

FROM THE PERMANENT SECRETARY
Dr Malcolm McKibbin



Department of
**Agriculture and
Rural Development**

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Date: 31 March 2008

Dear Mr Allister

FORESTRY

Thank you for your letter dated 18 March 2008 highlighting your concerns about the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme (FWPS) and requesting information about the legislative changes proposed within the Forestry Strategy.

I am aware that a lower rate of payment, under the FWPS, may result in a reduced level of uptake, creating difficulties in the achievement of our long term strategic aim of increasing forest cover and our annual afforestation targets.

Since the scheme payment changes were announced in January 2008, Forest Service officials have met with DG AGRI in Brussels to explain the importance of continuing to attract applicants to the FWPS. On the basis of these discussions, we are now preparing proposals which, subject to re-definition of a farmer within the context of the relevant European regulation, will allow more landowners to avail of the farmer rate of premium. We are also examining the possibility of making de minimis payments, subject to European regulation, to those applicants you refer to in your letter, who have already carried out planting on the basis of the farmer rate of payment, but who are now only eligible for the lower non-farmer payment.

You also enquired about proposed forestry legislation. Forest Service is working on new draft primary legislation to replace the Forest Act (NI) 1953. The proposed Bill will include provision to reflect the broader economic, social and environmental scope of modern



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forestry and bring about a reasonable balance between these functions. It is proposed - to regulate the control of felling and replanting of woodland; to permit the wider use of Department land to obtain better value from the public forest estate; to include powers for the compulsory purchase of land and rights over land where this will improve management efficiency, effectiveness and safety; for powers to undertake repair of minor, unclassified roads used primarily by timber traffic; to introduce powers to grant statutory pedestrian access to Forest Service estate with reduced occupier's liability; and powers to control and monitor animals such as rabbits, deer, and grey squirrels which damage forests.

It is hoped that the new Forestry Act will be introduced to the Assembly by the end of the 2008-09 legislative session.

I hope that you find this information helpful.

Yours sincerely



D M McKIBBIN (Dr)
Permanent Secretary



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