



Minister of State

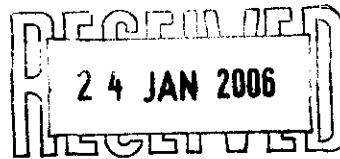
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Thank you for your letter of 5 January in which you requested that I respond positively to a further "Tie-Up" Aid scheme for the Northern Ireland Fishing Industry.

The Transitional Aid (Tie-up) Schemes of 2004 and 2005 were intended to provide assistance to the industry to allow them to adapt to changing fishing opportunities. They were developed within the framework of European regulations governing the awarding of structural funds and state aids for fisheries, and approved by the European Commission. The particular provisions governing the Schemes only allow payments for such temporary cessations to be made for a maximum of two years. There is no leeway to open such a Scheme for a third year.

I fully appreciate the economic difficulties faced by the NI whitefish fleet and the additional pressures faced as a result of the spring cod spawning closure in the Irish Sea, and my officials will continue to work with the industry to develop long-term solutions to the problems it is facing.

JEFF ROOKER