

# CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

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3 November 2017 – 10 November 2017



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

The Northern Ireland Assembly was dissolved at 00:01 on Thursday 26 January 2017.



Tuesday 7 November 2017

Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection

Stephen Donnelly asked the Minister for Employment Affairs and Social Protection the details of all planning and research work under way for the impact of the result of Brexit negotiations in her Department or related State agencies; if this analysis is intended for publication; the expected completion and publication date respectively of this research, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

**Regina Doherty:** As Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade with special responsibility for Brexit, Minister Coveney has responsibility for coordinating the whole-of-Government response to Brexit. In this capacity, he is working closely with his colleagues across Government to address the many challenges resulting from Brexit. This cooperation also involves the relevant State Agencies.

Work at Cabinet level is being prepared through cross-Departmental coordination structures. These represent a frequent and active channel through which all relevant Departments are providing their research, analysis and overall policy input to the Government's wider response to Brexit, including its priorities for the ongoing Article 50 negotiations between the EU and the UK.

As the outcome of the negotiations is not yet known, an important focus of the planning and preparation being undertaken through these structures is on deepening the Government's analysis and understanding of the exact consequences of a range of different possible scenarios. This represents an intensification of efforts to build on the Government's contingency planning.

In relation to the areas under my remit, the key area of concern is the impact of Brexit on the current reciprocal arrangements for social insurance (which includes pensions) and social assistance (means tested schemes linked to residency rights) and child benefit between Ireland and the UK, including Northern Ireland.

The Citizens Information Board has commissioned research to scope the possible impacts of Brexit on citizens in a number of areas and to identify potential information responses, including cross-border responses, to ensure citizens are kept informed of their rights and entitlements.

CIB intends to publish this research. It is due to be complete in February 2018.

The Department is continuing its assessment of the implications of Brexit on these areas on a scheme-by-scheme and client basis. This is part of ongoing Brexit analysis and scenario planning for input into larger Government deliberative processes and it is considered that all of these areas merit equal prioritisation as they fundamentally relate to the rights, entitlements and wellbeing of our citizens.

**Source:** <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-11-07a.3264&s=cross-border+2017-11-03..2017-11-10#g3266.r>

**Wednesday 8 November 2017**

Niamh Smyth ask the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the steps he is taking to protect farmers in Border counties from a hard Brexit; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

**Michael Creed:** I thank the Deputy for her question. I recognise fully the potential difficulties farmers and citizens, including those in the Border counties, are likely to face in the event of a hard Brexit, given the highly integrated nature of agri-trade and commercial, social and cultural interaction on the island of Ireland. However, from the beginning of the Article 50 negotiations Government policy has been to maintain a trading relationship with the United Kingdom as close as possible to the current configuration and, in the case of the island of Ireland, to avoid any kind of border. The position of the Government on this matter could not be clearer. As a response to Ireland's concerns, the special position of Ireland is explicitly recognised in the Article 50 negotiating guidelines which indicate that flexible and imaginative solutions will be required to avoid a hard border. That is also the position articulated in Prime Minister May's letter triggering Article 50 on 29 March 2017 and it is equally reflected in the position adopted by the European Parliament. The need to protect the Good Friday Agreement and the common travel area is a critical part of this dynamic. All of the institutions of the European Union and the UK Government are ad idem on these principles

and I believe there is also a broad political consensus in this House to do so. Clearly, the best protection for farmers in Border counties lies in the avoidance of a hard border.

In the meantime, my Department and I have been actively engaged in assessing the potential impacts of Brexit on the Irish agrifood sector, consulting stakeholders and engaging with political counterparts across Europe to sensitise them to the particular issues on the island of Ireland. This work is being done in conjunction with the overall Government response led by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. An issue of particular concern to my Department, for example, is the need for any post-Brexit trade arrangement to deal comprehensively with sanitary and phytosanitary, SPS, standards and controls in order to avoid the need for border controls for animals, plants, and products of animal or plant origin. However, the most immediate challenge for farmers is the impact caused by the significant drop in the value of sterling against the euro. My Department and I, in co-operation with the Government and other Departments and agencies, are attempting to mitigate the consequences through a range of actions under two distinct pillars - competitiveness and diversification. My Department introduced a number of measures in budget 2017 to help to reduce costs and improve competitiveness at farm level, including the introduction of a €150 million low-cost loan scheme, agri-taxation measures and increased funding under the rural development and seafood development programmes.

Additional information not given on the floor of the House

In budget 2018 I provided for a €50 million Brexit package to provide priming for a new low-cost loan scheme for farmers and food businesses, to provide additional funding for Bord Bia's marketing and promotional efforts and to fund the kind of investment in competitiveness, innovation and product development that will be critically important for the development of the Irish food sector post-Brexit. I also provided €25 million in additional funding for the areas of natural constraint scheme and €626 million for rural development measures, including a 40% increase in funding for TAMS, all of which will be of assistance to farmers in the Border area. The Government remains very focused on supporting farmers and the agrifood industry through the challenges ahead. I will continue to consult the industry as the negotiations develop and press Ireland's case for continued free access to the UK market, without tariffs or burdensome customs and administrative procedures.

**Niamh Smyth:** On his recent visit to Cavan the Minister had the privilege of taking a guided tour around McCarren's where, as he is well aware, there has been significant investment. He is also aware that a third dryer was opened recently in Lakeland Dairies. The mushroom industry in the constituency has been badly affected since the announcement of Brexit, following which the Border counties will be at the coalface. They will be affected most by the possible imposition of tariffs. The possible removal of tariffs in low-cost regions such as South America will result in their being opened up to trade with the United Kingdom, which will make it extremely difficult for Irish farmers and producers to compete. In counties such as Cavan and Monaghan the imposition of controls along the Border would make it much harder, slower and more costly to move produce and products from the North to the South.

The Minister referred to Bord Bia. It estimates that €570 million in trade was lost in 2016, with exports to the United Kingdom falling by 8%. The IFA estimates that beef farmers took a hit of more than €150 million in 2016. The mushroom industry in the constituency has been devastated.

**Michael Creed:** I agree with the points articulated by the Deputy. There are many agribusinesses along the Border such as the aforementioned McCarren's, Lakeland Dairies, LacPatrick and Strathroy in the North. We have, effectively, an all-island agrifood economy. Some 50% of our beef exports and 30% of our dairy exports are to the United Kingdom. A significant challenge is presented in that regard, particularly in the production of cheddar cheese, for which there are no ready-made alternative global markets. Our objective is to try to ensure we get as close to the current trading arrangements as possible. One of the issues that is often overlooked in the public debate in which there is a concentration of effort on Border tariffs is the one I raised in my initial reply, namely, that of SPS, sanitary and phytosanitary standards. If, for example, we have a situation where there is agreement on tariffs and it is a benign arrangement which will not change significantly, we could still be snookered on the basis of a variation in standards with the UK production system which would oblige us to police all movements of goods over and back across the Border. The application of equal standards here and in the United Kingdom post-Brexit is really important because it would also protect us, for example, from cheaper imports into the UK market which would undermine our market position there. That is something of which we are acutely conscious.

**Niamh Smyth:** I agree with the Minister. The continuation of an invisible border for Border counties such as Cavan and Monaghan must be of the utmost importance for the Minister and the Government in negotiations. The Minister does not need me to tell him that in 2015 exports of agricultural products from Ireland to the North of Ireland were worth more than €750 million. Imports from Northern Ireland were worth more than €500 million. Milk and milk products are so important for my constituency. More than 800 million litres of milk are imported from the North annually, much of which is processed and exported from the South. Lakeland Dairies is a prime example of a company that has milk processing plants on both sides of the Border. That is an example of the types of industry we have of which we need to be very cognisant to ensure they will be protected to the utmost.

**Michael Creed:** That is the reason the Border and such Irish issues were placed front and centre in the negotiations and there has to be sufficient progress made on them before we move on to deal with the future trading relationship. We can understandably concentrate on the economic impact, but as a Border resident, the Deputy is aware that the political aspect is also very important, as is the psychological effect of a border and what that would mean to those communities that have been plagued for a long time. Perhaps our memories are short, but we do not want to find ourselves slipping back into a situation where the Border will become something far more than a line on a map and that will have a psychological and political effect that could lead us back to a darker period in our history which none of us want to revisit. The economic argument is significant, but in many respects a hard border and the things that could flow from it are really important also. That is why

appropriate Border arrangements and the Good Friday Agreement are front and centre in our efforts.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2017-11-08a.390&s=brexit+2017-11-03..2017-11-10#g393>