

EUROPARL



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IAN HUDGHTON

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MEP PROMPTS ESF INQUIRY

Ian Hudghton MEP, the SNP's European spokesperson on Employment and Social Affairs, says that the results of a Commission inquiry into the way European Social Fund payments in the Highlands and Islands are administered, cannot come too quickly.

The MEP highlighted potential problems for small voluntary organisations in the north of Scotland earlier this year, due to the introduction of a £500 levy. The levy, imposed by the Programme Executive, each and every time an application for ESF funding is made, whether successful or not, was condemned by Mr Hudghton as "crippling on very hard-working organisations which rely heavily on public donations and the fund-raising efforts of their members."

Commissioner Anna Diamantopoulou wrote to the MEP recently. In her letter she acknowledged that the partnership "has put in place mechanisms to reduce the impact on the voluntary sector" and that "many voluntary sector organisations will not have to pay the £500 subscription". However, she also concurred with the SNP member in stating:

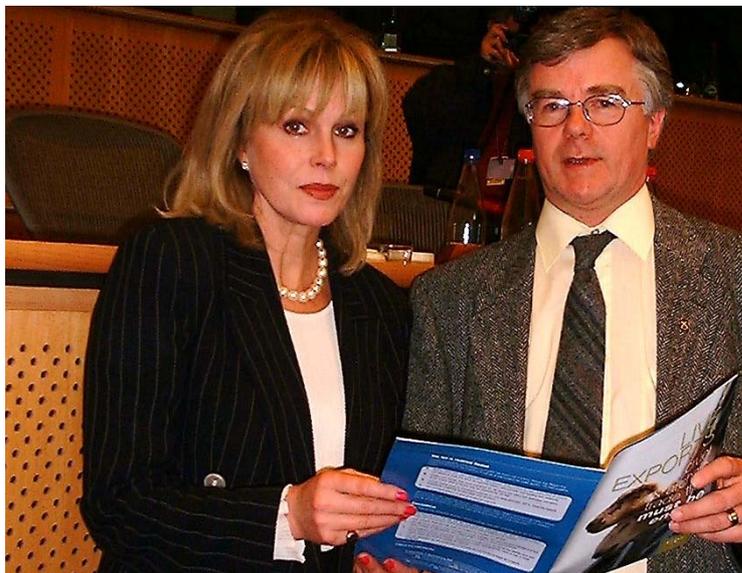
"It follows that any approach which has a detrimental effect on voluntary organisations would also have a similar effect on the delivery of European Social Funding. Consequently your letter has prompted a more thorough investigation of the Highlands and Islands method, which is still ongoing. In particular, we want to clarify that the approach is indeed allowable within the regulations governing structural funds and to discuss the implications with Commission colleagues and indeed the Scottish Executive."

MEPs welcome Scots visitors to Parliament

SNP MEPs Ian Hudghton and Neil MacCormick welcomed members of Dumfries & Galloway Saltire Society to Strasbourg during the plenary session last week. The previous week a group of Aberdeen students (pictured below) from the University's European Law Students Association staged a study visit to Brussels. Both groups enjoyed a question time session with the MEPs as part of their programmes.



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Long distance transport rules flouted

SNP MEP Ian Hudghton recently attended a packed meeting at the European Parliament in Brussels, hosted by celebrity Joanna Lumley as patron of the animal welfare campaigning group Compassion in World Farming.

In the course of the meeting, a video narrated by Ms. Lumley entitled "*Some Lie Dying*", was screened showing harrowing film footage of animals forced to endure journeys of 40 to 50 hours or more across Europe in poorly ventilated trucks, and being subjected to brutal handling and slaughter procedures, in clear breach of existing E.U. rules.

Ms Lumley and Mr. Hudghton called on the European Union to undertake a fundamental shake-up of its Directive on Animal Transport, which CIWF says is "routinely ignored in many EU countries". Speaking after the presentation, Mr Hudghton said:

"The scenes in the video were horrific. As an MEP, animal welfare and transportation issues crop up regularly in letters from constituents. The EU's Animal Transportation Directive is widely recognised not to be working. The Commission itself has reported widespread breaches in Italy, France, Greece, Belgium and Ireland. This appalling cruelty must cease.

"The SNP's policy advocates the transportation of meat on the hook, not on the hoof. I was glad to share this view with Joanna Lumley and I will continue to advocate an end to long distance transport of live animals across Europe.

"There is no practical reason why the transportation of meat could not replace the transportation of live animals for slaughter. CIWF and the SNP both see this as the humane way to move forward and I know that many Scots agree with this approach. The SNP will be pushing to end these cruel practices as a matter of urgency."

United States under fire over Kyoto

The European Parliament has condemned the United States' decision to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol on global warming as "appalling and provocative" and warns that the decision endangers the whole Kyoto process and threatens climate disaster. MEPs want the European Commission and the member states to take "all necessary political and diplomatic initiatives" to put pressure on the US administration and urge it to reconsider its position on Kyoto.

Foot-and-mouth investigation

Updating MEPs in Strasbourg on the latest developments in the foot-and-mouth crisis, EU Commissioner David Byrne announced plans for an investigation into the disease once the current outbreak had been dealt with. He said: "I intend that when the outbreak has been eradicated, we will carry out a very thorough examination of all the contributory factors to the current outbreak and the consequences." The investigation would look at all issues such as the transport of live animals and possible weaknesses in the traceability of animals. It would also look at vaccination policy and import controls.



Ian Hudghton MEP, Angus Robertson and Ian Hamilton visiting Cap Gemini's call centre at Forres during a recent tour of Moray Constituency.

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SAFETY FIRST FOR FISHERMEN

Ian Hudghton MEP, the SNP member of the European Parliament's Fisheries Committee last week in Strasbourg highlighted the "unacceptably high" level of accidents at sea. The Parliament recognised the dangers affecting workers in this industry and the shocking statistic that one fisherman in seven in the EU is involved in an occupational accident each year. Mr Hudghton said:

"Fishing is an activity which takes place in a naturally hostile environment. Risks are inherent in almost every decision made by a skipper or individual fisherman on when and where to go fishing, what gear to use and so on.

In the UK the fatality rate of fishermen is 20 times that of workers in manufacturing industries.

The accident toll could undoubtedly be reduced if the fishing industry, national authorities, the EU and international organisations face this issue with enough thought, political will and economic means."

Referring to the forthcoming Common Fisheries Policy review, Mr Hudghton urged that safety be a key priority. The MEP argued that all steps be taken to prevent management regimes where fishermen are forced to go to sea in adverse conditions to comply with days at sea restrictions or where boats are compelled to land fish at designated ports when poor weather conditions would jeopardise the safety of the crew.

"Such risks are preventable if safety forms an integral part of fisheries management."

The report recommended a ban on vessels over twenty years old unless they can be "proven to be in perfect condition". Mr Hudghton successfully argued that this be changed to ban vessels of any age unless they "have passed annual safety tests."

SNP PAIR TOUR "FISHING 2001"

Ian Hudghton MEP and Richard Lochhead MSP toured the recent "Fishing 2001" Exhibition in Glasgow. The pair met numerous fishermen as well as representatives of all kinds of companies who depend on fisheries for their survival. Commenting afterwards Ian Hudghton said:

"The general feeling in the industry is one of disappointment that the Scottish Executive has failed to see the conservation benefits which could accrue from a tie-up scheme."

IAN HUDGHTON'S DIARY

9-12 APRIL

Committee meetings, Brussels

14 APRIL

SNP National Executive Cttee, Edinburgh

16-21 APRIL

Constituency programme of visits/meetings around Scotland

19 APRIL

Dundee College student event, Marryat Hall

23-24 APRIL

Fisheries Cttee, Brussels

25 APRIL

Employment & Social Affairs Cttee, Brussels

Angus College visit to Parliament

Highlands & Islands video conference on Coastal Zone Management

26 APRIL

Economic & Monetary Affairs Cttee, Brussels

1 MAY

Gordon Highlanders Museum Launch, Aberdeen

2-4 MAY

EP Plenary session, Brussels

8 MAY

European Enlargement event, Edinburgh

9 MAY

Aberdeen City Council Educ. Dept. Europe Day event

12 MAY

SNP National Executive Cttee, Edinburgh

13 MAY

Tayside Racial Equality Council Careers event, Dundee

14-18 MAY

EP Plenary, Strasbourg

17 MAY

Visit by Bharatiya Ashram Group, Dundee to EP, Strasbourg
Visit by Shetland College to EP, Strasbourg