**Oifig an Aire Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara**
Office of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

19 June 2026

Timmy Dooley T.D.
Minister of State for Fisheries & the Marine
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Agriculture House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2.

c.c. Taoiseach Micheál Martin T.D.

Dear Timmy,

I refer to your letter of 18 June in relation to the position of Chair of the Agriculture and Fisheries (AgriFish) Council during Ireland's Presidency of the European Council.

As you are aware, holding the Presidency means that, for six months, Ireland will chair the work of the Council, lead discussions between Member States, work with the European Commission and the European Parliament, and seek to make progress on a wide range of issues that matter to citizens and communities across Europe.

This is a significant responsibility, but it is also a significant opportunity to lead the European agenda at a pivotal time.

Agriculture and fisheries are central to Europe's future. That is the core message that I, as Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, will bring to the Agriculture and Fisheries Council during our Presidency and my objective during our Presidency will be to make sure that this is understood clearly in the work of the Council.

It is with this in mind that I want to assuage some of the concerns that you have raised, particularly any feeling you may have that responsibility is being revoked.

Our roles and responsibilities as part of the presidency and those we have at a domestic level are distinct and different.

In holding the Presidency of the Council, Ireland's role will be to chair Council meetings and the many working groups that prepare Council decisions. Ireland will set agendas and coordinate and manage discussions between Member States, work closely with the European Commission, represent the Council in negotiations with the European Parliament, and seek to move legislative and policy files forward.

Where legislation is being negotiated, it also means that Ireland will represent the Council as a whole in discussions with the European Parliament and the Commission.

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As Presidency, Ireland must act as an honest broker, representing the whole of the Council, and the Governments of each EU Member State. It is a role that must be exercised responsibly, and carefully and one which is separate to our roles on a day-to-day basis on domestic matters including those covered under statutory instrument SI368/2025.

In recognition of the importance of those areas, I have always been keen to facilitate your participation at the monthly meetings of AgriFish Council when it comes to representing Ireland's position on these matters. As we have discussed, over the next six months I believe that you can continue to play a very important role advocating for Ireland as you have always done, including on the specific issues referenced in your letter.

However, again reflecting on the distinct role of the Minister chairing Council meetings and the need to act as an honest broker, the senior Irish minister vacating the chair during discussions on fisheries matters could be viewed by many as Ireland not prioritising this important area of work. This is something that I believe would not reflect well on our presidency.

I also want to caution against any suggestion that distinct legislative files at a European level are tradeable commodities.

As you will be aware, on 9 December, prior to the AgriFish Council meeting of 12/13 December where the Hague Preferences were discussed, the European Commission officially extended Ireland's nitrates derogation following a unanimous vote by member states. This was on the basis of a draft commission implementing decision circulated by the European Commission for consultation with member states on 21 November.

This decision came after a lengthy period of negotiations with the European Commission. In all my negotiations with the relevant Commissioner the only issue I or Department officials involved in those negotiations discussed were water quality, the Habitats Directive and technical elements of the derogation.

It is my understanding that advice provided to you during that December Council was to highlight potential risks of an approach that could contribute to the invocation of Hague Preferences being blocked.

In returning to the issue at hand, as set out in your letter, one of the clearest messages repeatedly communicated by fisheries stakeholders over many years was a belief that fisheries and marine interests had become an afterthought within the department and political decision making at a central level.

Deciding to treat the fisheries element of the AgriFish Council different to the agricultural elements would in fact reinforce this.

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Ensuring consistency across all parts of the role of chair of the AgriFish Council demonstrates due respect to the fisheries sector. This was reflected in our stakeholder engagement event on Wednesday 17 June which you referenced, where fisheries stakeholders were very much front and centre of discussions on the day and equal to agriculture in every way.

I believe this and my remarks on the day highlight the very significant focus this government places on supporting this vital sector, a focus which will continue for the duration of our presidency and thereafter.

In conclusion, I share your position that this is not about any individual officeholder. I am guided by the need to have a consistent approach in chairing all parts of the AgriFish Council in order to display an equality of all issues before the Council. I believe this best provides the continuity, credibility and clarity that we both recognise is required.

While I understand that this may be personally disappointing for you, I hope you understand my perspective as outlined above. I look forward to your support in performing the role of an honest broker during the presidency and from an Irish perspective, continuing to manage our domestic responsibilities.

Kind regards,

Martin Heydon T.D.
Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine

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