



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Dr William McCrea MP MLA
Chairperson, Committee for
Agriculture and Rural Development
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel
European Commission
200, Rue de la Loi
B-1049 Brussels
Belgium

18 February 2009

Dear Commissioner Fischer Boel,

**NORTHERN IRELAND RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME – FARM
MODERNISATION PROGRAMME**

I refer to the above.

As you will be aware, this programme opened for applications on 17 February 2009 and attracted a great deal of publicity in both the national and international press, not least when your spokesperson, Mr Michael Mann, indicated that the programme might not be operating in accordance with European Regulations.

The Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development was in session whenever this news broke and immediately called on the Minister to provide it with an explanation. This is in the process of being prepared and will be presented to the Committee at its next meeting. I can assure you that the Committee will be extremely meticulous in its investigation of this matter.

However, the Committee was of the unanimous opinion that our farming industry should not be penalised. The Committee believes that the industry has responded to the advertised scheme in a very positive manner and in accordance with the criteria that was provided and promoted to them. You will acknowledge that the industry has a high level of compliance with European regulations, and that any variance from European regulations in this scheme was outside of its control.

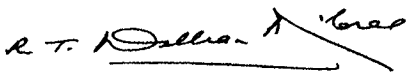
It is, however, important to remember that those who have entered the current scheme have done so with the knowledge that they will pass through a selection criteria as set out by the Department.

I would, therefore, ask on behalf of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development that, in the event the programme is found to have commenced outside of the EU regulations, you allow a derogation to permit the first tranche of funding to be progressed to farmers and that the subsequent tranches are then delivered in accordance with the appropriate regulations. This will recognise the efforts made by the industry in ensuring that application forms were submitted within the defined procedures identified to them and will allow for the commencement of much-needed investment in the rural economy of Northern Ireland.

My Committee colleagues and I are happy to discuss this matter with you.

I thank you for your attention to this matter and I look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. T. Dillan' followed by a large, stylized flourish that extends to the right and then loops back down to the left, ending under the signature.

Dr William McCrea MP MLA
Chairperson to the Committee for
Agriculture and Rural Development

Cc: Deputy Chairperson
Committee Members
Mr Jim Allister MEP
Mrs Bairbre de Brun MEP
Mr James Nicholson MEP