



**BRITISH-IRISH  
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

**COMHLACHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH  
NA BREATAINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN**

**FURTHER OBSERVATIONS BY THE NORTHERN IRELAND  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

**on**

**THE REPORT FROM COMMITTEE B**

**on**

**REFORM OF THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY**

**COMMITTEE B: EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

**Letter from the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, to the British Clerk to the Committee**

*20 March 2000*

I refer to the letter of 17 February to Lord Dubs from your Chairman, the late Michael Colvin.

May I first extend my condolences to the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, and to Committee B in particular, on Mr Colvin's sudden and tragic death last month.

In his letter, Mr Colvin sought a more detailed response from the British Government to your Committee's report into the Agenda 2000 Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. I believe you appreciate the circumstances which required Lord Dubs to make a fairly brief reply at the end of November 1999.

I am pleased to enclose a more detailed response to the issues raised in your Committee's report. The reply attempts to deal with each of the report's conclusions and recommendations.

I hope you find this response helpful.

**RT HON ADAM INGRAM JP MP**  
**Minister of State**

## **Response by the British Government**

The United Kingdom Government has studied the conclusions contained in the Report of Committee B and has also noted the response from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Dublin.

The Government concurs with many, but not all, of the conclusions reached by the Committee and, likewise, can accept many, but not all, of the recommendations. In many cases, decisions relating to the implementation of the Agenda 2000 reforms have now been taken. As the Dublin Department has indicated, where circumstances permitted, and where it was favourable to the economy and in line with industry views, a similar approach to that in the Republic was adopted.

The Government recognises 'the significant differences between the overall agricultural economies of the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom' (paragraph 49). A further, unmentioned factor which helps explain the 'different negotiating stances of the two governments' is, of course, the fact that the UK is a major net contributor to the EU budget while the Republic of Ireland is still a net beneficiary. The UK Government holds to its belief that the Agenda 2000 reforms are insufficient to satisfactorily address the difficulties facing the CAP, particularly with the prospect of further enlargement.

The Government appreciates that 'the agricultural economy of Northern Ireland... more closely resembles that of the Republic than that of the rest of the UK (paragraph 50), although the scale, structure, pattern and problems of agriculture in Northern Ireland also have much in common with those in Wales. The Committee correctly draws attention to the emphasis on dairy and pig production in Northern Ireland and the Republic. In his reply to the Committee, Lord Dubs also drew attention to the shared importance of beef cattle production.

The Government, while accepting that the 'commonality of interest has implications both for policy and for the way in which policy is developed' (paragraph 51), must also be mindful of other considerations. The need to avoid possible distortion between Northern Ireland and the Republic weighed heavily in the decision to top-up the heifer premium from the beef national envelope, in line with a similar decision in the Republic. This reflected the consensus view of the Northern Ireland agricultural industry and the Assembly Agriculture Committee. However, in accepting this, the devolved administration was aware that it was, therefore, obliged to give less weight to Targeting Social Need considerations.

The Government also notes the Committee's belief that '...the policy-making process itself does not at present take sufficient account of the interests of Northern Ireland agriculture' (paragraph 52). The Committee will recognise that major decisions on the CAP are taken by a Council of Ministers who represent Member States, rather than individual regions. As the Committee's report asserts, this does not mean that a restored Northern Ireland Executive cannot establish other forms of representation and participation in policy formulation within the UK, and in Brussels where

appropriate and with the agreement of the UK Government. The Government is ready to help devise and to fully co-operate in any such arrangements on the same basis as those in place for the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales.

Before the devolved administration was suspended, it participated in a number of meetings of the North-South Ministerial Council established under the Good Friday Agreement (paragraph 53). This will continue following restoration of devolution.

Committee B also identified 'a number of areas where greater co-operation across the border would be mutually beneficial' (paragraph 54). The Government's views on each of these areas are as follows:

(1) The Government values existing co-operation on research into animal health - which, as the Dublin Department states, has a long history - and

looks forward to identifying and pursuing areas for further cooperation.

(2) The Government accepts the need for closer integration of the animal health databases, but must await the convergence of the two systems, to which end officials are working.

(3) Routine agricultural statistics, such as aggregate income figures, census livestock numbers and crop areas and farm financial results, are already largely collected, analysed and published according to common practices and procedures, most of which are laid down in EU legislation. This enables comparisons to be made among EU Member States. The obligation is on the Member State to produce statistics for its own territory and harmonisation with England, Scotland and Wales is obviously necessary to generate UK-level data. However, in most cases this does not prevent valid comparisons with statistics for the Republic.

(4) The relevant agencies on both sides of the border are considering joint action on the promotion of food products in export markets. Subject to the outcome of the initial programme, and taking account of the fact that individual companies in the respective parts of the island are often in competition, consideration will be given to the scope for further co-operation in this field. The relevant agencies will also seek to build on the existing co-operation on environmental and related matters.

(5) The Government is confident that enhanced links between rural communities on both sides of the border will flow from rural development actions under the 2000-2006 structural funds round. These will include the Objective 1 (Transitional) Programme, LEADER+, INTERREG and PEACE II. The Good Friday Agreement identified agriculture and rural development as areas for enhanced cross-border co-operation. In the case of rural development, it is proposed that formal contact should continue through the Steering

Committee on Cross-Border Rural Development and that the Committee could

- (i) promote maximum co-operation in the implementation of rural development programmes and EU initiatives with a rural dimension;
- (ii) exchange information on experience and best practice in relation to rural development in both Northern Ireland and the Republic; and
- (iii) examine the scope for a common approach to the feasibility of developing cross-border area-based strategies and rural development research.

(6) There is a long history of collaboration on education, training and technology transfer between Northern Ireland's agricultural and food colleges and educational institutions in the Republic. Examples include joint planning and delivery of programmes and cross recognition of qualifications. New cross-border initiatives are being planned for delivery as part of the next round of EU funding.

**March 2000**