

NIAPA LFA SUBMISSION 2009

NIAPA consider the review of LFA support from the position given in the document that the status quo is not an option.

We are extremely concerned however about the continued use of agricultural land and the maintenance of the countryside. The maintenance of the countryside has been for years the non remunerative task of the active farmer and is ignored by many as a task involving time and money.

It should be noted that this work is mainly undertaken by the people who farm the land whether through ownership or taken in conacre or under lease agreement.

Whilst LFA support may no longer pursue socio economic objectives, the particular characteristics of LFAs make it difficult to provide public goods or maintain/enhance the environment.

There are limitations on types of farming that can be carried out and also the maintenance and enhancement which can be done by mechanical means.

Active farming and the use of livestock can provide more than the basic requirements under statute. We have seen the adverse impact on the environment when livestock have had to be removed.

LFA support has become over many years an accepted part of farm income and to have any income withdrawn will have a negative impact on a farming family whether it receives all or part of its income from farming.

This returns us to our opening paragraph. We do not wish to see a removal of income from any farming family but there does not seem to be any option but review the LFA scheme under new terms in order to maintain some sort of scheme within the province. However any change should provide a soft landing for those who may be negatively affected.

Having discussed the document we are content that relevant issues have been dealt with and the conclusions are in line with the evidence presented. We are firmly in support of retention of an LFA scheme.

There is no other option which will offer the same scope for maintenance and improvement of the environment, the opportunity for a living working countryside and the potential to enhance the use of livestock to help with the above where mechanical means in many cases is not practical. Once again we emphasise the role of active farmers who fulfil the role of stewardship of the land and possible incentives for the use of cattle

and sheep either singularly or in mixed proportions to help maintain and improve our environment.

While we do not wish to see a reduction in LFA area for payments we realise that a more rigid criteria from an environmental view may mean that we have to look at a re designation of LFA as opposed to adhere to areas previously designated. This would include studying topography, land classification, rainfall etc in determining the level of disadvantage and possibly re designating according to agreed criteria on which to focus support.

With no formal definition of hobby farmers or cut off point in terms of area of holding to define these types of farm, there may be a commercial element to livestock husbandry on a 3ha farm.

Livestock farming – suckler cows and sheep would be the enterprises which would be more suited to the type of environment envisaged in a possible re designated LFA. We see these as an asset in the development of an LFA programme with an environmental benefit on more inaccessible land. The use of maximum and minimum stocking densities would help with the issues of both under grazing and over grazing of land and thus assist with cross compliance and other environmental issues. Enhancement payment for beneficial use of livestock would be supported.

A further point we would wish to have considered is the issue of digressivity which we would support with an option of a cap on support at 200 ha.

We would hope this assists in any deliberations.