Address by Mr. Pat Farrell, Chairman of the Irish Farmers' Association's National Environment & Rural Affairs Committee, to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality.

30th November 2011

Chairman, Deputies and Senators

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee today. I am joined by my colleague Mr. Thomas Ryan, IFA Environment & Infrastructure Executive.

From the outset I note that the current position of the Minister for Justice and Equality, as set out in reply to a Dáil question on the 23rd June 2011, is that he has no plans at this time to change the present time zone arrangements or to conduct a cross-department cost-benefit analysis of advancing time by one hour all year round for Ireland. However, in arriving at that decision he referred to activity by other EU Member States. Farming and food producers in Ireland are predominately dependant on the export markets and therefore we must also be conscious of any changes in the Summer Time Rule in other countries. Each year the Irish agri-food sector produces enough beef to feed 30 million people, it is the largest exporter of beef into Europe and the 4th largest internationally. In addition over 80% of dairy products produced by Irish farmers are exported into the EU and other markets.

Three different time zones currently exist in the European Union: with Ireland, the United Kingdom and Portugal operating at Greenwich Mean Time (GMT); the Central European countries operating at GMT+1 and the Eastern European countries operating at GMT+2.

Ireland's GMT colleagues have all considered proposals regarding Daylight Saving Time. In the United Kingdom the Daylight Saving Bill 2010-2011 was debated at second Reading on 3 December 2010, and the House of Commons voted for the Bill to be sent to a Public Committee that will scrutinise the Bill clause by clause. Portugal converted to Central European Time (CET) from 1966-1976 and from 1992-1996. However, the country subsequently reverted back to GMT. Part of the reasoning supporting the conversion to CET was to increase tourism with Spain. This point was also articulated in the UK, where as part of British Tourism Week, analysts claimed that an extra hour's daylight could be worth £3.5billion a year to their economy, with 80,000 jobs being created because attractions would be able to open for longer.

This point cannot be lost, and if such increases in tourism revenues and employment could be generated in the Irish economy it would be of considerable benefit.

From a farming perspective we are unclear what proposals the Committee may be considering for inclusion in any future draft of Daylight Saving Time legislation. However if, for example, it resulted in an extra hour of morning day light, then with modern farm machinery and yard lighting this may not be a significant issue.

That said, an extra hour of morning brightness may provide other benefits, for example to motorists and pedestrians, to the tourism sector as already outlined, to the prevention of crime, and in the sports and recreation sectors.

From the environmental perspective Ireland faces an increasing challenge in achieving post-Kyoto emission reduction targets.

Agriculture is singularly the most successful sector in reducing greenhouse gas emissions over the past two decades however, other emissions from other sectors such as energy and in particular transport spiral out of control. It is therefore suggested that an Environmental Impact Assessment report should be carried out to assess if the introduction of Daylight Saving Time legislation could positively impact on national efforts to reduce greenhouse gasses.

In conclusion Chairman, I would once again like to thank you and the Committee for the invitation. I think any proposals regarding the introduction of legislation in this area will require full consideration of the impact it will have for the markets Irish agriculture exports into, the benefits which may arise for farmers; as well as taking into account pedestrians, road users, the tourism sector and meeting environmental obligations.

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