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Jim Paice MP
Minister of State
DEFRA
Smith Square
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Monday 18 October 2010

Dear Mr Paice,

Abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board and associated structures

Thank you for agreeing to meet me along with TUC officials last week with regard to the Government's decision to abolish the Agricultural Wages Board, the 15 Agricultural Wages Committees, and the 16 Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committees. I thought our meeting was very constructive and open, and I thank you for your honest approach to the discussions.

I felt it would be useful to put some of our concerns in writing so that there was no ambiguity about the issues we raised.

Firstly, we raised the issue of impact assessments with you. We previously raised this matter with Jeremy Cowper at a meeting of the Agricultural Wages Board, held on 23 July 2010. The verbatim notes show that I asked whether or not an Equality Impact Assessment had been carried out before the Government's decision was announced. Mr Cowper told the Board that the Department knew that an EQIA would be needed, but that one had not been completed yet. We were told that it would be worked on over the summer and autumn, ideally to be completed when the measures were introduced to Parliament. It was apparent at our meeting last week that this work has still not been completed.

I am concerned that the Government does not seem to have complied with the public duty to show due regard for the impact of this decision before announcing it.

In addition, the Government has widely publicised its commitment to ensure fairness in its legislative programme. There does not appear to be any evidence to suggest that the fairness of abolition of the Agricultural Wages Board and the other structures referred to above has been examined. I think it is fair to say that opinion in the

industry is divided and I would suggest that more work needs to be done to convince agricultural workers and the wider electorate that abolition will result in greater fairness.

Finally, I am concerned over the lack of consultation around this decision. There was no consultation with either the employers' side or the workers' side of the AWB prior to the decision to abolish it. There was very limited consultation with the Welsh Assembly Government which was severely constrained by a tight timescale for responses and cannot therefore be regarded as meaningful consultation in any sense.

For all these reasons, I would urge you not to press ahead with abolition, but to take the time to properly assess the impact removal of the AWB, ADHACs and AWCs would cause, and to consult the industry and interested parties with a view to achieving consensus on the way forward. We have indicated our commitment to tackle any difficulties raised by the employers' side and our open minded approach to reform and modernisation. I would hope that such a common sense approach would strike a chord with you and I hope you will reconsider the position.

Yours sincerely,

Ian Waddell
National Officer

Cc Frances O'Grady - DGS TUC