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**Northern Ireland
Rural Women's Network**

**Northern Ireland
Rural Women's Network (NIRWN's)
Response
To**

**Equality Impact Assessment of the
Agri-environment Programme and
Less Favoured Areas Compensatory
Allowances Scheme as contained
within the Northern Ireland Rural
Development Programme 2007-2013**

**Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)
15 Molesworth Street
Cookstown
Co Tyrone
BT80 8NX
Tel: 028 86769191**

Email: louise@nirwn.org.uk

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) is a regional network established to articulate the voices of women in rural areas. It is jointly funded by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department for Social Development (DSD).

1.2 NIRWN has six key objectives:

- Increasing the voice of rural women through giving them a voice at Policy level
- Playing an advocacy and lobbying role on behalf of rural women
- Capacity Building and Group Development for rural women
- Encouraging women in decision-making and providing representation for rural women
- Information and networking opportunities for rural women
- Working within the Women's Centres Regional Partnership to give a voice to rural women's centres

1.3 Before issuing this document DARD contacted various stakeholders to ask their initial thoughts on the content of this paper.

DARD met with NIRWN and NIRWN are pleased that comments and concerns we raised: issues such as; the structure of this consultation, and the aims and objectives of the Schemes involved, appear to have been taken on board already and included in this document.

1.4 To ensure there was no adverse impact on women that we hadn't considered; NIRWN held a focus group in the EQIA document as a framework for discussion.

2.0 Response to Questions

Q 1. Can you suggest any additional relevant evidence or information which DARD should have considered in assessing the equality impacts of the measures on different groups of people?

The Focus Group stated very clearly that they felt the EQIA had taken consideration of all the Section 75 groups and how the Agri Environment Programme and Less Favoured Areas Compensatory Allowance Scheme might impact on them.

It was stated that it would be useful if DARD considered the impact of their measures on farm families e.g. how many people on a farm receiving an allowance, benefit directly from the allowance. This would encourage the wider public etc. to acknowledge that there are people behind the numbers, statistics and figures reported by DARD.

Q 2. Can you suggest any other inequalities or potential adverse impacts, with supporting evidence where possible, which may occur as a result of the implementation of the measures?

It was noted that it is difficult to accurately gauge the potential adverse gender impacts which may occur as a result of the implementation of the measures; as the statistics available are not broken down in a wider context, for example, in respect of families and women. The absence of a baseline makes it very difficult to monitor and comment on.

A key issue for rural farming women is that of not being formally recognised. The current Agricultural Census reporting system only allows for one principal partner. This meant that, in the last census, 35 per cent of women who were working more than 30 hours a week on their farms were classified only as 'farmer's spouses'¹.

¹ Shortall, S and R Kelly (2001) **Gender Proofing CAP Reforms** Rural Community Network

The lack of gender awareness and the absence of gender-disaggregated information have been identified as the main problems in recognising farming women's contribution to the agricultural sector. Shortall² correctly highlighted that, in Western Europe most farms are operated by farm families. If the work and role of women on farms is not measured and recognised; it is impossible to assess the impact positively, or negatively, of measures such as the Agri-Environment Programme and the Less Favoured Areas Compensatory Allowance Scheme on rural women.

Q 3. Can you suggest any other ways that DARD could reduce or eliminate any potential adverse impact on the farmers or landowners concerned?

ICT Confidence and Competency

Women feel they need to have training and access to all the services available as they don't feel they have the ICT skills and confidence required to do all the online form filling etc now required.

Technical Support

It was suggested that a helpline providing technical support and assistance would be very helpful for those who have ICT skills and don't require training but face uncertainty with new style forms etc.

The women on a farm are often left with the administrative duties associated with farming. It was particularly evident that now some DARD initiatives are scored higher if submitted online; women definitely felt extra pressure when responding to correspondence and making online submissions; creating fear within those who consider themselves relatively ICT competent.

² Shortall, S (2002) **Women in the Field: Women, Farming and Organizations**- Gender, Work & Organization Volume 8 Issue 2, Pages 164 – 181, 2010 Blackwell Publishing Ltd

A technical support helpline you could simply telephone with a query e.g. to check you have correctly interpreted a question, would significantly reduce or eliminate any potential adverse impact on the farmers or landowners concerned

DARD Direct Offices

The rationalisation of DARD Direct offices will create a travel and transportation access issue for farm families. There will also be a time and revenue impact for farmers if they have to travel further and spend more time away from their farm and business.

Irrespective of the rationalisation of DARD Direct offices, all agreed support should be available in the DARD Direct offices to support farmers with online applications etc. perhaps with an appointments system in place.

Farm Family Training

Training for farm families would be useful in; ICT, application forms, bookkeeping V.A.T. etc. This training should be advertised and promoted to farm families and not just the named farmer. It is often women and children (often grown up) not employed on the farm, who provide administrative support in their own time to facilitate the successful running of the farm.

Extra Financial Burden

The group felt that **local** provision of ICT training was also imperative. Suggestions were that training could be provided in local school facilities or, CAFRE facilities if closer. This would assist farm families with the burden of ICT administration and reduce the money farmers currently spend on private 'form fillers'. The online system has created extra expense for farmers getting help with form filling and online submissions from private individuals charging for this service. This could reduce or eliminate any potential adverse impact on the farmers or landowners concerned from their lack of ICT confidence and competence.

Q 4. Have the needs of different groups of people been fully considered in this EQIA? If not, please provide your views.

The focus group felt that DARD currently makes a real effort to treat people according to their needs with the information they have and don't feel that there is any discrimination evident. Refer to response to Q2 on how women could be more effectively considered in future policies with more effective data capture.

Q 5. Do you think that there are ways that DARD could better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?

Actively targeting farm families, spouses and partners of farm owners would create the potential to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations and access.