

24 February 2021

Stella McArdle
Clerk, Committee for Agriculture Environment & Rural Affairs
Northern Ireland Assembly
Room 244 Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast BT4 3XX

Dear Stella

Climate Change Committee (CCC) Advice for NI in relation to the 2050 emissions reduction target

Thank you for your letter of 11 February 2021 regarding the Committee's request for a short written brief from LMC on the advice received by the DAERA Minister from the Chairman of the UK Climate Change Committee regarding Northern Ireland's fair contribution to the UK Net Zero target and the subsequent correspondence from DAERA to your Committee on this matter.

I would offer the following short briefing on the issues:

A fair contribution to the UK Net Zero target

- LMC's remit is to support the marketing and development of the Northern Ireland beef and sheep meat industry so our expertise is limited when it comes to emissions reduction proposals in the balanced pathway approach to sectors out with the agriculture sector.
- The UK's achievement of Net Zero by 2050 is hugely ambitious and challenging and will require comprehensive investment in research, innovation and support by Government to enable change and progress by every sector towards this target particularly in the earlier stages of the carbon budgets.
- It is welcome that the CCC recognises that the UK's achievement of Net Zero does not require achievement of Net Zero within the Northern Ireland region and as such the Committee does not recommend that Northern Ireland sets Net Zero targets for all Greenhouse Gases.

- An 82% reduction in all Greenhouse Gases within Northern Ireland by 2050 is presented by the CCC as representing an equivalent effort and a fair contribution to the overall UK target. This approach recognises the structure of the Northern Ireland economy and in particular the importance of agriculture within the region. The 82% reduction does however still represent a huge technical, policy, behavioural and economic challenge.
- The CCC acknowledges that the UK cannot achieve its Net Zero targets without strong policy actions across the Devolved Nations particularly in the areas where key powers are largely controlled within the scope of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland Governments. This presents an opportunity for Northern Ireland to work with industry and develop support tools and legislation that enables change rather than imposes change.
- One of the most concerning aspects of the CCC approach to Net Zero is the suggestion that meat and dairy consumption levels in the UK are reduced by 35% by 2050 in order to release land for emissions abatement and to reduce GHG emissions from UK agriculture. This is probably one of the most contentious issues in the CCC advice for the UK. Working closely with the agriculture industry in Northern Ireland it is LMC's view that the beef and lamb sector is up for playing its part in achieving the UK Net Zero ambition but the CCC approach should not be one of seeking contraction in an industry but should be one of helping it to become more productive and sustainable and recognising it for the positive contribution it already makes and can further make through enhanced GHG abatement activities such as carbon sequestration in well managed grasslands, soils, hedgerows and woodlands. Recognition and encouragement of carbon sequestration potential at farm level is perhaps one of the most important issues for getting real buy-in from the ruminant livestock sectors who are constantly frustrated that carbon footprint measurement on their farms doesn't readily take account of this positive contribution to GHG emissions mitigation.
- The global demand for nutrient dense high quality meat and milk protein is growing as populations get larger and as wealth increases in developing nations of the world. The CCC recognises that the carbon intensity of beef production in countries such as the UK is very favourable on the world stage. In order to achieve a fair contribution to UK Net Zero the CCC is suggesting that 28% of agricultural land in Northern Ireland would have to be released for other measures such as tree planting, hedgerow expansion, peatland restoration, energy crop growth etc. It appears to LMC to be a somewhat backward step to release so much of the region's productive land from beef, sheep and dairy production when Northern Ireland has an ideal climate and sustainable grassland resource for producing essential nutrients for human consumption in domestic and export markets where production of such nutrients is often much less sustainable.

DAERA Explanation of the CCC advice for Northern Ireland

- I have reviewed the letter to the AERA Committee from DAERA's Assembly Liaison Officer on 01 February 2021 and the explanations provided are consistent with LMC's review of the CCC advice.
- Perhaps one of the most important lines in the response from DAERA, from the perspective of LMC, is the last sentence of the letter which emphasises the importance of working to the evidence-based target advised by the CCC, achieving maximum buy-in of all sectors and being ambitious as a region to help achieve the overall Net Zero target for the UK.
- The letter from DAERA does not refer to some of the excellent work that the Department has already done in partnership with industry in this space in particular the work of the Greenhouse Gas Implementation Partnership (GHGIP). The GHGIP set out a framework of actions in two 5 year plans to help the agriculture sector reduce its environmental impact. The first plan - Efficient Farming Cuts Greenhouse Gases Strategy and Action Plan - ran from 2011-2015 and focused on raising awareness of how efficient farming improves business performance and reduces GHG emissions per unit of production. In the updated plan - Efficient Farming Cuts Greenhouse Gases Implementation Plan 2016-20 – the focus shifted to implementation and increasing the wider-scale adoption of more efficient farming practices across farms in NI. Discussion has been initiated on the next five years of the plan and this partnership approach has been a very successful initiative for delivering positive outcomes with joint industry and government endeavour.

I trust this briefing from LMC will be helpful in the Committee's deliberations and engagement on this important matter in the months ahead.

Yours sincerely



Ian Stevenson
Chief Executive