

## Brexit Position Statement: The Future of Agriculture Support in Northern Ireland

### 1. Key point

We need to rethink the way we manage land in Northern Ireland and why. Whilst the future outside of the EU is uncertain, the requirement to develop new policies presents a unique opportunity to develop a robust and sustainable policy which strategically places agriculture and land-use on a sustainable footing. We now have a once in a generation opportunity to develop new sustainable agriculture policies in NI that are good for nature, fair to farmers and benefit society through the delivery of environmental public goods.

### 2. Background

In recent decades the CAP has pushed farming in an unsustainable direction. Evidence for this includes poor water quality<sup>1</sup> and the loss of carbon from damaged and degraded habitats, such as blanket bogs. Agricultural intensification is recognised as one of the key reasons for the decline in farmland nature<sup>2</sup>. However, agriculture can be part of the solution, which is evidenced through the role farmers and land managers play in the maintenance of landscapes and delivery of current agri-environment schemes.

The CAP hasn't been effective at meeting one of its key outcomes of helping to build a resilient agricultural industry. In NI 87% of farm income is derived from EU subsidies- compared with 53% for the UK. Without financial support most farming in NI is uneconomically viable. This has been brought into stark relief by the risks posed to future agriculture support and the implications for farming as a result of our decision to leave the EU.

### 3. Asks

➤ A Common Framework

Our aim of wanting farming to be good for people and nature applies everywhere across the UK. It is imperative that Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland and England work together on an ambitious common framework for Agriculture that prevents a deregulatory race to the bottom. This must include an appropriate degree of flexibility so as to allow implementation to be tailored to the specific environmental and legislative context in each nation

➤ Effective Legislative Baseline

To secure value for money, it is essential that future payments build from a foundation of effective regulation. Payments should continue to be linked to regulatory compliance where relevant, in order to avoid undermining the effectiveness of public investment

➤ Funding

It is essential that the UK Government and devolved administrations continue to invest in farming and land management policies in order to meet a range of agricultural and environmental objectives. To ensure sufficient investment towards achieving our agricultural and environmental goals, existing levels of funding associated with the CAP

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/ni-environmental-statistics-report-2017\\_2.PDF](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/ni-environmental-statistics-report-2017_2.PDF) (page 41)

<sup>2</sup> [https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-projects/state-of-nature/210-2470-15-16\\_stateofnature2016\\_northernireland.pdf](https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-projects/state-of-nature/210-2470-15-16_stateofnature2016_northernireland.pdf)

should be maintained, particularly for an initial 10-year period<sup>3</sup>. Within this, the proportion of funding associated with environmental farming and land management policies should be significantly increased.

➤ Public Goods Payments

The concept of public goods is a way of describing the environmental and social goods and services provided by agriculture and other land uses such as forestry that are not rewarded through the market. These include biodiversity, soil function, resilience to flooding and a range of others<sup>4</sup> which contribute to NIs Natural Capital. A focus on public goods will demonstrate clear added value to the taxpayer in return for their investment whilst continuing to support farming and land management practises that deliver benefits to society.

➤ A Clearly Defined Transition

We recognise that there is a need to transition from our current policies under the CAP, to a future policy. At a time of significant flux however, it is essential that governments across the UK provide clarity about the road ahead

#### 4. What Next?

DAERA have been working with stakeholders in the Agri-food and the environment industries on a position paper which sets out the post-Brexit needs of the sectors. NMNI believes it is within the public interest that this paper is released for consultation to allow for public discourse on this important matter. This would also help ensure that NI is not left behind the rest of the UK when considering options post Brexit.

DEFRA has already consulted stakeholders on this matter, and plans to bring forward legislation in the autumn, the scope of which is to be decided. NMNI preference is that devolution is restored and the NI Assembly is able to bring forward its own legislation for Agriculture in NI, whilst working with the other devolved nations on an ambitious common framework.

#### 5. Who we are:

Nature Matters NI is a campaign for a nature friendly Brexit. Led by the NIEL Brexit Coalition we are working for more sustainable land use and fisheries, and better environmental protection for Northern Ireland.

Our position aligns with UK Environment Links in England, Scotland and Wales, and the principles set out by the Greener UK5 paper 'Agriculture at a crossroads: the need for sustainable farming and land use policies'. We will continue to collaborate with UK colleagues on a range of issues relevant to our goal of realising a nature friendly Brexit for NI. For more details on our asks follow this link.

For further information on the work of the Sustainable Agriculture Land-Use Group contact: e-mail [john.martin@rspb.org.uk](mailto:john.martin@rspb.org.uk) or tel: 028 9069 0836

<sup>3</sup>[https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/Assessing%20the%20costs%20of%20Environmental%20Land%20Management%20in%20the%20UK%20Policy%20Briefing\\_tcm9-449500.pdf](https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/Assessing%20the%20costs%20of%20Environmental%20Land%20Management%20in%20the%20UK%20Policy%20Briefing_tcm9-449500.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Cooper, T., Hart, K. and Baldock, D. (2009) The Provision of Public Goods Through Agriculture in the European Union, Report for DG Agriculture and Rural Development, Contract No 30-CE-0233091/00-28, Institute for European Environmental Policy: London.

<sup>5</sup> <http://greeneruk.org/>