

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT MEETING -15 SEPTEMBER 2015

INQUIRY INTO BETTER REGULATION – BRIEFING BY DARD OFFICIALS

BACKGROUND

The Committee is undertaking an inquiry into Better Regulation with the terms of reference being to ‘champion the cause of decreasing the level of regulatory burden that is faced by Northern Ireland farmers’.

The purpose of the briefing by DARD officials is to set the scene for Members as they embark on their Inquiry and before they call other interested parties to give evidence.

KEY POINTS

The joint DARD/DOE Northern Ireland Better Regulation and Simplification Review was published on 16 June 2009 and contained 85 recommendations to reduce the administrative burden. The DARD response was published on 18 May 2010. DARD had specific input into 78 recommendations and accepted 63 of these recommendations. 15 were rejected for various reasons including legal obstacles and disproportionate costs.

The DARD Better Regulation Action Plan was published on 5 January 2011 covering the period to 31 March 2013. An overall reduction of 10.3%, validated by the Ulster Farmers’ Union and NI Agricultural Producers Association, was achieved within this period. This was against a target of 25%.

The DETI Minister, on behalf of the Executive commissioned a Review of Business Red Tape, which published its report in November 2014. Agri-food was targeted as a priority sector within this review. The response to the review is being considered by Departments and will be submitted to the Executive shortly.

The European Commission has also committed to a better regulation agenda and its 2015 annual work programme aims to ensure that EU institutions only create legislation which is workable and delivers benefits without overburdening those who have to comply.

DARD is committed to the Going for Growth Report which contains nine specific recommendations under a Better Regulation theme.

DARD also subscribes to the principles of better regulation and does not set out to make things difficult for people. We ensure that rigorous regulatory impact assessments are carried out and simplify wherever possible.

There are difficulties in further reducing the administrative burden on farmers and the CAP Reform process illustrates some of these with a complex regulatory framework and the Single Payment Scheme replaced by four schemes. Some progress, however, was made on simplifying the initial proposals and following consultation with the industry, the Minister made decisions, particularly around greening, very much with simplification in mind.

Good progress has been made in some areas, notably towards the eradication of Brucellosis and the very near prospect of attaining OBF status.

It is also clear that further roll out of enhanced digital services with appropriate support offers significant potential for farmers in reducing the burden of compliance and increasing ease of access to simplified services. Increasingly, our focus will be on delivering more services online as there are very real gains to be made by farmers who are willing to make the shift to digital. Forms can be pre-populated with information we already hold and with errors rectified before submission, so reducing time taken to complete applications and deal with subsequent queries.

The Minister has given a clear commitment to examine any specific areas of excessive administrative burden which are brought to our attention and to simplify wherever possible.

Officials attending

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