

As per envelope/e-mail

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Date: 5 March 2009

Dear Consultee

## **LAUNCH OF CONSULTATION ON REVIEW OF SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS FOR LFAs IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

Less Favoured Areas (LFAs) account for 70% of our agricultural area and are home to the majority of our suckler cows and breeding sheep. LFAs also encompass many of our most valuable habitats and visually appealing landscapes. The Less Favoured Areas Compensatory Allowance (LFACA) Scheme is one of 18 measures of the current Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) 2007-2013. It provides around £22 million of support each year to LFA farmers in recognition of difficulties they face in farming these areas and the role that they play in maintaining the landscape and rural communities.

Over the past 18 months, this Department has undertaken a review of support arrangements for LFAs. A report on the findings of the review, which proposes four different options for future LFA support, was launched for public consultation by Minister Michelle Gildernew on 5 March 2009.

The consultation paper is available on the DARD website at <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/consultations/active-consultations.htm>. Hard copies of all documentation associated with this consultation can be made available on request in alternative formats including Braille, disc, audio CD, large print or minority languages.

I have attached a copy of the consultation report for your consideration. The document is very large, containing a significant body of evidence gathered during the review, but Chapter 12 summarises the evidence collated and presents the options for a future approach to LFA support. I would welcome views on the report findings and the options for future support in LFAs. You are particularly invited to respond to the questions on the attached Annex.

**Responses should arrive no later than 29 May 2009.** It would be helpful if responses could be e-mailed to: [policy.development@dardni.gov.uk](mailto:policy.development@dardni.gov.uk). If this is not possible, written responses should be addressed to:



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**Policy Development Branch  
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Policy and Economics  
Room 355, Dundonald House  
Upper Newtownards Road  
BELFAST BT4 3SB**

or faxed to : **028 9037 8532**


**The Department intends to publish the responses received during this consultation and to publish the name and address of the author along with the response. If you do not wish to be identified as the author of your response, or you do not wish the response to be published, please state this when sending us your response. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations and they will give you guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this consultation.**

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity should be made public or be treated as confidential. If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public please include an explanation in your response.

- This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that: the Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;
- the Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature; and
- acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office (or see web site at: <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk/>).

Yours sincerely



**Norman Fulton**  
Director of Policy and Economics Division



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If you have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the textphone on 028 9052 4420

An Roinn Talmhaíochta agus Forbartha Tuaithe  
Mánnystrie o Fairms an Kintra Fordèrin

## CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Chapters 5 to 11 of the Report detail the evidence that has been collated to inform this review of LFA support and guide decisions on the way forward.

- 1. Are you content that all of the relevant issues have been captured and adequately explored?**
- 2. Are you content with the conclusions that have been reached within the evidence chapters?**

A continuation of the current LFACA Scheme is not possible as a consequence of Council Regulation (EC) 1698/2005 that is due to take effect from 1 January 2010. Therefore, four Options have been presented in Chapter 12 of the Report for future action. Options 1, 2 and 3 are presented in recognition of the fact that there is no requirement under the EU Regulation to operate an LFACA Scheme, i.e. LFA is an optional measure.

- 3. Do you agree with Option 1 that there should be no future LFACA Scheme and that the funds released should not be reallocated to other rural development measures? If so, please explain your reasons for this choice in the context of the evidence that has been presented in this review.**
- 4. Do you agree with Option 2 that there should be no future LFACA Scheme and that the funds released should be reallocated entirely to Axis 1 and Axis 3 measures of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme? If so, please explain your reasons for this choice in the context of the evidence that has been presented in this review.**
  - a. If your choice is Option 2, to what priorities under Axis 1 and/or Axis 3 should the monies be directed, and why?**

- 5. Do you agree with Option 3 that there should be no future LFACA Scheme and that the funds released should be reallocated entirely to the agri-environment programme? If so, please explain your reasons for this**



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choice in the context of the evidence that has been presented in this review.

- a. If your choice is Option 3, should the additional monies be directed through the existing agri-environment measures, or are adjustments to the programme required (including, for example, ring-fenced monies for certain areas)? Please give reasons for your answers.

6. Do you agree with Option 4 that there should be a future LFACA Scheme? If so, please explain your reasons for this choice in the context of the evidence that has been presented in this review.

- a. Do you agree with the broad outline for such a Scheme that has been given and the reasons for this? If not, what changes would you like to see and why, in the context of the evidence that has been presented in this review. In particular:
  - (i) Do you agree that the focus of future of support should be the SDA (or any future designated LFA)?
  - (ii) Do you agree that applicants to the Scheme should farm at least 10 ha of land in total (of which at least 3 ha must be in the SDA)? If not, what would you like to see as the minimum size and why?
  - (iii) What are your views on the range of farm enterprises that would make a farm eligible for support?
  - (iv) What are your views on the use of minimum and maximum stocking densities?
  - (v) What are your views on the use of a possible environmental option within an LFA support scheme? What sort of environmental issues could usefully be addressed by such a mechanism?

7. Are there any equality issues that you would like to raise that have not been addressed adequately?

8. Are there any issues relating to rural proofing that you would like to raise that have not been addressed adequately?

9. Are there any other issues you would like to draw our attention to in the context of this review?

