



Submission
to
Committee for Agriculture
and Rural Development
on
Committee Bill:
Abolition of Agricultural
Wage Board

April 2008

Introduction

NICEM is an umbrella organisation representing the interests of ethnic minority people in Northern Ireland, these includes settled ethnic minorities, migrant workers, asylum seekers and refugees in Northern Ireland. Currently we have 23 affiliated ethnic minority groups as our full members, which represents most of the ethnic minority communities in Northern Ireland.

Comments on abolition of the AWB

1. NICEM has serious concerns on the abolition of Agricultural Wage Board (AWB). There are both procedural as well as substantial issues in which will have adverse impacts on the new migrant communities who are now working in the agricultural sector as well as related Agri-food industry and other rural occupations.
2. Firstly, the Committee would introduce a Bill to repeal the AWB. If the Bill was introduced by the Department, they are required to produce a copy of the equality impact assessment for consultation. Although the Committee is not bound by the equality duty under Section 75, as a matter of good practice I would recommend the Committee conduct the same in the proposed Bill if adverse impacts on the agricultural migrant workers were inevitable.
3. Secondly, the proposed abolition of the AWB will single out Northern Ireland is the only region in United Kingdom to take such drastic action. Will the Committee explain to us why the rest of the AWB in United Kingdom will not abolish and what reason behind to take different course of actions?
4. Thirdly, the proposed abolition of the AWB will have adverse impacts on those experienced agricultural migrant workers in Northern Ireland which results the drop of pay, the lose of overtime payment on Sunday and a reduced leave entitlement. It may also leave the agricultural workers with a weakened bargaining position, as employees may have to negotiate with the employers directly and may not have the benefit of union representation, in particular the migrant workers.
5. Fourthly, since the rate agreed by the AWB is used as a benchmark of the Agri-Food industry and other rural occupations in Northern Ireland. It will inevitable have adverse impacts on lose of the wage benchmark.
6. Therefore we would like to pledge the Committee not to abolish the AWB for the above reasons.

Should you have any queries about this submission, please contact the following person:

Mr. Patrick Yu
Executive Director
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)
Ascot House, 3/F
24-31 Shaftesbury Square
Belfast
BT2 7DB
Tel: 028 9023 8645
Fax: 028 9031 9485
Email: patrickyu.nicem@btconnect.com