

# Environment, Planning and Countryside Committee

## EPC(2) 14-06(p3)

**Date: 26 October 2006**

**Venue: National Assembly for Wales, North Wales Visitor Centre, Colwyn Bay**

**Title: EU Common Agriculture Policy Simplification**

### **Purpose**

1. To provide the Committee with a position report on European Commission progress under the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) Simplification agenda.

### **Introduction**

2. In October 2005, the Commission published a paper outlining plans for simplifying the administration and operation of the CAP through reducing the regulatory impact, making rules more transparent and easier to understand. The aim was to reduce costs for farm businesses and provide greater value for EU taxpayers.

3. The purpose of simplification was to identify and remove unnecessary burdens under the following broad headings:

- **Technical simplification**

Revising the legal framework applying across the CAP, as well as reviewing administrative procedures and management mechanisms to identify actions for more coherent stream-lined processes that could provide for increased cost-effectiveness and efficiency.

- **Policy simplification**

Reducing the complexity of the CAP through improvements to the agricultural and rural development policy instruments where impact assessments play an increasing role.

4. The Commission made clear that the simplification debate would not extend to broader issues associated with the policy direction of the CAP. The Commission's 2008 "health check" would meet the requirement to review the impact of the 2003 CAP reform package.

5. In December 2005, the EU Agriculture Council agreed the work plan proposed by the Commission, including the holding of a stakeholder conference to inform the preparation of an Action Plan to be finalised in 2006.
6. Since that time the Commission has been engaged with Member States and external stakeholders to identify potential areas for action consistent with the technical and policy simplification process outlined above. The Assembly Government has contributed to the UK's negotiating framework and will continue to do so.
7. The underlying aim of the Commission to simplify the CAP and to reduce the administrative burden on farming is fully supported by the Assembly Government (and elsewhere within the UK).

## **The Action Plan**

8. A draft Action Plan from the Commission was made available at the CAP Simplification Stakeholder conference held on 3-4 October. The Conference was the opportunity for the Commission to present its views and outline activities to progress the simplification agenda, to seek reaction from a range of Stakeholders and to initiate a wider debate.
9. A copy of the draft Action Plan is at annex A for information. It essentially consists of a summary of actions undertaken by the Commission since last year that has led to the 20 proposed action areas for legislative change (set out in detail in the annex to the draft Action Plan). The next stage involves EU-based negotiations as the Commission aims to produce a formal Action Plan by end-2006.
10. The proposals put forward by the Commission are driven by DG Agri. It will be important to ensure that when the regulatory framework relating to the CAP is made more transparent and burdens reduced on the farming community in particular, comparable action applies elsewhere within the Commission that also impacts on farming eg public health and the environment.
11. The 4 administrations within the UK are currently considering the proposals in the draft Plan as part of the process to further develop the negotiating stance for the continuing EU-level discussions.

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