



**Simon Hamilton MLA**  
Member for Strangford

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Monday, 04 August 2008

John McKee,  
DARD,  
Organisation Improvement Branch,  
Room 559B,  
Dundonald House,  
Stormont.  
BT4 3SB

Dear Mr McKee,

**Re: Equality Impact Assessment on the Roll Out of DARD Direct**

I wish to respond formally to the above.

In the first instance, I wish to register my disappointment that the EQIA consultation on such an important proposal by DARD is happening over the summer months. I would suggest that the consultation period should be extended perhaps until the end of October to allow the public – and in particular members of the farming community and public sector staff who are most directly affected – to carefully consider the proposals and respond.

Turning to the substance of the proposals, I believe that the proposed sites for the 10 DARD Directs deeply disadvantages many of my constituents. As the map on page 41 of the consultation clearly shows, large sections of North Down and Ards which are heavily farmed areas, are not within the 16 mile radius. This contrasts starkly with parts of Counties Londonderry and Antrim where as many as 3 DARD Directs will be within a 16 mile radius of some locations. Indeed, I would suggest that whilst the lower section of the Ards Peninsula is shown to be within a 16 mile radius of the proposed DARD Direct in Downpatrick, this simple drawing of a circle on a map does not take



into account geographical factors like the need to cross Strangford Lough and the attendant difficulties this can bring.

I also feel that siting a DARD Direct in Downpatrick as opposed to a more northerly location in the county will cause upheaval for staff. As the table showing the Breakdown of Mobile/Non-Mobile DARD Staff by Regional HQ Office on page 47 indicates, the number of staff employed in Newtownards is much greater than that in Downpatrick.

I am extremely supportive of the concept of DARD Direct and as such believe that people living in North down and Ards deserve to benefit from a DARD Direct that is close to them. Therefore, I would submit that instead of locating two DARD Directs in the southern half of County Down, that an alternative or additional location in the northern part of the county such as around Newtownards should be sought.

Yours sincerely,

**Simon Hamilton MLA.**