



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

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COMMITTEE  
FOR THE OFFICE OF THE  
FIRST MINISTER AND DEPUTY  
FIRST MINISTER

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**OFFICIAL REPORT**  
(Hansard)

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**European Issues**

14 April 2010

**NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY**

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**COMMITTEE  
FOR THE OFFICE OF THE FIRST MINISTER AND  
DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER**

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European Issues

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**Members present for all or part of the proceedings:**

Mr Danny Kennedy (Chairperson)  
Mrs Naomi Long (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Alex Attwood  
Mr Tom Elliott  
Mr Francie Molloy  
Mr George Robinson  
Mr Jim Shannon  
Mr Jimmy Spratt

**Witnesses:**

Mrs Diane Dodds MEP

**The Chairperson (Mr Kennedy):**

We will receive a briefing on European issues. I am conscious that our quorum is vulnerable. I seek everyone's co-operation.

Good afternoon, Mrs Dodds. You are very welcome. I apologise for the delay in starting. Obviously, you are here in your role as a Member of the European Parliament to brief the Committee on European issues. The session is being recorded by Hansard for future reference. We would like you to make an opening statement and then be available to answer questions.

Sessions are normally not expected to run for more than half an hour. Is that acceptable?

**Mrs Diane Dodds MEP:**

Thank you. That is no problem.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you very much indeed.

**Mrs D Dodds:**

First, Committee Chairperson and members, I thank you for your invitation to attend today's meeting. It is encouraging to see the interest that is being shown in European matters. I commend you for your inquiry.

My views on Europe are well known. I come down on the side of the anti-federalist agenda that is so active in Europe. Regardless of whether people are pro- or anti-federalist, for further integration or for withdrawal from Europe, we must deal with the inescapable fact that we are part of the European Union. As such, and as a small region, we must make our presence felt, make our demands known and use that for the benefit of the people whom we represent. That is important, and we are at one in that aim.

More than 70% of legislation that goes through Westminster or regional Assemblies emanates from Brussels. Therefore, Brussels is important, and it becomes ever more so as many in the Parliament, the Commission and the Council pursue further integration. Therefore, ensuring that the voice of Northern Ireland is heard is hugely important. That is not just my job as an MEP or the job of the other two Northern Ireland MEPs; it is the job of the Executive and the Assembly in Northern Ireland. We need to ensure that that role is fulfilled.

The Committee's report into the consideration of European issues makes a number of recommendations. Some of those can help us to have a stronger voice in Europe. The Northern Ireland Executive have an office that operates in Brussels, and we have a good relationship with that office. I was at the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development on Monday where I talked to the official who is charged with looking after agriculture, rural development and fisheries policy, which is hugely important. Therefore, it is important that we have people in Brussels, that we keep making our case there, that we are able to network and that we become

more mainstream. We need to become part of the whole scene out there so that we can pick up on the issues that are hugely important. It is important that this Committee, the Executive and the MEPs work together on issues that are important in Europe. Information sharing is an important part of the process of creating an effective voice for Northern Ireland in Europe.

We need to add value to everything that we have here. That is what Europe can do for us in Northern Ireland. We have some good examples. Post-Lisbon, the European Parliament is a different place. We have the codecision procedure, which means that, in theory, the Parliament should become as powerful as the Council in proposing and deciding upon legislation. That is a big difference that is coming forward. However, many of us think that the codecision procedure will clog up the system, because it must be remembered that, before anyone can get anything through, there has to be opinions from 27 member states on every issue. Therefore, that is a health warning.

For Northern Ireland, the two policy areas on which I have been working hard are fisheries policy and agriculture. Of course, by 2013, those areas face the two big reforms — that of the common fisheries policy (CFP) and the common agriculture policy (CAP). On Monday of this week, I attended the Agriculture Committee in Brussels. The new Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Commissioner Cioloş, was present. We debated the George Lyon own-initiative report by the Committee on the reform of the CAP and what agriculture policy, post-2013, should look like. Commissioner Cioloş announced a consultation period from now to June on ideas for the reform of the CAP. There is a section on the website in which people can have their input about how they think that the CAP should progress.

George Lyon, who was the reporting MEP for the Committee, was here in Northern Ireland. More than 200 farmers from across the spectrum attended a meeting that I hosted in Templepatrick. George also met the Deputy Chairperson of the Assembly's Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development, our colleague Tom Elliott, as well as the Chairperson of that Committee and officials from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD). All such meetings are about influencing reports that are going through Parliament and that will form the basis of Parliament's intent and the EU Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development's intent for future discussions on the CAP. Therefore, those are all important issues.

What do I see as the main issues in the reform of the CAP? There are a number of issues and tensions in the Parliament. The CAP accounts for around 38% to 40% of the total budget of the European Union. With all the competing priorities, the emphasis on economic growth and on climate change, there is a real fight to retain a relevant share of the budget for the common agricultural policy. That will be massively important and is the main objective. If we do not have the budget, we cannot do a lot. However, our farmers will undoubtedly be asked, in many ways, to do more for less.

There are competing priorities, even within the 27 member states. The eastern European states are new member states and do not benefit from the CAP in the same way as the old member states. At the Committee meeting on Monday, a Polish MEP was very vocal in saying that that kind of “discrimination” must end. There will be a push for direct payments to farmers being made at a flat rate and then topped up. It has been proposed that some of the payments should reflect the cost of production and the standard of living in member states. That is a huge issue for Northern Ireland because we depend and our industry depends on support from pillar 1 and from direct payments to farmers. That is a huge issue and will be a huge fight. That will be a priority for me at the EU Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development over the coming months.

That must also be a priority for the Executive, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, this Committee and the Assembly. Northern Ireland agriculture would be in a negative position if it did not receive that amount of support and direct support for farmers from the CAP.

Another important issue is the reform of the CFP, which is going through and will have direct consequences for Northern Ireland. My party and I feel strongly that the United Kingdom should withdraw from the common fisheries policy. Of course, we live in the real world and that is unlikely to happen, so we have to work hard to combat the disastrous effects of the CFP in Northern Ireland. Do not forget that, over the past 10 years, the number of trawlers in our white-fish fleet has been reduced from more than 40 to six, which has been massively detrimental. The Irish Sea has been closed to cod fishing for many years. Last week, I, along with the two other Northern Ireland MEPs, met the Fisheries Commissioner. One of the things that we asked for was a review of the cod recovery programme in the Irish Sea.

The common fisheries policy has had a largely negative effect on Northern Ireland, yet our fishing industry employs about 1,200 people, mainly around the County Down coast in Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie. We need to work together in Europe and Northern Ireland to build on that industry and nurture it so that it can withstand anything that comes its way. We will have particular difficulties with that. Indeed, as members will know, last year, the Fisheries Council implemented a 9% decrease in the amount of prawns, or nephrops. In Europe, they are calling for further science, and I believe that there will be attempts to cut further the amount of prawns that our fishermen are so dependent on. Therefore, that will be a huge issue. The Commissioner has the will to develop some power, if not a lot of power, and she will probably try to push that not to nation states but to regional advisory councils.

Other issues, such as the working time directive, remain very relevant for the United Kingdom. However, the big issue that everyone is talking about in Europe is the problem with the euro and the euro zone and the great debt and the potential for Greece to default on that debt. We have had the bizarre situation whereby every time that a solution is cobbled together, it breaks down a couple of days later. Last Sunday, the Finance Ministers from the euro zone cobbled together a solution whereby they would lend €30 billion to Greece to try to alleviate the debt, but now Angela Merkel is trying to row back from that, and some people in Germany are actually saying that it should be challenged in the constitutional court. Those are all very rife issues.

Two weeks ago, I attended a debate on that issue in the European Parliament, and the answer from most European parliamentarians was not that we should look at the problem and allow nation states to manage their own fiscal and monetary affairs but that there should be further integration of the European monetary system, which many of us disagree with and would challenge hugely.

Economic growth will be a huge issue for Europe, and the 'Europe 2020' document was produced recently. That strategy calculates that potential economic growth will be only 0.7% this year and 1.5% for the future. Therefore, the sense of anxiety about the euro zone is almost palpable because of the lack of vision for economic growth in some of the areas.

The 2020 strategy is likely to see policies shift in the direction of innovative, ecologically efficient technologies and new ways of doing things, and we cannot get away from that. The

other issue that will be massively important is climate change. Whether you believe in it or not, the fact of the matter is that it is a massive political issue. Even in respect of the reform of the CAP, it is very likely that many of our farmers and our industries will be asked to take measures that mitigate the effects of climate change. Much of the finance that is available will be linked to that, and we have to come to terms with that.

Finally, the Council decision of 10 March established a European microfinance facility for employment and social inclusion, which is perhaps an opportunity for Northern Ireland. It is aimed at giving unemployed people, particularly those who have difficulty in accessing the traditional financial and credit markets, a new start by giving them microcredits of up to €25,000. That is still very much in its infancy, but it may be a means of helping small businesses in Northern Ireland. I understand that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) is taking the lead in looking into that as having potential for Northern Ireland. Again, we continue to work on Peace III funding, which, as it comes to an end, has implications for Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has a good recognition level with the European Commission, and we have to acknowledge that part of that has been the fact that President Barroso has taken an interest and produced a task force. That gives us some advantage and access that we might not otherwise have had.

Thank you for the opportunity to give evidence. I apologise if I have rambled on for too long. I am happy to take your questions.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you for that overview.

The new Commission is in place and it has set its priorities. In addition to the issues that you raised, is there any particular focus or attention that Northern Ireland should give to any of the emerging priorities?

**Mrs D Dodds:**

We must realise that the Commission is very much bedding in. It produces a document one day and a contrary document the next. It will take some time for us to get to grips with that. MEPs

are just beginning to have our first meetings with the new commissioners.

I twice met Commissioner Damanaki, the new Fisheries Commissioner; we met last week about a fairly extensive overview of fisheries policy and how it relates specifically to Northern Ireland. Commissioner Ciolos addressed the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development on Monday. Like other MEPs at the Committee, we were a little disappointed that he came and presented a lot of intellectual thoughts on the CAP and a lot of sound bites but little in the way of his particular vision or priorities.

We get a sense of that through the fact that the EU 2020 strategy had only one line about agriculture, although it has subsequently been argued that all the principles of the strategy, including competitiveness and others, can be applied to agriculture, which is why it was not specifically named. However, that meeting was disappointing in that we did not get a further outline. Many of us expressed the view that, if you ask for public consultation, you should give the public something to consult on rather than ask for views and then turn down many of them.

The Commission is bedding in, and it has some way to go.

**Mr Spratt:**

Welcome, Diane, and thanks for the briefing.

You mentioned the European microfinance facility, which sounds as though it may present a timely opportunity in present circumstances. Is there any other information available on that fund?

The Chairman may indulge me in allowing a couple of other questions, given that Mr Shannon is not here today. Diane mentioned the fisheries policy. It would be remiss of me, given that Mr Shannon is probably frying other fish, not to say that the policy has had a tragic impact on Northern Ireland. I heard you refer to only six white fish trawlers left in Northern Ireland. That is a revelation and it shows the damage that has been done to the industry. Alongside agriculture, it is an important industry for Northern Ireland. Can anything be done to address the needs of our fishermen in the future?

One of my pet subjects, which is related to Queen's University in South Belfast, is research



and innovation, which is one of the areas mentioned in the 2020 strategy. Some exciting research is taking place in the universities. Have you any views on how Northern Ireland could expand that either on a North/South or east-west basis to try to tap into money? Other witnesses made it clear that funding is available in that area, which is an important area for Northern Ireland. The question is about how we can best work together to tap into that funding.

**Mrs D Dodds:**

The microfinance facility is new and details are still coming through. I met the official from the lead Department who is looking at that facility to see how it can be developed for Northern Ireland. A general criticism that I have about all European issues is the amount of bureaucracy, red tape, papers and forms that have to be gone through before anything hits the ground running. It is important that the Commission gets this right and that we are able to reach and provide support to small and medium-sized businesses.

My understanding is that it will be possible to apply for a loan through a microloan provider, which can be a bank or a provider that is nominated through the Commission. There will be predetermined financial criteria, and I understand that there will be a call of interest in June, when €25 million will be available throughout the European Union, and a second call in September, when €150 million will be available for that scheme.

It is important that we are able to respond, get the information out and are geared up and ready, willing and able to go to tap into that fund. My understanding is that a considerable amount of work had already been done, but we need to continue to work on that so that Northern Ireland can be a bit ahead of the game. It should always be remembered that, although €25 million may seem like a lot of money, it will be spread fairly thinly throughout the 27 member states.

As I said, in an ideal world, we should scrap the Common Fisheries Policy. It has not been good for Northern Ireland. The best that will come out of the hearings will probably be some decentralisation of the policy, and we would like as much decentralisation as possible. I met Commissioner Damanaki twice since she was appointed in January and since the hearings, and she has the will to decentralise some of the policy. I do not believe that she wants it decentralised to nation states, as I think that it should be, but she will try to decentralise to regional bodies. There are already regional advisory councils that advise on fishing issues in different areas.

There will then be the political question of how much is decentralised. I put the point to her last week that we really want to get away from that frantic bartering every December Council on how much fish may be caught, how many days may be fished, etc. I also asked how she will take into account the science on which that is based. She is adamant at present that the science will come through International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), which is the Commission's accepted scientific route.

It is really import that this Committee, DARD and the Executive work with local fishermen and organisations to get the science accepted, because Commissioner Damanaki said quite clearly last week that the science as regards the Irish Sea and the stock of prawns is very skimpy. Therefore, some of the decisions that are being made are based on science that is not that well formulated. The Commissioner admitted to that when we met her last week. That will be highly important.

As regards fisheries, Europe will want fishing to be from sustainable stocks. Again, the reform will have to consider the issue of imports, which we have raised with Commissioner Damanaki. Some 60% of all fish that is consumed in the European Union is imported. Vietnam, for example, is a huge importer of fish products to the European Union. Much of that fish is caught or processed under conditions that are unsustainable and are not to the social or economic standards to which we produce. Therefore, many of our producers are at an automatic disadvantage. Something must be done about that.

Most of the fishing industry will also want to see the freeing up of funding from the European Fisheries Fund for decommissioning and modernisation schemes that must go ahead. At present, the industry is suffering particularly badly because of high fuel prices. That is massive issue for the industry throughout Europe.

Additional money could be tapped into for research and development. Around three or four weeks ago, I met Moy Park officials in Brussels. We are going to consider how they can avail themselves of some of the technologies and research that is available and tap into funding. They are particularly concerned about bacteria that must be dealt with in food processing. We must consider that to establish how we can draw research together and how Northern Ireland can tap into available funding. Again, that is the type of information that the Assembly and the Executive

can disseminate from Europe to local companies.

I also met representatives from Harland and Wolff who, again, are looking for further research into the safe disposal of vessels, which is an interesting field. We are working with those officials to determine how we can draw down funding for that.

**The Chairperson:**

I believe that Mr Spratt wanted particular focus to be put on universities.

**Mr Spratt:**

Something that impressed some of the other Committee members and me at receptions that we attended during our most recent visit to Europe was that certain universities had people there to network. I am not sure that local universities are doing that in a way that produces results for Northern Ireland. I wonder how best we can do that. Queen's University, for example, is highly advanced in areas such as medical research. It sends people to Brussels periodically. However, there is an issue about linking up with other universities. It is important that that is considered. Some of that funding is granted on a joined-up basis, whereby universities must join up with others. That would be particularly important on a North/South, east-west basis. That matter was raised when we visited the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels.

**Mrs D Dodds:**

Much of the funding that is available from Europe is available only on a trans-boundary basis. Therefore, a link up with a range of people of required. That is important. The only way that we will be successful in doing that is if we are able to bring information to people.

Many universities believe that they cannot afford to have people in Brussels to network. Others do it very successfully. It is important to them that they get into that league of universities, in which they can pick partners. There is a network in which they all participate. They can pick and choose their partners in the particular area that they need. I recently met a group of PSNI officers in Europe, who were doing just that in the area of child protection.

**Mr Molloy:**

Thank you very much for the presentation; it was informative. You said that the Commissioner was not very clear about the CAP reform proposals. What do you think is the best way forward

for the CAP? How should it be dealt with?

**Mrs D Dodds:**

I have the website address, which I will leave for you. I am sure that some members have it already. You can log into the debate on the CAP reform that the Commissioner launched on Monday. I also brought the Commissioner's speech, in case anyone is sad enough to want to read it.

As I said, the Commissioner was not that specific on vision and was short on detail. What he really said was that he would like to hear views. He announced that he was launching the consultation and that it would last until the end of June. Then, he said, in July, there will be a conference in Brussels. By the end of the year, all those views will be collated and we will have some stuff that we will be able to progress. That was not terribly satisfactory; it does not show the Commission leading from the front.

Where do I think we need to go? The CAP is hugely important to Northern Ireland. If we did not have the payments via the CAP, Northern Ireland agriculture would be in great difficulties. We need to retain pillar 1, which is direct payment to farmers. There may be changes in the way that those direct payments are made, which will be a matter for discussion, but for me, it is an absolute necessity that we retain direct support for farmers through pillar 1 direct payments.

We also must retain market management tools, which is a contentious matter. We have all seen the crisis in the dairy industry. In 2007 we had high prices, in 2008 prices were rock-bottom and in 2009 there were high prices again. Given that we are dependent on the commodities market and produce so much that goes to milk powder, we depend on world markets to set the prices that are paid. Had we not had the introduction of export refunds and intervention at the end of 2008-09, there would have been no ceiling put on the market and dairy producers would have continued to produce at a huge loss. Expense is the wrong word, but terrible distress was caused to farmers at that time. We need to be able to help when prices are volatile; therefore, direct payments to farmers and the ability to intervene when the market fails are hugely important. We do not need to intervene at all times. Currently, we do not need intervention but it is important to be able to step in and help.

In Europe, the issue of whether we should have modulation of rural development is debated at

length. Some countries go further and top-slice single farm payments under articles 68 and 69. That will be a huge debate. I read the policy advice from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) before the meeting of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development on Monday. DEFRA said that rural development should be a cornerstone of the new CAP. However, the Green parties in Europe say that climate change should be that cornerstone. Fundamentally, what is important for Northern Ireland is retaining our share of the budget, being able to directly support our framers and being able to produce good, wholesome and traceable food.

**Mr Elliott:**

Thank you, Diane. I notice that you said that the European Parliament produced one document one day and then produced something contrary to it the next day. That sounds pretty much like normal government, so perhaps we should not be surprised. I have two brief questions. I noticed in the 'Europe 2020' document that there is a determination to increase the share of renewable energy sources in our final energy consumption to 20%. Is that practical? I believe that that is neither practical nor possible in Northern Ireland. Do you think that that is possible locally and in Europe?

My second question is about the possible establishment of an office of the Northern Ireland Assembly in Brussels. That proposal was mooted on a number of occasions during our deliberations. What are your thoughts on that? My impression is that if the office is not properly resourced and funded, perhaps it is not worth doing. The Northern Ireland Assembly may not have the resources to do that to the proper level. Where do you see the balance being struck? Is it better to have an office even if it has only a skeleton staff and is under-resourced?

Finally, you mentioned the issue of the CAP. I would hate to go without saying something about agriculture.

**The Chairperson:**

This is not the Agriculture Committee.

**Mr Elliott:**

What are your views on product labelling and where that sits in Europe at the moment? As you are well aware, that is a big issue over here, particularly the need to get agriculture products

labelled in the proper manner.

**Mrs D Dodds:**

Thank you for that, Tom. I will start with the issue of product labelling. You may know that last month in Parliament, we debated and passed a motion to support the Scottà report, which is about product labelling and how we engage in that. At one stage, the idea of an EU label was promoted, but I am totally opposed to that. An EU label would be largely meaningless, because it would not take account of any geographical factors or the actual conditions under which products are produced in particular countries.

Country of origin labelling for Northern Ireland products is not a bad thing, because we want to promote the value and quality of Northern Ireland produce. However, as Tom well knows, there needs to be some flexibility in the market. We export cheese to, for example, Italy. However, if country of origin labelling on Northern Ireland products stopped us from doing that, it would be a problem for Northern Ireland. We are a net exporter of meat, so we need to be careful. A balance must be struck. Farmers like to have some flexibility on product labelling. However, the Scottà report, which was supported by the previous Parliament, is worth a quick look for anyone who is interested in that issue. Of course, a number of us spoke about product labelling for our country's produce in the debate. We must treat the issue carefully. Although we must promote the value and safety of Northern Ireland produce, we do not want to lose out on the export market simply because our produce says that it does not come from a particular country or place. We, therefore, need a little bit of balance and caution when addressing the issue.

As regards whether there should be an office of Northern Ireland Assembly in Brussels, we already have the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels, and I am not one for duplication. However, I understand that the Assembly has voted to promote that.

**The Chairperson:**

I think that the report contains a proposal for an Assembly officer to work from the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels.

**Mrs D Dodds:**

That seems an eminently more sensible suggestion. However, I warn against duplication. The more that I am in Brussels, the more that I understand the importance of networking, of being on

site and on hand, and of the ability to disseminate and catch information quickly to use it to my advantage and that of Northern Ireland. The importance of that is huge and should not be underestimated.

People from the Welsh office, the Northern Ireland office, the Scottish office and the various member states all sit on the Agriculture Committee in Brussels. When everyone is taken together, including all the officials and farmers' organisations, there can be 400 people at an Agriculture Committee. The fact that the National Farmers Union has seen fit to organise in Brussels is testament to the importance of being there; I cannot stress that enough.

A 20% increase in renewable energy sources will require huge investment. I will reserve judgement on whether we, or Europe, are up for that level of investment in the current economic climate. However, we should be doing everything that we can to have renewable energy sources. As we have seen, the volatility in the energy markets is making life very difficult for ordinary folk. Anything that helps to give our industries a longer-standing and more stable energy supply is very important. Whether we can reach 20% by 2020, and whether the investment is there to make that possible, is another matter.

**Mr G Robinson:**

I thank Diane for her presentation. You mentioned the reform of the CAP. What should we, as an Assembly, be doing to make as strong a case as possible for Northern Ireland farmers for the reform of the CAP?

**Mrs D Dodds:**

As I said, reform of the CAP is the policy that will impact most directly on Northern Ireland. Our agriculture industry relies on subvention from Europe through the common agricultural policy; it is hugely important. First, we need to formulate our policies about Northern Ireland's needs and demands for the CAP reform. We cannot allow that to be lost among the mandarins of DEFRA, who will be the lead negotiators of the UK position.

Northern Ireland needs to set out a strong regional position that contains a strong plea for direct support under pillar 1. I know that that will be difficult because of DEFRA, but I believe that you will have the support of the Scottish and Welsh Administrations. I will refrain from making the obvious political analysis but a strong case needs to be made to DEFRA at

Westminster about the way that agricultural funding is disseminated by Europe.

We will also need to make a strong case in Brussels. We have invited Commissioner Ciolos and Commissioner Damanaki to Northern Ireland to see the benefits that the CAP has produced and to consider how we should go forward. Our farmers receive a higher direct subsidy per payment than those of any other region of the United Kingdom. We want to retain that share of the payment. That will be an objective no matter how difficult it will be, and we will need to work together to achieve it.

**Mr Attwood:**

Thank you, Diane. I apologise for missing the earlier part of your presentation.

I have only one question, which I asked Bairbre de Brún and to the Minister of Finance and Personnel in a debate two or three weeks ago. You referred to trans-border funding, which Jimmy also touched on. You also mentioned universities, and this is a comment about universities, our Government and the private sector.

If we in the North cannot get our act together to put together better applications for the €5 billion that exists for trans-border funding for R&D and innovation, we are going to miss the boat, to mix a metaphor. The Dublin Government's target is to apply for €600 million of that €5 billion funding. They have a dedicated person in each Department to try to develop a proposal for funding between them and other jurisdictions in that scheme. I cannot remember the name of the scheme; I think that it is called the seventh framework fund or something. So far, they have had 80 successful bids. The North has so far had 11 with a total value of €16 million.

We do not have dedicated people going after that funding for the North, nor do we have a target of drawing down funds compared, say, with the South on a per capita basis of €200 million. So far, we have got a dozen successful projects and a total drawdown of €16 million. It is a huge project: a €5 billion funding project. If we are going to get the island, North and South, into partnerships with other parts of the EU and positioned to compete in the global market, it will be around R&D and innovation, yet we have got only as far as €16 million of a drawdown.

If anything will prove that we are fit for this job, it will be the funding that is available on that project and whether, over the next couple of years, we are able to drawdown anything close to



€200 million. That is a notional figure of what we are looking for, given that Dublin is looking for €600 million.

My final point is that some people in the South tell me that, again to mix metaphors, they are pulling their hair out.

**The Chairperson:**

Is this one question, Mr Attwood?

**Mr Attwood:**

Yes; it is.

**The Chairperson:**

I am waiting for the question mark.

**Mr Attwood:**

I want to have affirmation that I am right.

**The Chairperson:**

You have convinced yourself that you are right. We have heard the question before, and we need to move on.

**Mr Attwood:**

You understand the point that I am making?

**Mrs D Dodds:**

I understand the point that you are getting at, and I will resist going through all the issues that relate to it. We are currently on the Peace III programme. Whether we have a Peace IV programme is entirely questionable. As Northern Ireland grows and moves forward, we will not be awarded funding simply because we are Northern Ireland. We need to be contending for the mainstream of European funding that exists. That will entail our having people in Brussels who are able to disseminate information for us, take the information around and make it relevant in Northern Ireland, as well as having people to help us put together the applications.

One of the greatest problems, as I am sure that you have heard from other MEPs, is that people find a level of bureaucracy and difficulty in contacts when putting together applications. We need those contacts in Departments, organisations and businesses between here and Brussels.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you. Mr Shannon has joined us and is, of course, very welcome. Mr Shannon, we have covered quite a lot of ground. The session has been recorded for Hansard, so you will be able to get a copy of the report. I hope that your question is concise and has not already been posed.

**Mr Shannon:**

I would be very surprised if my question has been asked. If it has, members of the Committee have much more knowledge of fishing than I thought.

**The Chairperson:**

You underestimate your colleagues.

**Mr Shannon:**

I suspect that this question has not been asked. I am sorry for being late.

**The Chairperson:**

No, you are not. Go on ahead.

**Mr Shannon:**

Diane, it is nice to see you again. This is the second time today that I have seen you; it is always a pleasure to see you. It is good to have you at the Committee.

The scientists in Europe always tell us that the numbers of white fish in the Irish Sea are falling at such a rate that is no longer sustainable. That is why the restriction on the number of days at sea has been increased and why the quotas have been reduced. The fishermen are telling us —

**The Chairperson:**

News of that has already reached south Belfast.

**Mr Shannon:**

The fishermen tell me that there are more white fish in the Irish Sea today because of the colder winter and, indeed, climate change. How can we reconcile what the fishermen tell us about the numbers of white fish in the Irish Sea with what the scientists from Europe, who perhaps never see the Irish Sea, tell us?

**The Chairperson:**

That is a very good question. To be fair to Mrs Dodds, she has given a fairly detailed explanation about the problem with white fish, but I will allow her to answer.

**Mrs D Dodds:**

I will recap, because it is an important issue for the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. Since the hearings in January and her appointment, I met Commissioner Damanaki on two occasions, and one of the issues that I constantly raised with her is the science that leads to the deliberations that lead to quotas, cod recovery and the limiting of days at sea, all of which are determined by the Commission. She is determined to press home the point that all science will come from ICES scientists.

I met the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development a few weeks ago, and I understand that DARD is working with scientists here to produce evidence on state of white fish and nephrops stocks in the Irish Sea. As Jim knows, we were very disappointed to receive a 9% cut in our nephrops quota in December. We were disappointed that we did not get the 15% increase that we asked for in the herring quota.

We are still under the very strict conditions of the cod recovery plan, which has closed the Irish Sea for much of the season. We need to work with ICES, because the Commission will not countenance science that does not come via the ICES route. Although fishermen are out on the sea doing their jobs and experiencing what is going on first hand, we need to produce science that Brussels will accept.

I was very surprised, as the other two MEPs, who were at the meeting last week, will confirm, that she admitted that the science behind the nephrops fishing quota in the Irish Sea was quite sparse. Therefore, it seems that the Commission has been making decisions that are based on something that they cannot stand over.

**Mr Shannon:**

I just want to say one more thing.

**The Chairperson:**

I am sorry, but we are under serious pressure. I thank Mrs Dodds —

**Mr Shannon:**

The water in the Irish Sea is much colder this year. That is why there are more white fish in it.

**Mrs D Dodds:**

I have not tested it.

**The Chairperson:**

Thank you very much for your tolerance, Mrs Dodds. Thank you for your briefing, which is part of an ongoing exchange between the Committee and MEPs. We look forward to that continuing.

**Mrs D Dodds:**

Thank you. As I said, it is useful to continue to have meetings, to know your views and to keep in touch.