

# CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

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Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**Tuesday 22 November 2016**

**North/South Ministerial Council: Agriculture**

Miss McIlveen, the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs made a statement in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 regarding the twentysixth North/South Ministerial Council agriculture meeting, which was held in Armagh on Wednesday 26 October 2016.

Chris Hazzard MLA, Minister for Infrastructure, and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive at the meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Michael Creed TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and Michael Ring TD, Minister of State, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Minister Creed chaired the meeting.

Ministers discussed the implications of the result of the recent UK referendum on EU membership. They noted that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) had undertaken an initial scoping exercise to assess the impact of the UK decision.

The Council welcomed the ongoing collaboration between DAERA and DAFM aimed at maximising the drawdown of EU funding under Horizon 2020 for the agriculture, forestry, food and marine sectors and the bio-economy and the €26 million secured in funding to date by successful applications from both jurisdictions. Ministers noted the progress made in funding projects in both jurisdictions under the DAFM national competitive call and the extension of the United States-Ireland research and development partnership to include agriculture research themes.

The Council noted the ongoing progress made by DAERA and DAFM on the implementation of the common agricultural policy (CAP) reforms agreed in 2013 and the up-to-date situation with regard to the implementation of the rural development programmes. Ministers also noted the potential implications for future CAP funding of the result of the UK's decision to leave the EU and the determination of Departments to implement European Commission proposals for CAP simplification and push for further simplification where appropriate.

The Council noted the current position with regard to the ongoing difficulties being experienced in agricultural markets, the associated measures introduced to address those difficulties and the continuing close contact between officials from DAERA and DAFM on a range of issues, including CAP reform implementation issues and the impact that the UK decision to leave the EU will have on the agri-food and fisheries sectors in both jurisdictions.

The Council welcomed the continuing work on the delivery of the all-island animal health and welfare strategy action plan since the last North/South Ministerial Council agriculture meeting on 20 January 2016 and, in the context of the recent UK referendum, looked forward to the continuation of practical and effective cooperation on animal health and welfare and disease control in both jurisdictions in order that the health and welfare of livestock is maintained at the highest level.

Key points noted included the introduction of a mandatory bovine viral diarrhoea eradication programme by DAERA on 1 March 2016, similar to that introduced by DAFM in 2013; that, on 29 September 2016, the Executive agreed the recommendation for DAERA to submit an application to the World Organisation for Animal Health for BSE negligible risk status for Northern Ireland — the application has been submitted and the decision will be taken in May 2017; that agreement was reached at a meeting of the North/South disease control and trade working group in March 2016 on ways to enhance trade between the two jurisdictions, in particular agreement on how to streamline the health certification processes for deer and pigs being moved to Northern Ireland for slaughter; that a shared contract for the emergency supply of carbon dioxide for whole-house gassing of poultry has been in place since June 2016 and will be valid for three years; and that a memorandum of understanding for sharing livestock culling teams in the event of an exotic disease outbreak in either jurisdiction was signed by Chief Veterinary Officers in June 2016.

The Council noted the progress made with the review of the all-Ireland Chalara control strategy by officials from DAERA and DAFM in response to ongoing scientific and surveillance evidence; the research being undertaken to develop a population of Irish planting stock tolerant to the Chalara — ash dieback — disease; and the ongoing commitment to continue to work towards the shared objective of achieving and Tuesday 22 November 2016 23 maintaining good plant health status on the island. Ministers welcomed the continued cross-border cooperation in dealing with tree and plant health and the shared approach to regulation, as evidenced through a common approach to Eptitrix, which is the potato flea beetle, risk management. Ministers welcomed the joint approach to the continued sharing of science and diagnostic capability and the regulation of the use of pesticides.

The Council welcomed the continuing cooperation between both jurisdictions, the ongoing work to improve farm safety and the agreement between the Health and Safety Authority and the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland on the joint development of farm-safety e-learning packages. Ministers welcomed the success achieved in raising public awareness of the inherent health-and-safety dangers on farms during the international farm safety week 2016 and the forthcoming tripartite meeting of the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, the Health and Safety Authority and the Health and Safety Executive of Great Britain to discuss farm safety that will take place on 1 December 2016.

The Council welcomed the good progress made in both jurisdictions in implementing the LEADER element of the rural development programme. DAERA and the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs organised a LEADER cooperation event, held in Newry on 8 and

9 November 2016, to launch cooperation between local action groups from all regions of the UK and the Republic of Ireland. Ministers also welcomed the opening of a new social farming capital grant scheme in Northern Ireland to complement the existing support office in Cookstown. They also noted progress made on the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas funded social farming grant scheme and the Republic of Ireland's new town and village scheme, and they agreed that officials should explore opportunities to share experience gained from initiatives aimed at sustaining rural settlements.

The Council agreed to hold the next agriculture meeting in the spring of 2017.

Source: <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/plenary-22-11-2016.pdf>



**Wednesday 23 November 2016**

**Seán Crowe asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the matters discussed in his meetings with political parties in Stormont on 3 November 2016; and if he will provide a report on the North-South Ministerial Council meeting that took place on 18 November 2016**

**Charles Flanagan:** The Taoiseach and I visited Belfast on 3 November for a series of meetings with political parties. We met the deputy First Minister, Mr. Martin McGuinness, MLA; the Sinn Féin President, Deputy Gerry Adams, the SDLP leader, Mr. Colum Eastwood, MLA, and colleagues; the UUP leader, Mr. Mike Nesbitt, MLA, and colleagues, and Alliance Party MLAs, Mr. David Ford and Dr. Stephen Farry. The Taoiseach also met the First Minister, Ms Arlene Foster, MLA, in Dublin on 15 November.

Each of these meetings was an important opportunity to speak directly with political leaders in Northern Ireland as part of the Government's continuing engagement with the Executive and other parties, with a view to working together to prepare for and manage the shared, all-island impacts of the United Kingdom's decision to leave the and those of the European Union. We emphasised the Government's commitment to playing its full role, as co-guarantor of the Good Friday Agreement, in support of continued peace, prosperity and deeper reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

We also discussed what special arrangements might be required to take account of the unique situation of Northern Ireland in the upcoming negotiations within the European Union on the departure of the United Kingdom from the Union.

As the Deputy outlined, the UK departure from the Union was also a major focus of the North-South Ministerial Council, NSMC, plenary meeting last Friday. The Government and Northern Ireland Executive agreed to continue to work closely together to optimise North-South planning in the phases preceding and following the UK withdrawal from the European Union. In terms of taking forward the necessary work, the NSMC agreed that the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive will be guided by some common principles. It also agreed that this work would be taken forward through continuing bilateral discussions within the NSMC at sectoral level, as well as through a high-level working group comprising senior officials from the Government and from the Northern Ireland Executive office.

In addition to our discussions on Brexit, we also reviewed progress on the implementation of the Fresh Start agreement, commitments on cross-Border infrastructure projects and on the cross-Border partnership arrangements, developed by Derry city and Strabane District Council and Donegal County Council. I am pleased that my Department has played a leading role in that regard by contributing €2.5 million to the North West Development Fund.

**Seán Crowe:** Does the Minister accept that Brexit undermines the institutional, constitutional and legal integrity and status of the Good Friday Agreement? Has the Government done an impact assessment on what Brexit could mean for the Good Friday Agreement? We all agree the Good Friday political institutions, human rights guarantees and all-Ireland bodies, the constitutional and legal rights of the people to exercise their right to self-determination and a united Ireland through consent by referendum North and South must be protected.

We also agree that the peace process is still very fragile. There are many unresolved legacy issues. Acht na Teanga has not been implemented. There are outstanding human rights concerns and there are problems with prisons. Sectarianism is rife. Issues also arise on parades, flags and emblems. A considerable amount of work remains to be done and the problem is Brexit brings uncertainty, division and doubt. Has the Government undertaken an assessment of the potential impact of Brexit on the Good Friday Agreement?

**Charles Flanagan:** I very much agree with the Deputy that we have many challenges in respect of Northern Ireland, the fragile political process and the institutions as established under the Good Friday Agreement. The Deputy is correct that it is essential in the context of Brexit that we ensure the primacy of the Good Friday Agreement as a legally binding international document.

It is fair to say that while at last week's North-South Ministerial Council the dominant agenda item was Brexit, other issues were also discussed. In the context of the other issues I adverted to progress in the Fresh Start agreement, the Stormont House Agreement and at last week's meeting, the council received an update on the progress being made on the implementation of the various commitments under those agreements, and some issues that remain unimplemented from the Good Friday Agreement itself from 1998. The plenary meeting also reviewed the major economic and social developments which had occurred in both parts of the island since our last meeting in July

2016. I share the Deputy's concern that this is something of a challenging agenda. I intend to be in Belfast on a couple of occasions between now and the Christmas recess.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2016-11-23a.234&s=cross-border#g237>