



21<sup>st</sup> December 2007

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

Economic Policy Unit  
E5.22  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
Belfast  
BT4 3SR

Dear Sir/Madam

**RE: Building a Better Future – Draft Programme for Government 2008-2011  
Building a Better Future – Draft Investment Strategy 2008-2018**

I am writing on behalf of the Ulster Farmers Union's (UFU) 12,500 farming family members to provide our comments on the Northern Ireland Executive's Draft Programme for Government (PFG) 2008 – 2011 and the Draft Investment Strategy (IS) 2008 – 2018.

The Ulster Farmers Union is fully supportive of the broad thrust of this Draft Programme for Government. We welcome the emphasis on economic development, innovation and export growth. We consider that it is essential that the budgets necessary for each Government Department are established and then the funding required is found. In the first instance, this funding should be found by efficiency savings within the Northern Ireland Government and subsequently by the realization of Government assets. However, it is absolutely imperative that funds generated from the sale of assets are not used to fund/subsidise inefficiencies within the public sector, and that the decision making process for selecting assets from disposal, is open and transparent and subject to consultation with the sectors which are impacted.

On the specific targets which are contained within both the Draft PFG and Draft IS which are of direct relevance to the Northern Ireland agri-food industry, we consider that these are 'piecemeal' rather than 'holistic' and that this is a serious failing within both the Draft PFG and IS and must be addressed. We do however welcome the confirmation that work will commence to achieve a 25% reduction in agricultural bureaucracy by 2013 although we do hope that this recommendation is achieved long before then. Targets to include more farms in agri environment schemes are also welcomed, as are plans to reduce the incidence of Bovine Tuberculosis and Brucellosis, although we hold the view that the target should be to eradicate both of these diseases. We are supportive and encouraged by the commitments given to increase the generation of electricity from indigenous renewable resources but we need clarity on how this is to be achieved.

We are, however, extremely concerned at the absence within these proposals of a Public Procurement Policy which favors the purchasing of local produce. This would re-invest public money in the largest private sector employer within the local economy. This is an opportunity which must not be missed.

While we are supportive of the £45 million which is to be provided to aid the industry's competitiveness, this is funding which is contained within the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2008 – 2013 and has already been announced in July of this year.

Additionally, the challenge which the Northern Ireland agri-food industry faces to maintain a vibrant rural economy here is not addressed in the Draft Programme for Government. With the Northern Ireland RDP, amounting to £500 million, compared to the equivalent Programme in the Republic of Ireland which has a budget of almost 6 billion Euro, the competitive disadvantage which the NI Agri-food sector must face, is starkly evident.

I trust that these comments are of use and will be fully considered as part of this consultation process on both of these Draft Northern Ireland Executive documents.

I am also copying this letter to the Strategic Investment Board.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Kenneth Sharkey', written in dark ink on a light background.

**KENNETH SHARKEY**