18 The Earl of Caithness:** Can I just follow up Baroness Parminter's question? You failed to wave a magic wand in your usual style with the labelling. You also failed with storage aid and mandatory objectives for producer organisations. Do you see any movement in those two areas?

**Richard Benyon MP:** I am going to seek inspiration from the people either side of me, but on the storage aid one I was suspicious that a number of countries were asking for enormous resources from the EMFF, the marine and fisheries fund that we are being asked to agree, for funding for storage. We have a strong view that any EU money that is spent should be spent on sustainability, should be spent on supporting transferring fishermen from one system to one that is more sustainable and for other means such as our onshore



facilities that will improve the value and, therefore, the viability of that industry. Can you remind us where we are?

**John Robbs:** Yes. Of the three examples Lord Caithness quoted, for each one the result is a compromise. In the case of the EU eco-labelling, it was not agreed but nor was it dropped. It was agreed that further work would be done on it and that was a compromise. In the case of storage aid, the Commission proposed a reduction. We said faster, faster, whereas others said slower, slower; it ended up where the Commission proposed it. In the case of the producer organisations and obligatory objectives, that ended up that you have three out of five or something. That is not precisely how it works but there is an element of you have to do these and you have to choose between the other. So it is a mixture of mandatory objectives and voluntary objectives.

So each one of those three we did not get as far as we wanted but a compromise was agreed.

**Q19 The Earl of Caithness:** Thank you, that is helpful. Minister, in your reply you mentioned the EMFF (European Marine and Fisheries Fund). Could you just update us on the timetable for future negotiations on that and where the sticking points are, please?

**Richard Benyon MP:** The priority for the majority of Member States, including the UK, is for the EMFF to support CFP reform and for the fund to provide greater flexibility, accessibility, and proportionality over the current EFF (European Fisheries Fund) scheme. However, many Member States consider that a strong financial instrument dedicated to supporting the industry must be maintained. Most believe that the EMFF must, at a minimum, be maintained at the same level, in real terms, as for the 2007-2013 EFF, which was €4.3 billion. It is important to remember that the EMFF budget is subject to the wider multiannual financial framework negotiations, which is above my pay grade.

The UK Government's position is that the EU budget must be frozen at 2011 expenditure levels. This, therefore, affects all expenditure being considered under the multiannual financial framework. As a result of the EMFF negotiations, the Commission—that is DG MARE (Maritime Affairs and Fisheries)—has indicated that they expect the final budget for the EMFF will be lower than the current proposed budget at approximately €6.6 billion. The new aquaculture and inland fisheries measures also present new opportunities for the five landlocked Member States, and we heard lots from them about how they want to see some of this funding.

A number of Member States have also called for the retention of the various fleet instruments from the current EFF, for example construction of new vessels, vessel modernisation and decommissioning. But in terms of the exact dates, can I refer to John? Can you tell me: is this coming on the same dateline as the rest of the reforms?

**John Robbs:** At some point it will all come together, because there are three legs to the package. The EMFF was not part of the partial general approach agreed in June, as you know. Our understanding is that the Cypriot Presidency hopes to get agreement to a general approach in the Council in October. We do not know quite yet when the European Parliament will give us its opinion but we do not expect it until next year. It is moving, as in the Council, to a slower timescale, which is because it is so linked up in terms of overall budget with the wider negotiation on budgets.

**Q20 The Earl of Caithness:** When in October is the meeting, please?

**John Robbs:** I do not remember offhand. Can we tell the Clerk the precise date? I would hate to get it wrong.

**The Chairman:** Yes. A point to bear in mind is that we are back on the 8th October, so just to be mindful of our ability to scrutinise—

**Richard Benyon MP:** I have received inspiration. It is the third week of October so we will ensure that you are well briefed on our position.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, that is a nice note to end on. Minister, thank you very much.

Mr Clayton and Mr Robbs, thank you very much for coming in.