

Brussels, 07 SEP. 2009  
C(2009) 6439

Dear Lord Roper,

The Commission would like to thank you for sending us your report of 4 June 2009 on the 'Review of the Less Favoured Areas Scheme' {COM(2009)161}.

We note with interest your conclusions and recommendations and we welcome the Committee's support for a clear, transparent and objective scheme for farmers in areas with natural handicaps.

The Commission Communication 'Towards a better targeting of aid to farmers in areas with natural handicaps' is seeking to assess the impact of a number of suggested biophysical criteria, for delimiting areas in Europe suffering from natural handicaps and where these are a hindrance to normal agricultural practice. To ensure that any proposed delimitation of areas is based on the most pertinent evidence available, the Commission called on Member States to simulate the impact of a new delimitation methodology using the data sources available. The results of these simulations will feed the preparatory work within the Commission. This exercise does not preclude further continuing the debate on any of the elements of the scheme.

With regard to the specific conclusions and recommendations presented in the report, it is worth noting that a number of them are already taken into account in the current Rural Development Regulation, Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005.

It is suggested in Chapter 5 that a criteria to capture the handicap related to maritime climate should be added. The Commission considers with interest this proposal and at this stage, we will not preclude any additional evidence that is provided by Member States in the simulation of the suggested criteria or any additional criteria that they might suggest. However, in assessing any new proposed criteria, the Commission will adopt the same standards that have inspired the system proposed in the Communication, which has been developed by an expert panel managed by the Commission's Joint Research Center based on sound science and backed by a large body of evidence and literature.

Some of the views expressed in the report on the scheme and its future in the CAP are mirrored by the Commission's interest in taking forward the implementation of a robust mechanism which will meet the objectives of the policy instrument to prevent land

abandonment. This will ensure that some of our most treasured areas and landscapes continue to be sustainably managed for the foreseeable future.

The Commission appreciates your support and notes all the work that went into the investigation and writing of the report and its conclusions and recommendations.

We look forward to continuing the policy dialogue in the future.

Yours sincerely,



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