

## AERA Committee Meeting Update – Wednesday 24 June 2020

### Food & Farming Group Input

#### Covid 19 update

##### Single Application

- The window for Single Application claims and amendments is now closed.
- Inspections have recommenced across Basic Payment and the Environmental Farming Scheme. Whistleblower inspections are ongoing in relation to potential breaches of cross compliance, site visits are considered on a case by case basis. Consideration is being given in relation to how other inspections and how social distancing can be managed.
- The Minister has agreed to reduce the control rates for BPS inspections in 2020. This is in line with action taken by England, Scotland and Wales. A Statutory Rule to allow this reduction in control rates is being drafted and will be made under the negative resolution procedure in due course.
- Applications to the fourth Tranche of the Environmental Farming Scheme Higher level have been prioritised and letters of offer are being prepared for issue.

#### Covid-19 – Current key issues for Agri-food sector

1. NI Executive allocation of £25m for market interventions to support Farm and Horticultural Businesses.

**Position – Minister Poots has indicated that the funding would be allocated to those hardest hit based on the evidence in a fair and equitable way. Officials have engaged with numerous industry representatives and stakeholders, to hear their analysis of the impacts of the pandemic and their proposals for allocation of the £25m. During those discussions, there was a clear acceptance of the need for support to be targeted at those farm businesses hardest hit financially as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

2. While supply chains are still working effectively there still remain concerns across all stakeholders that staff availability for work could decline quickly if staff have to self-isolate as a consequence of the new Track and Trace protocols.

**Position – Output from the sector remains at 100% of demand, with levels of absenteeism reported as remaining relatively low.**

3. Beef prices started to fall during March with the average steer price reaching a low point of £3.15/kg for the week ending 25 April (down 16p/kg on March prices at £3.31). Since then prices have increased to £3.46/kg and it is expected that forthcoming statistics will show further increases as weekly quotes have been improving and are now above early March levels. Lamb prices fell by 40p/kg at the start of April but recovered relatively quickly to prior levels. The latest GDT auction (16 June) for milk products showed an increase of 1.9% from the previous auction (skim milk powder up 3.1%, whole milk powder up 2.2%, cheddar up 1.4%, butter down 1.0%). Lakeland dairies announced a base price of 23p/litre for April and

May milk (down 0.75p/litre on March and 2.25p/litre on February cumulatively). Dale Farm also announced a base price of 23p/litre for April milk (down 1p/litre on March and 2p/litre on February cumulatively). Other firms that have announced price drops include Glanbia Cheese (0.5p/litre for April milk), Glanbia Ireland (0.5p/litre for April/May milk) and Aurivo (0.75p/litre for April milk).

**Position – DAERA is continuing to monitor market conditions, liaise with DEFRA and other DA's, and work is ongoing to develop support schemes for farmers in affected sectors. Work is also ongoing to monitor impacts in the sheep, potato and hatching egg sectors.**

4. Financial pressures continue to impact across supply chains as markets adapt to the changing trading environment. For example, loss of food service markets, certain export markets, reduced productivity in processing plants and increases in some input costs like animal feed. Industry has called for financial support measures including grants, rates relief, loans and EU (CMO) schemes.

**Position – DAERA continues to work closely with industry to assess the potential impacts on the supply chain, and to explore mitigation measures if required. DAERA has announced a £25m funding support package.**

5. Many horticulture businesses producing and selling spring bedding plants, cut flowers and ornamentals rely on sales at this time of year. There is a narrow window for sales and a short shelf life for the product with 60% of annual sales occurring in spring.

**Position - Enabling people to visit garden centres while remaining safe, has provided a much needed injection of cash to these businesses and their suppliers and has gone some way towards helping the sector recoup some of its loses. DAERA Officials continue to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 on the horticulture sector to assess the level of financial support required.**

6. As with private sector workers, there is concern that a shortage of workers in key roles within Government/Agencies with statutory inspection roles to protect public health, could lead to a slow down or halt in food processing capacity. This would limit not only the amount of product available but also have knock on effects at farm level.

**Position – DAERA are reprioritising workstreams in light of the pressures created by Covid-19 to maintain key services.**

#### **College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE)**

- The majority of the education programmes at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) have concluded for the 2019/20 academic year.
- The Minister will deliver an address to all CAFRE students at an online student engagement event scheduled for circulation on 19 June 2020. It is intended that graduation ceremonies will be arranged at a more appropriate time, depending on Government advice on large group gatherings, to celebrate the students' success in the presence of their friends and family.

- CAFRE Knowledge Advisory Service Advisers and Technologists have produced technical articles, videos and webinars which have been made available online and promoted through social media channels to support those sectors of the agri-food industry most impacted by COVID-19.
- CAFRE are progressing the development of recovery plans, in line with the Executive's five stage plan on the lifting of the COVID-19 restrictions, for the future delivery of education programmes during the next academic year and the enhanced provision of knowledge advisory programmes to the agri-food industry.
- CAFRE's residential facilities continue to be used by the Department of Health as part of their contingency planning with health workers using Enniskillen and Greenmount Campuses for overnight accommodation.

#### **Update on Essential Legislation**

- The UKG Agriculture Bill has moved to the House of Lords where its Second Reading took place on 10 June 2020.

### **Veterinary Service & Animal Health Group**

#### **Covid 19 update**

##### **Delivery of Official Controls**

- The delivery of official controls, that is, ante mortem and post mortem inspections, verification of food business operators' compliance with hygiene, animal health and welfare requirements continues in all slaughterhouses. All slaughterhouses are working normally with full throughput maintained.
- VSAHG officials continue to actively engage with the Public Health Agency (PHA), Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI) and the industry to ensure adherence with PHA advice and guidance in all food processing establishments.
- In accordance with government guidance on Covid-19, Agri-food Inspection Branch have recommenced some pre-notified and unaccompanied on-farm inspections for food safety. Remote inspection work is also being completed across the dairy, meat and egg sectors to meet official control requirements.

##### **Bovine TB Programme**

- From the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, revised temporary measures for bovine TB (bTB) testing have been introduced, based upon the principles that:
  - (i) testing should not take place except in exceptional circumstances; and
  - (ii) the primacy of public health requirements.
- The new measures are designed to safeguard the health and well-being of farmers, veterinary practitioners and staff, maintain animal and public health controls and ease the burden on farmers.
- **Current Position**

- Private Veterinary Practitioners and farmers are working hard to catch up with TB testing that was delayed following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, in week commencing 13<sup>th</sup> April 2020, only 44% of herds and 41% of animals were tested, compared with the equivalent week in 2019. In week commencing Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020, TB tests were completed for 123% of herds and 120% of animals were tested when compared to the equivalent week in June 2019.
- When comparing the period 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020 to 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020 with a similar period in 2019, 20% fewer herds and 23% fewer animals have been tested. There is a risk that the reduction in TB testing levels during the Covid-19 crisis could lead to a rise in TB herd incidence later in 2020.
- VSAHG officials will continue to monitor the impact of the new bTB testing measures.

#### **Resumption of Animal By-Product Inspections**

- In accordance with public health advice, inspections of hunt kennels, farm approved incinerators and on-farm feed sampling will recommence with effect from week commencing 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2020.

#### **Trade Export Certification**

- From the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, a number of easements in relation to export health certificates for exports of live animals and products of animal origin to various countries have been introduced. Such arrangements help to minimise the need for face-to-face interaction between Private Veterinary Practitioners, exporters and DAERA staff.
- **Current Position**
- Further third country export health certification easements for exports of all commodities to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will be implemented from Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> June.
- The current easements being implemented for Australia, China, Gibraltar, Myanmar, Philippines and the United States of America make up between 30 and 40% of the total third country exports from Northern Ireland over recent weeks. The addition of Hong Kong on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020 and the UAE will increase this further. Negotiations are ongoing with a number of other countries.

#### **Animal Welfare**

- **Zoos Funding**
- The Department issued a questionnaire to licensed zoo establishments in Northern Ireland in order to establish the evidence base for providing financial support.

- Officials are analysing the responses and are in the process of developing appropriate governance arrangements should a scheme be required.

#### **Essential Legislation**

- Work on essential legislation continues but at a slower pace given the diversion of resource to Covid-19 related work. This diversion, alongside the potential for additional Covid-19 related absences, means that there is a risk that legislation may not be completed within the required timescales and/or to standard.

## **Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Environment, Marine & Fisheries Group**

### **ENVIRONMENT UPDATE**

#### **Covid 19 Update**

##### **Waste Management Collection, Storage and Processing**

- As at 17 June 2020, there are 67 Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) open across Northern Ireland with further sites expected to re-open in a phased manner over the coming weeks. HWRCs are also accepting an increased number of waste streams at many sites.

##### **Maintaining Drinking Water Quality**

- NIEA and Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) have been working with NI Water and DfI in their application for 3 Drought Orders as a result of the prolonged period of dry weather. On 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2020, NIEA agreed to NI Water's proposals to increase abstraction rates and reduce compensation flows which will have a detrimental impact on the environment. These are required to protect the raw drinking water supply required to serve water treatment works. DfI published the Drought Orders on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2020. Work continues to finalise the specific method statements to minimise the impact on the environment.
- There has been some improvement in the situation due to the change in weather and significant work done by NI Water in re-zoning and tankering water to areas at highest risk. Although the treated water storage reserves have returned to normal and demand has reduced, NIEA and DWI continue to work with NI Water in the event that the situation may escalate again. This is critical for maintaining our supply of clean safe drinking water.
- DWI have been working with NI Water to agree their Rollback Plan to re-introduce regulatory monitoring of drinking water again. In the week commencing 18<sup>th</sup> May, NI Water started to increase sampling frequencies for most of the regulatory parameters that had been suspended from mid-March. This represents a return to 90% of their regulatory monitoring for drinking water. Monitoring at consumers' taps is still suspended, however samples which are representative of the water being supplied are being collected to ensure continued public health protection.
- NIEA have also been working with NI Water to agree their Rollback Plan to re-introduce regulatory monitoring of wastewater discharges. NI Water are seeking a further extension to the current Regulatory Position Statement for Reduced Sampling until August 2020 due to limited capacity within the wastewater laboratories. NIEA have agreed in principle subject to

the provision of clear evidence of the resilience issues and the planned mitigation measures to return to a full regulatory sampling programme.

- DEFRA have approached NIEA to take part in a research project for Covid-19 in wastewater. NIEA are currently scoping the possibilities of extending the research within Northern Ireland. The research will monitor wastewater for Covid-19. The monitoring results would be used in conjunction with other research to provide early warning of a resurgence in the virus.

### **Future Viability of Environmental NGOs**

- DAERA has worked with Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) to issue a second survey to provide an update of the impact of COVID-19 on the eNGO sector. NIEL have extended the closing date of the survey until 19<sup>th</sup> June.

### **Country Parks and Nature Reserves**

- Minister Poots announced on 12<sup>th</sup> June that he authorised opening of public conveniences in DAERA forest and country parks from 15<sup>th</sup> June. Vans selling beverages, ice creams and beverages have been also been allowed to operate since 15<sup>th</sup> June.
- Toilets are opened at Castle Archdale Country Park, Ness Country Park, Peatlands Park, and the Quoile Countryside Centre.
- Toilets at Scrabo Country Park, Crawfordsburn, Helen's Bay and the Duross bay toilets at Castle Archdale Country Park are not yet able to open as health and safety works are ongoing (primarily legionnaires work). The Department are working towards opening toilets at these properties as soon as possible.

### **Update on Essential Legislation: Environment Bill**

- The Public Bill Committee at Westminster is expected to resume scrutiny of the Bill on 7 July. It is hoped that the Assembly debate on the Legislative Consent Motion will take place on 30<sup>th</sup> June.

### **Update on Essential Finance Information**

- Nothing new to report.

## **Environment, Marine & Fisheries Group**

### **FISHERIES UPDATE**

#### **Covid 19 Update**

#### **Fisheries - Sea Fishing Sector**

- On 3 April 2020 the Minister announced that the Department would proceed with a scheme of financial support for the sea fish catching sector.
- Letters of Invitation to apply for the scheme were issued to 166 vessel owners and 81 letters of ineligibility were issued during April.
- After appeals, a total of 169 Letters of Offer and Claim Forms have been issued, with 161 returned to date. As of 18<sup>th</sup> June, the Department has made payments to 159 vessel owners totalling £1,220,000.

#### **Aquaculture Sector**

- The Aquaculture Financial Assistance Scheme was announced by the Minister on 26 May. This funding is to be delivered through the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) Programme.
- On 29 May, letters of Invitation to apply to the Scheme were issued to 19 potential eligible businesses. A further 38 letters were issued to potential ineligible businesses to advise of the appeal mechanism.
- 11 applications have been received to date (18<sup>th</sup> June 2020). It is hoped that the first letters of offer will be issued to eligible applicants by 26 June. The Scheme will remain open until the end of June.

#### **Lough Neagh Fishery**

- While some sectors within Europe are beginning to reopen it will take longer for the eel market to recover which the Lough Neagh fishermen and the local community depend on.
- EMFF Regulation 2020/560 has recently been amended particularly Article 33 which may provide possible funding opportunities for Lough Neagh Commercial eel fishermen who at this time are unable to work during the short season 1<sup>st</sup> May until end of October.
- DAERA officials have confirmed that Lough Neagh commercial eel fishermen would be eligible for financial assistance under this amendment. A meeting with the Lough Neagh Fishermen's Cooperative Society (LNFCS) took place on the 11<sup>th</sup> June to discuss the proposals for such a scheme. Work is ongoing between DAERA officials and the LNFCS to look at the various issues and compile the necessary data. A further meeting has been scheduled for Friday 19 June.

#### **Update on Essential Legislation: UK Fisheries Bill**

- The next stage (Report) of the Bill in the House of Lords will begin on 22 June 2020. A second day for the Report Stage has been arranged for 24 June 2020.

#### **Update on Essential Finance Information**

- Nothing new to report.

## Rural Affairs, Forestry Service & Estate Transformations Group

### RURAL AFFAIRS DIVISION

#### RURAL AFFAIRS RESPONSE TO COVID-19

Rural Affairs continues to focus on payments processing and supporting partners. Work continues on the draft Rural Policy Framework. Work also continues in the DAERA DIRECT Offices both in offices and via home working.

#### DAERA DIRECT OFFICES

Admin staff continue to work in the 12 DAERA Direct offices on essential services, whilst maintaining social distancing, on a rota basis. The remainder are working from home on PCs and laptops, with secure access to the relevant DAERA databases such as APHIS, NIFAIS and CIS. Recovery plans are being developed to allow more staff to return to the offices and increase capacity.

#### TACKLING RURAL POVERTY AND SOCIAL ISOLATION (TRPSI)

These TRPSI funded initiatives continue to proactively deliver support to rural dwellers. To date, under the Coronavirus Community Fund (CFNI) 154 rural organisations have been supported in total with £433,852 awarded. Some 74 of these have been funded from DAERA's £200k contribution agreed by the DAERA Minister. Also, 13 organisations (7 rural) ineligible for support by CFNI, with eligible projects, have now been grant aided through a partnership arrangement between DAERA, DFC and the Rural Community Network, receiving £42,645 in total, an average of £3,280.

#### PROJECT STRATUM

DfE lead on Project Stratum. The tender has now closed (5/5/20) and the bids are being technically appraised and assessed by a specialist team in DfE. At this point, the project is still on target to issue a contract this financial year.

#### RURAL SUPPORT

Rural Support continue to deal with calls and offer support. An on-line resources hub is in development for the farming community and sectors that support the community.

Rural Support are currently adequately resourced to deal with the increase and DAERA officials continue to liaise with them on a very regular basis. The table below provides a comparison of calls to the Rural Support Helpline between 2019 and 2020.

	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
<b>Jan</b>	39	68
<b>Feb</b>	31	34
<b>March</b>	33	85
<b>April</b>	34	128
<b>May</b>	40	64
<b>June</b>	37	22 * (1 <sup>st</sup> to 12 <sup>th</sup> June)



### **ROLE OF RURAL COMMUNITY TRANSPORT PARTNERSHIP (RCTP'S)**

The RCTP's continue to work in a very effective partnership approach with local Councils and Health Trusts, in delivering services to rural dwellers.

Some 3,804 individual food parcels have been delivered to vulnerable rural dwellers and another 4,361 parcels have been delivered to hubs for onward transmission to households. RCTP's have made 7,016 telephone contacts and these have resulted in 3,833 individuals receiving support including signposting, onward referral and inclusion into the food parcel scheme.

### **SPRING SOCIAL PRESCRIBING PROJECT**

Some 4,391 contacts have been made to vulnerable people and 1,368 of these people have received other forms of support such as food and medicines.

### **FARM FAMILIES HEALTH CHECK PROGRAMME (FFHCP) - COVID-19 RESPONSE**

Contact made with 286 people in the Northern, Western, Southern and South Eastern Trust areas who are aged 70+. Some 257 of these people have received support and advice.

### **RURAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT SERVICE**

Councils have identified the Rural Support Networks as delivery partners and all are involved in the community response. DAERA officials continue to meet with the Rural Support Networks on a fortnightly basis to provide support and advice.

In terms of practical activity on the ground, RSN's have been involved in a wide range of community initiatives including the following:

#### **Rural Support Networks Activity.**

- 963 food parcels delivered through member organisations
- £32,000 funding provided to 80 community groups for PPE and sanitiser
- 12 Wellness packs delivered
- 24 families support with connectivity
- 14 families supported financially due to low income
- 1500 volunteers identified and currently providing Covid 19 assistance
- 28 referrals prescription collection
- 610 e bulletins issued detailing funding programmes, Covid 19 assistance
- 274 households visited as part of the Door to Door Initiative
- 650 groups referred to funding programmes
- Zoom training delivered to 10 participants

Facebook posts with a total reach of 2000

## **RURAL POLICY – RECOVERY**

Work continues on a draft Rural Policy Framework. We still intend to go to consultation later this year.

## **EU LEADER PROGRAMME AND TOURISM**

RAD continue to monitor progress on the LEADER and Tourism measures. Issues on access for projects remain as previously advised. The Department is aware that many contractors are now back on site or planning to go back on site.

Payments continue to be processed in line with easements set out within EU Commission guidance.

DfE has established a Tourism Recovery Steering Group and Working Group to put in place the structures that will help support recovery and prepare the industry to respond when consumer demand ultimately returns. The Department has representatives sitting on both Groups. The Department has also established a Tourism Recovery Advisory Group; the first meeting took place on 5 June. The Advisory Group will work collaboratively to provide a cohesive response to the issues facing the tourism sector in NI and to encourage the development of a recovery framework that has Green Growth as the pathway to sustainable development.

## **PROCESSING OF GRANT AID CLAIMS**

RAD continue to process claims and make payments relating to TRPSI and LEADER.

### **Rural Development Programme**

Programme	1 <sup>st</sup> March to 2 June 2020		3 <sup>rd</sup> June to 19 <sup>th</sup> June	
	No of Payments	Amount	No of Payments	Amount
LEADER	142	£4,519,596.25	10	£359,229.86
Running Costs to LAGS	22	£634,245.40	5	£260,562.69
TOURISM	7	£1,141,339.95	0	0
Farm Business Improvement	12	£1,250,179.00	2	£62,541.00
Other RDP Schemes	9	£69,309.84	0	0

There are an additional 9 LEADER project payments valued at £228,108.80 are being processed for payment.

## **Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation (TRPSI)**

Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme 2019		Rural Business Development Grant Scheme 2019	
No. Claims Paid	Grant Amount Paid	No. Claims Paid	Grant Amount Paid
16/3/2020 12/6/2020	- 16/3/20 -12/06/2020	16/3/2020 12/06/2020	- 16/3/20 -12/06/2020
465	£573,127	123	£411,397

#### **Local Community Development Support Service Programme:**

£173,000 paid to Rural Support Networks to cover the period 1 April to 30 June 2020.

£70,000 paid in micro grant management fees for the 19/20 scheme.

#### **FOREST SERVICE**

Following Ministers authorisation to re-open toilet facilities and concession stands, DAERA staff have completed legionnaire checks, installed appropriate signage and the finalised enhanced cleaning rotas to make available toilet facilities at Forest Parks from the afternoon of 15 June. These include sites at Tollymore, Drum Manor, Glenariff, Parkanaur and Castlewellan.

The NI Direct site and the Discover NI site which it directs users to, are being kept up to date with relevant opening details to inform the public.

With NI Executive agreement on 15 June to bring forward the date for the re-opening of caravan parks, camping sites and self-catering tourist accommodation, DAERA staff are undertaking the necessary work including risk assessments to prepare for a reopening date of 26 June 2020 for these services.

### **Central Services & Contingency Planning Group**

#### **Staff Engagement & Communication**

- The wellbeing and mental health of staff, both working at home and office situations has been a key issue for the Department. In response, specific Webinars on health and wellbeing are being delivered alongside a series of communication Webinars by senior staff.
- Additionally, a multigrade group on wellbeing has been established. The group meets fortnightly to look at new methods of communication and to consider how the Department can better support our cadre of 'WELL Champions' to provide practical information and advice to staff and to feed issues of concern up the line. The first article from the group was released on 16 June 2020.
- Preparation for our next Grade 7 Leadership Programme is now underway. These will take the form of virtual courses and it is the intention to, where possible, pick up all our programme of leadership events virtually over the coming months.
- Finally, a dedicated resource will be added to the Department's Staff Engagement team to develop a wellbeing strategy for the Department.

## Covid 19 Recovery

- The Department is considering ways in which it can recover better from the ongoing Covid 19 emergency. This is an essential element of the Department's Major Emergency Response Plan (MERP), which continues to be in force to respond to stakeholder and societal issues related to Covid 19.
- The initial scoping work on recovering better will identify a range of initiatives across all aspects of the Department's internal and external functions, with a priority focus on reducing the impact and aiding the recovery of citizens, the economy and the environment from Covid 19.

## AFBI Testing

- AFBI in collaboration with Queens University Belfast and Ulster University are supporting the Department of Health's efforts in respect of Covid-19 testing
- An SLA with the Belfast Trust has been signed.
- Live testing commenced on 21 May 2020.
- As at 18 June, AFBI are still being sent 94 samples (one microplate) per day for testing. AFBI has weekly meetings with RVL and will move to the next phase 200-500 test per day when RVL are in a position to provide more samples.
- Tests have been run and results provided in line with agreed targets.
- The release of staff to work on Covid-19 testing is currently planned so as not to impact on the priority animal health and food safety testing programmes. This will, however, be kept under close review.

## Questions from Members to DAERA on COVID-19 Update 21 May 2020

Briefing Subject/Area	Question	Answer
Funding	Can the Minister provide details of the £25m support scheme for agriculture and horticulture?	<p>Since the £25m COVID-19 support fund was announced, Minister Poots and Officials have consulted with numerous industry representatives and stakeholders, to hear their analysis of the impacts of the pandemic and their proposals for allocation of the £25m.</p> <p>During those discussions, there was a clear acceptance of the need for support to be targeted at those farm business hardest hit financially as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Minister Poots plans to make a final decision on the allocation of the funding soon and it is his intention to ensure that it is administered with ease and at pace so that businesses get the funding into their bank</p>

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		accounts quickly to address cash flow concerns.
Agri-food sector	<p>The Minister has been made aware that sector has called for a pause on current Brexit plans – What are you doing about it?</p> <p>Has DAERA engaged with the House of Lords regarding concerns that an amendment on the standard of food imports has not been included in the Agriculture Bill?</p> <p>Has DAERA assessed the implications for local farmers of the failure of the British government to include food import standards in the Agriculture Bill?</p>	<p>UKG has been clear that it will not request any extension to the transition period. The transition period will therefore end on 31 December 2020, in line with the provisions of the Withdrawal Agreement. It is important that the industry continues to engage with DAERA to get the best outcome we can in the time available.</p> <p>DAERA does not intend to engage with the House of Lords regarding any concerns that an amendment on the standard of food imports has not been included in the Agriculture Bill.</p> <p>The Agriculture Bill will be scrutinised at Committee Stage in the House of Lords. This will be an opportunity for Members to table amendments relating to the standard of food imports, and some have already done so.</p> <p>The DAERA Minister has made it very clear to the UK Government that high food standards must be maintained. The UK's food producers cannot be placed at a competitive disadvantage to third country competitors who may benefit from greater levels of support and/or significantly lower regulatory costs.</p> <p>Amendments relating to the standard of food imports have already been tabled by Members in the House of Lords. These will be debated at Committee Stage with a view to their inclusion in the Agriculture Bill.</p>
Aqua-culture sector	<p>The department states that it is giving Consideration to the recent amendment to the European and Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), that provides the possibility of granting financial compensation – What is it that the department is considering?</p>	<p>The Aquaculture Financial Assistance Scheme was announced by the Minister on 26 May. This funding, which is being delivered through the EMFF, will provide funding to businesses of up to 50% of the income lost from sales within the qualifying period, March to May. The average monthly sales from the last 3 years' accounts will be used as the baseline. The scheme opened on 29 May. We have received 11 applications from potential eligible businesses to date.</p>
Inland Fisheries	<p>The department states there they cannot provide any additional support for the loughneagh fishermen - What are the</p>	<p>The Department was unable to provide additional support for a fixed costs scheme.</p> <p>In a more recent June update, the Committee will note that the Department is currently reviewing the</p>

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	<p>consequences for this industry?</p> <p>What feedback have you received from loughneagh fishermen?</p> <p>Update on Essential Legislation: UK Fisheries Bill 1. Are there any impacts for the north in any potential delays to the timing of the Legislative Consent Motion in the Assembly?</p>	<p>recent amendments to the EMFF scheme which would all assistance in respect of COVID difficulties and those who have had to stop fishing. A meeting has been held with the LNFCS and officials are continuing to liaise with them over this option. Whilst most fishermen are part time, the continued difficulties with market collapse could impact on the numbers of fishers in the future.</p> <p>Fishermen are keen to get some financial assistance for the losses experienced due to Covid 19, due to loss of markets and incomes.</p> <p>The Bill will be introduced to the Commons immediately after Third Reading in the House of Lords, with Second Reading no sooner than the period of two weekends following its introduction.</p> <p>A programme motion adopted at Second Reading will confirm dates for the Committee and remaining stages in the House of Commons.</p> <p>A proposal to shorten the Commons summer recess would free up more time for progressing the Bill but timings for each stage will be dependent on other parliamentary business.</p> <p>The guidance says that LCMs should be secured before the last amending stage in the first House (by Third Reading in the Lords or Report in the Commons). However, it is not uncommon to receive consent ahead of the last amending stage of the second House, particularly if the Bill has devolved provisions added in the second House.</p> <p>Therefore at the latest, DEFRA will need consent ahead of the Commons Report stage.</p> <p>The legislative consent motions for Scotland and Wales will be debated after their respective summer recesses.</p>
Environment	<p>How many people have been convicted during the past 6 months for flytipping?</p> <p>Does DAERA have any plans to upscale detection and prosecution of people engaged in fly tipping ?</p>	<p>NIEA Enforcement Branch investigates incidents of illegal waste dumping and does not record incidents under the term fly-tipping.</p> <p>Both the NIEA and the local councils are responsible for management of illegal waste dumping. At present, under a draft protocol with NIEA, local councils will generally take responsibility for smaller scale illegal waste deposits (under 20 cubic metres) and as such deal with the majority of 'fly-tipping' incidents.</p> <p>Since December 2019, NIEA has overseen 2</p>

		<p>convictions, generating £15,500 of fines, for illegal waste dumping, against 1 business and 1 individual.</p> <p>During the same period, the Agency has issued 8 fixed penalty notices, earning £3,100 in penalties. This has proved to be a timely and effective means of tackling smaller scale offenders.</p> <p>NIEA has spent the last few years developing a well trained and equipped Enforcement Branch. Investigations are conducted in accordance with the NIEA Enforcement Policy and NIEA will continue to investigate suspected unauthorised waste activities that optimises its resources through targeted recruitment, training and continued partnership working with key partner agencies. Some prioritisation of investigative work has been necessary in line with the Department's response to the Covid19 crisis.</p>
TRPSI	Can the department provide a breakdown of how funding was allocated between the nine organisations deemed ineligible by CFNI for the Coronavirus Community Fund who have been granted aided through the partnership arrangement between DAERA, DFC and the Rural Community Network?	<p>To date Rural Community Network on behalf of DAERA and DfC has distributed £42,645 to 13 faith based eligible applicants received through the CFNI Coronavirus Community Fund, an average of £3,280 each.</p> <p>£21,175 has been distributed to 7 rural organisations and £21,470 to 6 urban organisations.</p>
Rural Affairs	<p>In the absence of doing any consultation at this time – is it feasible to progress areas of identified need and prepare pilot projects or schemes to help and support communities, micro enterprises etc post covid? (There will be a need to kickstart the economy and construction is one potential aspect that could support this so allowing construction works in rural areas is one such option)</p> <p>What consideration is the</p>	<p>It is hoped to progress the rural policy framework to consultation over the summer, however in the interim DAERA is looking at progressing a number of pilot schemes targeted at business and community to help inform the framework going forward, to provide some degree of gap funding before the new Rural Business and Community Investment Programme is drafted and approved and to provide some assistance coming out of the Covid 19 crisis.</p> <p>All working groups were contacted and asked to</p>

	<p>department giving to a rural recovery plan in the context of the rural Framework? (There is a concern post covid 19 that many businesses may not reopen so timely consideration of how to address issues like these would be important).</p> <p>We have seen many communities doing a clean-up of the country side - Are there any opportunities to support their efforts?</p>	<p>provide any additional input on the back of the Covid-19 crisis. The main finding was that broadband is even more important than ever and a must for rural communities. The TRPSI programme is bringing forward the Rural Business Development Scheme to assist small rural businesses.</p> <p>The rural tourism working group had highlighted the possible need for a 'Tidy Towns' type initiative to support rural communities wishing to enhance their areas through clean up type work, this will be investigated going forward and may form a scheme in the new Rural Business and Community Investment Programme.</p>
<b>Budget</b>	<p>In what areas of your departmental budget have you identified a reduced budgetary pressure due to the Covid-19 crisis?</p> <p>What plans have you to reallocate spending from areas of reduced pressure to the COVID-19 response?</p> <p>What plans have you to reallocate spending from areas of reduced pressure to other areas within your department?</p>	<p>This information was previously provided to the AERA Committee on 9 June as part of the June Monitoring Round Briefing in advance of AERA Committee Meeting on 11 June 2020.</p>
<b>Distribution Issues</b>	<p>The document mentions supply chains and haulage companies. Does the department know if any of the staff of these companies are still furloughed, as they are vital to our supply chains?</p> <p>The document also talks about the relaxation of certain safety controls with regards to Bovine TB and transportation of live animals - how long is this</p>	<p>According to the latest (25 May 2020) Freight Transport Association UK Coronavirus survey, the percentage of Furloughed staff by category are; HGV drivers 14.0%, Van drivers 5.5%, Warehouse staff 7.0%, All other road transport staff (support staff, managers, administrators) 31.6%.</p> <p><b>Bovine TB</b></p> <p>Since the end of March, guidance on bTB testing arrangements has been updated on three occasions. The most recent guidance, which issued 1 May, outlined a number of mitigating measures to ensure</p>



	<p>sustainable for and does it put the consumer in danger?</p>	<p>that disruption to farm businesses is kept to a minimum. In particular, calves under 180 days of age may be exempted from bTB tests, where they cannot be tested safely. This guidance has taken account of feedback from both farmers and veterinarians which noted that the handling of young bovines was the biggest obstacle to maintaining social distancing during a bTB skin test. It also reflects the experience of bTB testing in other jurisdictions.</p> <p>The current advice is that visits to carry out bTB tests may continue if they can be done safely in accordance with guidance issued by the Public Health Agency. For each arranged test, the testing veterinarian must discuss the conduct of the test with the herd keeper before commencing. If the herd keeper has any doubts that they cannot provide the necessary facilities to maintain social distancing throughout the test it should not be undertaken. Should a test commence the veterinarian must ensure that social distancing is maintained throughout. If it cannot, the test must be abandoned. The position with regard to bTB testing throughout the UK is being kept under review as the situation develops.</p> <p>The current guidance does not put the consumer in danger. It is a risk based strategy/policy which has helped to ensure that the maximum number of herds and adult animals are tested safely. Routine surveillance for TB continues in meat plants and milk continues to be pasteurised so the risk to the consumer is minimised.</p> <p><b>Export of live animals</b></p> <p>The Committee has asked about relaxations regarding the transport of live animals. This question appears to relate to easements in place regarding the export of these animals.</p> <p>An easement associated with the administrative process for export has been agreed with third country partners and is sustainable for as long as that agreement remains in place. The administrative process has no impact on the official controls delivered by Departmental officials in NI food production establishments exporting to consumers in these third countries.</p>
<p>DAERA Assistance to Councils</p>	<p>Can you give any indication of how many food parcels have been delivered to date?</p>	<p>2,300 food parcels have been delivered by DAERA staff up until week ended 12 June 2020.</p>

Update on Ferries / Hauliers	Can the department give any indication of what the critical issues are that Hauliers in the north face in maintaining the supply of critical goods for the north in this current crisis?	According to the latest (25 May 2020) Freight Transport Association UK Coronavirus survey and current stakeholder engagement the critical issues faced by NI Hauliers include; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced Ferry sailings</li> <li>• Empty outbound trailers</li> <li>• Financial pressures concerning vehicles, premises, insurance, staff retention, workloads</li> </ul>
Second Rural Needs Annual Monitoring Report	Can the Minister provide specific examples of public authorities altering their policies, strategies and plans in response to the Rural Needs Act?	The second Rural Needs Annual Monitoring Report, published in December 2019 contains information sent to my department by public authorities on the exercise of their functions under The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016. Examples of policies that have been altered by Public Authorities include the relocation of Newtownhamilton Community Dental Clinic by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, the reduction in Local Office opening hours and the Revision of the Management of Lone Working Policy by the NIHE, and the revision of the School Crossing Policy Service by the Education Authority.