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FROM THE DEPUTY PRESIDENT

Sheila Mawhinney
Room 373,
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw,
Stormont
Belfast,
BT4 3XX

Dear Sheila,

CONSULTATION ON THE ROAD TRAFFIC (AMENDMENT) BILL

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the above consultation. The Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) is the largest farming organisation in Northern Ireland representing nearly 12,000 farming families. The UFU represents farmers from all areas of Northern Ireland and across all sectors.

We would like to welcome the new requirement that helmets be worn on quad bikes at all times on public roads. The wearing of helmets is something the UFU has encouraged in order to bring down the number of preventable deaths on these vehicles.

We would like to make some comments on the impact of the proposed legislation on young tractor drivers, particularly at times when they are frequently on the road, such as during silage season. Many young people living on farms may drive tractors as part of the agricultural operation from 13 years old, and from the age of 16 they are allowed to drive on the road during agricultural operations. The input of young drivers is vital to the industry and we hope that the proposed legislation will not impact this source of seasonal employment. These young drivers gain invaluable road experience which we believe should be taken into account when it comes to their car driving tests. Previously a driving instructor could tailor their services to suit a learner driver who has gained such experience by meeting the learner at their level of capability. It would be completely unnecessary- not to mention expensive and time consuming- for these young drivers to have to go through the full driving course.

Regarding the changes to licensing requirements, we do have some concerns. Firstly, the limitation on the number of passengers aged between 14 and 20 for a period of six months following gaining their licence. We are concerned that this will have a disproportionate negative effect on rural communities where young people often need to drive. In the absence of a viable public transport network in rural areas, there is no choice but to use private transport. It is imperative that due and realistic consideration is given to the effect on rural economy and culture of any change to the current legislation.

I trust our comments will be given full consideration but should you wish to query any comments raised please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barclay Bell', enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

BARCLAY BELL