

# EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

## CONFIDENTIAL

**Title of Report:** Collection & Publication of Farming Statistics

**Paper No:** 172/12

**Date:** 27 June 2012

**Report of:** Director of Natural Resources/Agricultural Advisor

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### 1.0 Purpose

This paper makes recommendations for maintaining the collection and publication of the Falkland Islands Farming Statistics.

### 2.0 Recommendations

That Executive Council agree that a new Agricultural Returns Ordinance (or similar) to allow the continued collection of the current range of agricultural statistics be drafted and presented to the Agricultural Advisory Committee for comment and then be brought to Executive Council for approval.

### 3.0 Summary of Financial Implications

None.

### 4.0 Background

**4.1** For over 100 years, farming statistics have been gathered from the stock return and published for use by farmers, and other stakeholders in the Falklands farming industry. Currently this information is collected under The Livestock Ordinance which is for animal health, specifically dealing with the control of infectious and contagious diseases. This has worked well although there have been a small number of complaints about some of the questions. It is apparent that more questions are asked as part of the livestock return than are just relevant to animal health. The legal view is that a number of these questions are not relevant to the purpose of the ordinance (control of infectious and contagious diseases) so should not be included in the stock return.

**4.2** The majority of questions relating to animals would seem to be justifiable in relation to the Livestock Ordinance. In terms of disease control it seems reasonable to know how many animals are on each farm, how many are sent to the abattoir etc. There are some other statistics which have been collected for many years but which are unlikely to be justifiable in relation to the ordinance. These include questions on number of tractors, area of pasture sown etc. There are other issues which are included in the

stock return sent to farmers but which are not published in the statistics due to their sensitivity. Again these are unlikely to be justifiable in relation to the current ordinance. These include data on wool value, horticulture production etc. These data are kept confidentially within FIG for internal use.

- 4.3** The view within the Department of Agriculture is that it is essential to continue collecting the full range of statistics. It is the view that these statistics provide essential information to the farming industry and policy makers and the livestock return is used as a 'stock take' or inventory of the general situation in farming. The published statistics provide farmers with something of a benchmark with which to manage their business. In an isolated community farmers are able to look at the statistics and identify farms where productivity changes have occurred and stimulate an understanding as to why. The statistics provide a starting point for knowledge exchange and farm improvement. The basic requirement is to simply allow continuation of the statistics included in the current stock return.
- 4.4** There have been a number of significant policy decisions, infrastructure developments, and funding schemes in the agricultural sector. A sound and current statistical base has been critical to analysing options and taking timely decisions. It would be unfortunate and unhelpful if the time series of data is lost for the future. It is recognised that completing the stock return can be onerous. However, apart from the foregoing arguments for continuing to collect the statistics, farmers are also interested in the state and trends in agriculture, and find the data useful.
- 4.5** The stock return and the publication of farm statistics have had some recent history in Exco. Paper 214/08 recommended amendment of the Livestock Ordinance to permit the publication of stock numbers, wool yield and other non-financial information included on the stock return form. Prior to that whilst it was clear that the Livestock Ordinance provided for 'relevant' data to be collected it was not clear that it provided for publication and this had been challenged. Paper 69/09 recommended a further amendment to allow the Director of Agriculture to approve the format and questions included in the livestock return. Prior to that any change would have required the approval of the Governor and would most likely have been an Exco matter. Both amendments were agreed by Exco. Maintaining this flexibility to allow the Director of Natural Resources to approve the format and questions included in the livestock return is useful. There may be minor amendments from time to time. Some have considered that the point of Exco paper 69/09 was partly to address the issue raised here (the other part being the ability to modify the statistical return without it having to go to Exco each time). However, whilst the outcome of 69/09 was that it gave the Director authority to modify the livestock return and the questions posed, the legal view remains that any such questions must be relevant to the purpose of the livestock ordinance; the control of infectious and contagious diseases.
- 4.6** This issue has been considered by the Agricultural Advisory Committee and the committee endorsed the view that agricultural statistics should continue to be collected in the current format. At the meeting on 11 January 2012 various options were considered for maintaining the collection of statistics. This paper was circulated well in advance of the meeting to all members of the Agricultural Advisory Committee including the Rural Business Association and independent farmer representatives. The

options proposed at that time included: amending the current livestock ordinance, using the statistics ordinance, developing an additional ordinance or simply limiting questions in the return to those relevant to the control of contagious and infectious diseases. The Attorney General advises that the best approach to provide for the continued collection of statistics would be through a new Ordinance; the Agricultural Returns Ordinance for example. This would provide authority to collect and publish statistics in the current format and could provide for some evolution in terms of changes in agriculture and rural development. Given that there has been some consultation on the proposal that the agricultural statistics should continue to be collected and that this could be done through a new Ordinance, it is felt that further consultation on the proposal at this time is unnecessary. There will be an opportunity for consultation on the draft Ordinance when it has been prepared.

**4.7** One of the criticisms which have been made of the statistics relates to timing. This relates to the questions on wool yield and value in particular. In some cases all the data relating to wool sales may not be available by the 30 June deadline for farm statistics returns. This could be overcome by having most data returned by the usual June deadline but giving until 31 October for some of these other data items. This need not delay publication of the statistics as these particular data items are only for FIG internal use and are not published.

**4.8** The new Ordinance should incorporate the recent amendments to the Livestock Ordinance as they relate to the collection of statistics. These include the authority to publish statistics, and for amendments to the form and questions to be approved by the Director of Natural Resources. It is considered that it would be good practice to present any proposals for substantive modifications to the content of the livestock/agricultural return to the Agricultural Advisory Committee and to consider their views in making any changes.

## **5.0 Financial Implications**

No additional cash resource is required.

## **6.0 Legal Implications**

This proposed new Ordinance has been included in the legislative priorities programme. The tentative schedule for the Bill is Executive Council in September and Legislative Assembly in October. It is anticipated that it need not be unduly long or complicated.

## **7.0 Human Resources Implications**

The main resource required is the involvement of staff time from within the Attorney General's Chambers to provide the legislative solution.