

From the Permanent Secretary
Dr Denis McMahon

Your reference
Our reference: SCORR-0247-2018

Dr Andrew Murrison MP
Chair, Northern Ireland Affairs Committee
By email: northircom@parliament.uk

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07 January 2019

Dear Dr Murrison

Thank you for your letter of 20 December 2018 in relation to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's report on Brexit and Agriculture in Northern Ireland, and the UK Government's response to it.

First, you asked whether the UK Government had sought DAERA's input to those Committee recommendations related to devolved policy matters. I am content that while this input had not been sought, the UK Government's response accurately reflects the current position in Northern Ireland in the absence of an Executive.

Secondly, you asked for an update on DAERA's 'Northern Ireland Future Agricultural Policy Framework' stakeholder engagement exercise. This was undertaken in the context of the following key, desired outcomes set by Michelle McIlveen MLA, the last DAERA Minister:

- Increased productivity in international terms, closing the productivity gap which has been opening up with other major suppliers. This will create the basis for a profitable sector which can grow market share;
- Improved resilience to external shocks (such as market and currency volatility, weather related events, etc.) which are ever more frequent and to which the industry has become very exposed;
- An agriculture industry that is environmentally sustainable in terms of its impact on air and water quality, soil health, carbon footprint and biodiversity; and
- An industry which operates within an efficient, competitive and responsive supply chain, with clear transmission of market signals and an overriding focus on food and the end consumer.

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I am pleased to inform you that over 1,300 responses were received to this engagement exercise, and that work is ongoing to analyse their content. DAERA intends to publish a summary of responses later in January, and to use those responses to inform future developmental work in preparation for a future Minister.

Thirdly, you asked the following specific queries:

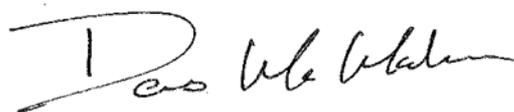
- Whether the Department will base its future scheme of agricultural payments on the principle of “public money for public goods”, and if so whether that definition of “public goods” will include the survival of farms as essential rural assets;
- Whether area payments will be retained as an element of agricultural support;
- If DAERA’s intention is to, during the 2021 scheme year, continue to pay Direct Payments under the rules of the current CAP scheme, maintain alignment with the terms of the CAP should these change;
- Whether DAERA will pilot approaches for incentivising the use of longer term tenancy agreements for agricultural land in Northern Ireland; and
- Whether DAERA will agree the Government’s policy that no additional border checks will be imposed on imports of animals, plants and their products from the EU on Day 1 of a no deal Brexit.

In response to the first four of these queries, DAERA’s guiding principle continues to be one of ensuring that the ability of an incoming Minister, NI Executive and NI Assembly to decide what is appropriate for NI’s agricultural industry is neither prejudged nor constrained. Therefore, it remains the position that it will be for Ministers to take decisions on future agricultural policy in NI, as reflected in the UK Government’s response to the Committee’s report.

On your final query, DAERA will follow the approach determined by the UK Government on the import of animals, plants and their products from the EU from Day 1 should there be a no-deal Brexit.

I trust you will find this response useful.

Yours sincerely



DR DENIS McMAHON
Permanent Secretary

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