

The Priority for Northern Ireland must be to avoid a no deal outcome

Joint letter from Voluntary, Community, Environment, and Rural sectors

THURSDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2018

As representative bodies from the rural, environmental and wider community and voluntary sectors we welcome the progress that has been made in the UK Withdrawal Agreement with the European Union. While it is by no means perfect, we believe it currently represents the best option of avoiding a potentially disastrous no deal outcome in 18 weeks' time.

The deal includes many positive commitments which we welcome.

It is good news that the UK and EU have agreed that Brexit will not weaken environmental protections with a mutual pledge on non-regression on current standards.

The plan also proposes an independent body / bodies to monitor, oversee and enforce environmental obligations applicable to Northern Ireland that the EU currently oversees. It is vitally important that we retain effective environmental governance mechanisms, as we are one of the only parts of Europe without an independent Environmental Protection Agency. This is important because post-Brexit we will continue to have cross-border environmental management challenges on the island of Ireland not faced in Great Britain.

Direct support from the EU, not least through successive PEACE programmes, has played a vital role in developing peace and stability in Northern Ireland. We need both the European Union and the UK to remain committed to supporting projects that help contribute to continued peace and stability in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland's farming and rural communities, many of which straddle the border, could be disproportionately impacted by leaving the EU without a deal. A hard Brexit could impact hugely on people and businesses, with economic research showing that the beef and sheep sector would be particularly vulnerable. The proposed deal would ensure that farmers in Northern Ireland would continue to have access to EU markets and provide economic opportunities for businesses including our many small and medium enterprises (SMEs) of which only 5% have a Brexit plan in place.

Post-Brexit, Northern Ireland must robustly plan for a new rural development policy which acknowledges that over 90% of those that live in rural areas are not directly employed in farming. It is essential that we implement a robust rural development programme that will secure the sustainability of rural communities and promote balanced regional development.

A no-deal scenario next year would be a severe blow for Northern Ireland in terms of both our economy and wider society with our communities and environment likely to bear the brunt. Concerns like these must come first as our local politicians consider how to respond to the draft deal. The priority for Northern Ireland must be to avoid a no deal outcome on 29th March.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Nuttall'.

Geoff Nuttall
Northern Ireland Council for
Voluntary Action (NICVA)



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. McGuicken'.

Craig McGuicken
Nature Matters NI



Rural Community Network
SUPPORTING RURAL COMMUNITIES

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kate Clifford'.

Kate Clifford
Rural Community Network