



St Helena  
Government

ST HELENA LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

SELECT COMMITTEE 1

REPORT TO LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ON THE SECOND  
MEETING OF SELECT COMMITTEE 1, PUBLISHED ON 2  
JULY 2024 – FARMING SUPPORT, LAND USE REVIEW  
AND POULTRY PRODUCTION (DAY OLD  
CHICKS/INCUBATION UNIT)

Laid on the Table 5th Dec 2024

Legislative Council of St Helena

Select Committee 1

Farming Support, Land Use Review and Poultry Production  
(Day Old Chicks / Incubation Unit)

Second Report of Select Committee 1,

together with the formal minutes relating to the report

Published 02 July 2024

# Select Committee 1

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## *Select Committee 1*

As per the Select Committees (Establishment) Order 2022, Select Committee 1 is appointed by the Legislative Council to scrutinise sectors of Government activity. Select Committee 1 is responsible for reviewing and scrutinising (i) Health and Social Care (ii) Environment, Natural Resources and Planning and (iii) Education, Skills and Employment.

## *Current membership*

Councillor Robert Midwinter (Chair)  
Councillor Rosemary Bargo (Resigned 31 May 2024)  
Councillor Gillian Brooks  
Councillor Ronald Coleman

## *Powers*

The Committee is one of two Select Committees, the powers of which are set out in the Select Committees (Establishment) Order, 2022, and the Standing Orders of the Legislative Council. These are available to view on the St Helena Government <https://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/government/legislative-council/> website.

## *Staff*

The current Secretary of the Committee is Anita Legg.

## *Contact Information*

All correspondence should be addressed to the Secretary of Select Committee 1 at [anita.legg@sainthelena.gov.sh](mailto:anita.legg@sainthelena.gov.sh).

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## Introduction

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1. In March 2024, Select Committee 1 conducted its second inquiry focusing on “Farming Support, Land Use Review and Poultry Production (Day Old Chicks / Incubation Unit)”, along with policies and processes that relate to these items of business. We felt this second topic was current and would also garner a high level of public interest. Members of the public and organisations were invited to get in touch with the Committee to share experiences and issues of concern within the farming industry on St Helena.
2. No written evidence was received from the public but related information in respect of all policies and procedural guidelines was received from St Helena Government (SHG) on the matter
3. On 06 March 2024 we held an oral evidence session from the Portfolio Director of the Environment, Natural Resources and Planning (ENRP) Portfolio, whose role involves agricultural support, and being responsible for the Agricultural Development section in supporting the Agricultural Development Officer to implement policy and services for agricultural support. We also heard from the Agricultural Development Officer, who is responsible for the Agricultural section which consists of three sections: the farmers support; pest control and veterinary and livestock.

We are grateful to everyone for their contribution and cooperation with our inquiry.

## Report

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4. Unlike our previous live hearing, we did not look at any specific areas of legislation, instead looked at the various policy and procedural matters related to farming, agricultural production, and forestry matters.
5. The Portfolio Director provided an overview of the main policies that were in place, supporting the agricultural sector, which were:
  - i) Policy for the release of agricultural assets in the form of land and buildings; currently due to funding, a number of policy provisions had not been actively pursued or had been removed from the policy portfolio therefore land and buildings are leased under the Assets Policy.
  - ii) Water Subsidy Policy.
  - iii) Support provisions for clearance of government land, in the form of a small partnership grant.
  - iv) Herbicide Policy subsidising the cost of herbicides and pesticides that are provided from ENRP's stock.
  - v) Soil testing support provision.

All of the other support services do not come under specific policies, but they are provided as part of the overall service provision from ENRP.

6. The Agricultural Development Officer (ADO) then explained that when the operation of the Poultry Unit was first contracted out to the private sector, the targets were set under a public private partnership arrangement, looking at producing a number of chicks that could be purchased by the private sector and smallholders in order to support egg production on the island. However the targets were only partially met due to encountering some challenges, one of the biggest being the outbreak of Newcastle disease. As a result the plan to bring in embryonated eggs and/or point of lay chickens did not go ahead.
7. The ADO went on to say that first batch of day old chicks was brought to the island in 2018, namely the Dekalb Amberlink breed, from a bio-secure unit in Johannesburg, South Africa. This was seen as an opportunity for a quick win and order to get the poultry industry started again. We heard that to date, the Portfolio has imported 5000 day old chicks. We were interested to hear the process that is followed, should a flight be delayed or cancelled. We were advised that legally chicks can travel within a period of 72 hours, any delay beyond that would mean asking the Supplier to take them back. To date this has currently

causes no additional costs to the St Helena Government, as there is a pay on receipt of the chicks arriving in St. Helena arrangement in place.

8. The ADO also explained the procurement process for bringing day old chicks in. There is an arrangement with a poultry supplier in Johannesburg, who is contacted with the island's demands, being a maximum of 1000 chicks, which the Quarantine Station can manage. The import license states what diseases they need to be free from and they will also need to be vaccinated prior to coming to the island. Once the chicks are ready, an agent in Johannesburg manages the freight and handling logistics, to book the chicks to arrive here on St Helena. The cost of importing a batch is £6210, which covers quarantine costs. These are then sold on to the public at £3 per chick.
9. A policy is in place for the distribution of day old chicks, which was approved by the previous Economic Development Committee. Since then ENRP has amended the policy and taken to their Advisory Board for approval, the proposed changes defines that a commercial producer would be someone receiving in excess to a minimum up to 20 chicks, and below that would be considered as smallholders.
10. ***There is much scepticism in the public as to how day old chicks are allocated therefore we recommend that once the policy is approved by the Advisory Board, ENRP should ensure that the proposed changes, are communicated to the public. An indicative timescale for this action to be completed, should be provided by end of July 2024.***
11. ***Now that the ban on prohibition, on the import of poultry and poultry products originating from South Africa has been lifted, we also recommend there is an immediate review on the importation of day old chicks, with an update provided to the public. An indicative timescale for this action to be completed, should be provided by end of July 2024.***
12. We noted that no register of Poultry Producers currently exists, as the majority of poultry producers on the island are operating on private land. However based on the applications received from people wanting to have chickens, the Portfolio judged the number to be in the regular region of 130 or more. We were also advised that regular engagement meetings had previously taken place with poultry producers, however this had not happened for some time.
13. ***The Animal Census requires chickens to be declared therefore we recommend this data be analysed as soon as possible, from which the Portfolio should consider establishing a register of Poultry Producers. Also six monthly meetings should be reinstated with Poultry farmers to gauge what has worked well, or what needs to be improved.***
14. The ADO said the Portfolio certainly wants to move to looking at a combination of options in order to resupply the island with layers going forward. Once the poultry

units have been refurbished, they would gauge the public interest. We were advised that it would be difficult to operate parent incubation of poultry sustainably alone therefore it either has to be in conjunction with another business opportunity, or use a combination of methods of overall supplying chicks on the island.

15. ***We recommend that the ENRP consult with the public as soon as possible to gauge interest in restarting a parent-stock breeding facility and put together options as to the operation of the facility.***
16. We then moved on to question ENRP on the land use review and whether the current asset policy is still fit for purpose (entitled "to provide for the release of forestry land for residential and commercial purposes, and agricultural land and buildings for commercial purposes" - approved on 21 November 2007). The Director said it is currently under review and the aim this year is to have a new policy in place for both agricultural and forestry land and also building assets
17. ***We recommend the Portfolio ensures that the review of the policy relating to the release of Forestry land is completed in a timely manner and furthermore that work currently underway relating to the Options Paper is completed and the new Agricultural Policy is drafted. The Committee should be updated by the end of July on whether the aim to approve the overall main strategic policy by the second quarter of financial year 2024/25 is still on target.***
18. The Committee heard about consultation that had taken place with farmers in order to form the policy review however the Portfolio could not reveal at this stage what the actual options were, as they were still working through the details.
19. The ADO then explained their assets portfolio, which historically is determined as agricultural land, and how a review is undertaken on the suitability of land. The result could be that land is changed from arable to pasture or vice versa. New lands are also considered if the criteria is suitable, plus the release of land to clients for farming purposes.
20. Additionally, forestry land is looked at in terms of its suitability and whether or not it is economical, or whether it should become more of a business or private sector opportunity. The Committee noted that the Portfolio receives requests on occasion for forestry land to be used for residential purposes and individual housing plots but there is a coordinated approach, whereby all requests must go through the Property Section first, so that all parties are aware of the intentions. Land swaps are considered as well. These activities could be carried out via the forest rationalisation exercises or ad hoc requests, but going forward the Portfolio wants to ensure a more formal and structured process.
21. ***We recommend that this process is formalised in the short term and included in relevant policies as noted above.***



22. Long term leases that are still in place because the 30 years has not come to an end, do not require detail on how the land is to be managed under that particular arrangement. We heard there is only one arable 30 year lease remaining and the other remaining long leases are for pastures. However under the new policy being developed by the Portfolio, which is moving toward shorter term leases, it is aimed to ensure that lease schedules are more specific, such as that the land should not be lying fallow for a specific period of time. The aim was to work with producers to try and address issues such as labour shortages and also update and monitor the land use database on a quarterly basis.
23. ***We recommend that under the new policy that is being developed, lease schedules need to be formed in a more specific manner. An indicative timescale for this action to be completed should be provided by the end of July 2024.***
24. The ADO went on to explain that irrigation water is managed by Connect St Helena, wherever it is possible for farmers to have a connection. In the event that water can be provided, ENRP has a procedure whereby they will pay for the connection fee and the tenant pays for the usage. The Director acknowledged that irrigation arrangements could be improved but it was sometimes difficult to justify the investment, especially in smaller estates. However within the development of the water resource management plan, agricultural water overall will be looked at sustainably.
25. On the final topic we examined farming support and heard there were 138 tenants who use Crown land, notwithstanding those who farm on private land. Farmers who have a lease or license with ENRP sign a Tenancy Agreement and will be listed on the Tenants Register but, as we heard earlier, there was no other requirement to be registered.
26. ***We recommend the Portfolio should consider establishing a register for Full-time and Part-time farmers who are using Crown land, as well as Private lands. Any level of subsidy or grant should also be recorded.***
26. ENRP owns 1780 acres of pasture land and, in terms of grant support, an assessment is carried out as there is insufficient financial resources to support all lands within one financial year. The ADO listed the areas in which they issue grants, which were very few, namely:
  - i) Pasture grant; whereby a contribution of £180 per acre is made to assist in cleaning weeds off the land;
  - ii) Animal Husbandry Fund grant; which provides support for breeding stock. However, under the legislation (the "*Pasturage (Government Lands) Ordinance, 1938*" refers), this only extends to cattle and sheep, but not pigs. A review of the legislation is therefore being considered;

- iii) Key wirebird habitats; ENRP sees this as a responsibility, to provide support in protecting the environment, as well as keeping the land free of invasive species.

**27. *We recommend that the Animal Husbandry policy, under the Pasturage (Government Lands) Ordinance, 1938, is reviewed to extend support to pigs and other animals. An indicative timescale for this action to be completed should be provided by the end of July 2024.***

28. In addition, the ADO explained that all agricultural services provision and support is heavily subsidised but there are only two policies that provide specific subsidies – firstly the Herbicide Subsidy; where ENRP pays 60% of the chemical cost and the claimant 40% covering both Private and Crown land, and secondly the Water Subsidy. Other support services include: soil testing; agricultural pest control service; availability of agricultural land and buildings for production and storage; a livestock breeding program to improve the genetics of the sheep; and an AI service for cattle and goats. A veterinary program is also in place, plus an animal clinic which is provided to the public at large.

**29. *We recommend that training in the safe use of pesticides, evidenced with a certificate, should be available to farmers every two to three years.***

30. In terms of data collection, we heard this is challenging, as farmers are reluctant to provide data, in order to form policy and procedures going forward. However some data is collected from a few farmers, retail outlets, importers, and also Environmental Health in respect of the number of animals slaughtered. In terms of how to overcome shortages, such as potatoes, the Portfolio felt it came down to farmers themselves and the need to work together. ENRP had tried to set up workshops but unfortunately had not been successful. This is an area of concern to members of the public, with a view being expressed that if producers are unwilling to provide data then they should not receive subsidies or other forms of government support.

**31. *We recommend that provision is made for collecting data in order that this can be published annually, especially from those producers in receipt of subsidies and other support from SHG. Data should be published in a manner that demonstrates how support provided is translated into productivity.***

32. The Director could not confirm with any certainty if the investment that SHG puts into lands versus production is looked at in terms of value for money but stated that one of the options coming out of the agricultural policy review is whether or not some of the pasture lands could become larger units, in order to be run more commercially.

33. Finally we asked about compliance, and the handling of complaints or concerns raised by the public and whether ENRP hold records of these along with associated

actions taken. The Director explained how they try to address queries from the public, through Elected Members, one to one meetings or formal letter. Land queries are tracked on their database.

34. The Director then concluded that from his position as Policy Officer, note is taken where policies are outdated or can be improved. Agriculture is one area where there is a real balance to be struck between retaining people on the land and making sure that regulations and provisions are enabling, but at the same time making sure the Portfolio has the policy basis as well, as the legal provision in order to support the improvement that is needed around compliance and enforcement and better utilisation of agricultural land and buildings.
35. *We recommend the Portfolio ensure that policy is developed in a manner that empowers compliance and enforcement by the relevant Portfolio Officers, in relation to the utilisation of land and buildings owned by the Crown. An indicative timescale for this action to be completed should be provided by the end of July 2024.*

## Conclusions and Recommendations

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*There is much scepticism in the public as to how day old chicks are allocated therefore we recommend that once the policy is approved by the Advisory Board, ENRP should ensure that the proposed changes, are communicated to the public. An indicative timescale for this action to be completed, should be provided by end of July 2024.*

*Now that the ban on prohibition, on the import of poultry and poultry products originating from South Africa has been lifted, we also recommend there is an immediate review on the importation of day old chicks, with an update provided to the public. An indicative timescale for this action to be completed, should be provided by end of July 2024.*

- 1. The Animal Census requires chickens to be declared therefore we recommend this data be analysed as soon as possible, from which the Portfolio should consider establishing a register of Poultry Producers. Also six monthly meetings should be reinstated with Poultry farmers to gauge what has worked well, or what needs to be improved.*
- 2. We recommend that the ENRP consult with the public as soon as possible to gauge interest in restarting a parent-stock breeding facility and put together options as to the operation of the facility.*
- 3. We recommend the Portfolio ensures that the review of the policy relating to the release of Forestry land is completed in a timely manner and furthermore that work currently underway relating to the Options Paper is completed and the new Agricultural Policy is drafted. The Committee should be updated by the end of July on whether the aim to approve the overall main strategic policy by the second quarter of financial year 2024/25 is still on target.*
- 4. We recommend that this process is formalised in the short term and included in relevant policies as noted above.*
- 5. We recommend that under the new policy that is being developed, lease schedules need to be formed in a more specific manner. An indicative timescale for this action to be completed should be provided by the end of July 2024.*
- 6. We recommend the Portfolio should consider establishing a register for Full-time and Part-time farmers who are using Crown land, as well as Private lands. Any level of subsidy or grant should also be recorded.*
- 7. We recommend that the Animal Husbandry policy, under the Pasturage (Government Lands) Ordinance, 1938, is reviewed to extend support to pigs and*

*other animals. An indicative timescale for this action to be completed should be provided by the end of July 2024.*

- 8. We recommend that training in the safe use of pesticides, evidenced with a certificate, should be available to farmers every two to three years.*
- 9. We recommend that provision is made for collecting data in order that this can be published annually, especially from those producers in receipt of subsidies and other support from SHG. Data should be published in a manner that demonstrates how support provided is translated into productivity.*
- 10. We recommend the Portfolio ensure that policy is developed in a manner that empowers compliance and enforcement by the relevant Portfolio Officers, in relation to the utilisation of land and buildings owned by the Crown. An indicative timescale for this action to be completed should be provided by the end of July 2024.*

# Formal Minutes

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Tuesday, 02 July 2024, at the Legislative Council Office, The Castle, Jamestown

Members present:

Councillor Robert Midwinter (Chair)  
Councillor Gillian Brooks  
Councillor Ronald Coleman

Paragraphs 1 to 35 read and agreed to.

Annex 1 agreed to.

Resolved, that the Report be the Second Report of Select Committee 1 to the Legislative Council.

Ordered, that the Chair make the Report to the Council.

Adjourned to a day and time to be fixed by the Chair.

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the St Helena Government website – [www.sainthelena.gov.sh](http://www.sainthelena.gov.sh)

*Wednesday 6 March 2024*

Mr Darren Duncan, Portfolio Director, Environment, Natural Resources and Planning

Miss Andrea Timm, Agricultural Development Officer, Environment, Natural Resources and Planning Portfolio

## Annex 1: Summary of the written evidence

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We received evidence from the Environment, Natural Resources and Planning (ENRP) Portfolio after writing to them in advance of our evidence session.

All written evidence will be archived.





St Helena  
Government

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Date: 12 September 2024

Miss Anita Legg  
Secretary  
Select Committee 1  
The Castle  
Jamestown

Dear Miss Legg

### **Farming Support, Land Use review and Poultry Production**

Thank you for sharing the report dated July 2024 in relation to Committee 1 inquiry undertaken in March 2024, in relation to Farming Support, Land Use review and Poultry Production.

I do apologise for the late response to this report which is as follows:

*Point 3. ...." and being responsible for the Agricultural **Development** section in supporting .....*

We suggests that the word "**development**" is removed to read ... *and being responsible for the Agricultural section in supporting.....*

*Point 7. ....The ADO went on to say that first batch of day old chicks was brought to the island in 2018, namely the Dekalb Amberlink breed, from a bio-secure unit in Johannesburg, South Africa. This was seen as an opportunity for a quick win and order....*

We suggests that the words "**the**" and "**for egg production**" is inserted to read:

*The ADO went on to say that **the** first batch of day old chicks was brought to the island in 2018, namely the Dekalb Amberlink breed, from a bio-secure unit in Johannesburg, South Africa. This was seen as an opportunity for a quick win **for egg production** and order.....*