

# Consultation on proposals to increase the maximum construction speed and weights of agricultural tractors and trailers

## Consultation Document

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## **1 Foreword**

From 9 March 2015 in England, Wales and Scotland, the maximum speed for agricultural tractors increased from 20mph to 40km/h (24.8mph) and the maximum weight of agricultural tractor and trailer combinations increased to 31 tonnes.

The increases in permitted weight and speed limits are part of a package of changes aimed at maximising the productivity and economic performance of the agricultural sector and increasing road safety. They result from an Independent Farming Regulation Taskforce Report in May 2011. The Report contained some 214 recommendations aimed at reducing red tape and unnecessary regulatory burdens.

The Department for Transport is also considering allowing further increases in weight and speed limits for tractors, alongside annual roadworthiness testing for heavier vehicles. These proposals are currently being developed and are anticipated in the next year or so.

Whilst the Report focused largely on the British farming community, the Department believes that local farmers could benefit from the ability to drive their tractors at higher speeds and to transport heavier loads. However, we recognise that farming practices may differ here and that it may not be appropriate allow such increases.

This consultation therefore seeks your views on the appropriateness of introducing the same increases here. In responding to this consultation you should consider and provide information on any benefits to the agricultural industry and any road and road safety impacts.

## **2 Who should read this Document?**

The following, amongst others, may have an interest in this document, which relates to secondary legislation covering Northern Ireland:

- Farmers and farming representative organisations;
- Road safety groups;
- Enforcement organisations such as the PSNI and DVA;
- Hauliers and their representative organisations.

### 3 Executive Summary

In May 2011 a report<sup>1</sup> by the Independent Farming Regulation Taskforce recommended that Government examine the maximum weights of agricultural tractor combinations and the maximum speed of tractors. This resulted in the Department for Transport bringing forward consultations in November 2013 and new legislation which came into operation on 9 March 2015.

The policy objective of these proposals is to maximise the productivity and economic performance of the agricultural sector and to improve road safety by changing the current combination and trailer weight limits and the maximum speed limits for conventional tractors. Reduced time spent on the road for a tractor driver should increase productivity for farmers and make it safer because farmers will no longer seek to use inappropriately small tractors to tow heavy trailers.

The Department of the Environment believes that farmers here could benefit from the same increase in weight and speed limits.

This consultation outlines the current position in Britain and seeks views on whether we should make the same legislative changes.

### 4 Options

In developing this consultation we looked at the following options:

#### Option 1 – Do nothing

The Department will make no change to the current legislation. This means that tractor speeds would remain at 20mph and tractor and trailer combination weights would remain 18.29 tonnes (t) and 24.39t respectively. Based on the findings of the Taskforce Report this would disadvantage farmers here as compared to their counterparts in Britain and Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-farming-regulation-task-force-report>

Option 2 – Increase speed and weight limits in line with current changes in Britain and consider introducing further changes in line with future Department for Transport policy.

### **Maximum speed**

The maximum road speed for agricultural tractors with or without a trailer is 40mph, as set out in the Motor Vehicles (Speed Limits) Regulation NI 1989. However, the Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations (NI) 1999 (C&U Regulations) set out certain technical requirements for agricultural tractors and require those that are driven above 20mph to meet certain requirements, including the fitment of brakes meeting truck standards, and Anti-lock Braking System (ABS). Most tractors do not comply with these requirements, so can legally only be used at speeds up to and including 20mph.

The Independent Task Force report suggested that the restrictions imposed by the technical requirements were outdated and that increasing the allowed speed above 20mph would not adversely impact on road safety. In addition, the report indicated that the current speed restriction did not reflect the capabilities of modern farming machinery, forcing farmers to drive unnecessarily slowly. In other EU member states, conventional tractors can operate at 40kph (24.85mph). The proposed changes will bring us into line with Britain and Europe.

### **Maximum Weight**

The C&U Regulations set out the maximum weights for agricultural vehicles. Currently, the maximum weight of agricultural trailers and combinations is 18.29 tonnes (t) and 24.39t respectively. The Independent Task Force report indicated that the current weight limits do not reflect the capabilities of modern farming machinery, limiting farmers from using certain trailers or risking road safety by using inappropriately small tractors to pull large trailers. Other EU countries often allow agricultural tractors to carry higher weights. Again, changing the combined weight limit to 31 tonnes will bring us into line with Britain and Europe. In this proposal the maximum weight of an agricultural trailer will remain unchanged.

### **Future Changes**

The Department for Transport is considering introducing further increases in weight limits for agricultural tractors and trailer combinations. Coupled with these increases in weight limits will be a requirement for a voluntary annual test. Should this consultation identify Option 2 as the preferred way forward the Department will work with DfT to ensure that the circumstances of the farming sector here are reflected in the work.

*The DfT consultations and the summary of responses can be viewed at:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/maximum-speed-limit-for-tractors-on-public-roads>*

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/agricultural-weight-limits-for-trailers-and-combinations>

## **5 Recommended Option**

The Department recommends that we increase the maximum speed for agricultural tractors from 20mph to 24.85mph (40kmh) and the tractor and trailer combination maximum weight to 31tonnes and engage with DfT with regards to future increases. Once the future policy is identified, we will consult further with stakeholders about possible future changes.

## **6 Impact Assessments**

DfT undertook significant regulatory impact assessment with regards to increasing both the speed and weight limits for agricultural tractors and we believe that the benefits which they identified will also apply to farmers here. The disbenefits in terms of increased loads on small country roads may be more significant for us because, whilst farming techniques are similar, the scale here may be smaller which would mean that loads are smaller and fewer return journeys are required.

In terms of road safety it is likely that increasing the speed limit from 20mph to 24.85mph would have little impact on road safety and may actually reduce the risks around collisions with slow moving vehicles.

Increasing the permitted weight is unlikely to have a detrimental impact on road infrastructure as many agricultural tractors are already carrying the higher weights and it is likely that damage may be reduced as a result of farmers having to make fewer return trips.

Competitiveness will be improved as the increases in weights and speed will allow our farmers to benefit from the same efficiencies as those in Britain and Europe.

An equality impact screening exercise has been undertaken which indicates that the change will have no adverse impact on any section 75 group.

We anticipate that the proposal will be of benefit to rural communities because it will improve efficiencies and competitiveness within the farming community.

Additionally, better rationalisation of farming transport should reduce the amount of slow moving traffic on country roads.

## **7 Consultation Questions**

**Question 1:** What is your preferred option? Please provide supporting evidence where appropriate.

**Question 2:** Do you agree with the Department's impact assessment? Where appropriate please provide evidence which supports your view.

**Question 3:** Do you agree that the proposal will have no adverse impact on any section 75 group? Where appropriate please provide evidence which supports your view.

**Question 4:** Do you agree that the proposal will benefit the rural community here? Where appropriate please provide evidence which supports your view.

## **8 How to respond**

The consultation period will begin on 26 May 2015 and will run until 7 July 2015. Please ensure that your response reaches us before the closing date. Annex A contains a preformatted answer sheet which we would like you to complete. If you would like further copies of this consultation document, it can be found at <http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/information/foi/recentreleases/publications-class-results.htm?category=Cat%204%20-%20How%20we%20make%20decisions&class=Public%20consultations>

Or you can contact the Department if you would like alternative formats.

Send consultation responses by email to [june.gibson@doeni.gov.uk](mailto:june.gibson@doeni.gov.uk) or alternatively to the following address:

**June Gibson**  
**Road Safety & Vehicles Regulation Division**  
**Clarence Court**  
**10 - 18 Adelaide Street**  
**Belfast**  
**BT2 8GB**

When responding, please state whether you are responding as an individual or representing the views of an organisation. If responding on behalf of a larger organisation, please make it clear who the organisation represents and, where applicable, how the views of members were assembled.



## 9 Freedom of Information (FoI)

- 9.1 Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be subject to publication or disclosure in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) or the Environmental Information Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993.
- 9.2 If you want information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence.
- 9.3 In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.
- 9.4 The Department will process your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act (DPA) and in the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

## 10 Annex A: Response Form

### Consultation on Tractor Speed and Weight limit increases

Question 1: What is your preferred option? <i>Please Tick</i>			
Option 1: Do Nothing	<input type="checkbox"/>	Option 2: increase speed and weight limits and engage with DfT with regards to future increases	<input type="checkbox"/>
Supporting data:			

Question 2: Do you agree with the Department's impact assessment? *Please Tick*

Yes		No	
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Supporting data:

Question 3: Do you agree that the proposal will have no adverse impact on any section 75 group? *Please Tick*

Yes		No	
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Supporting data:

Question 4: Do you agree that the proposal will benefit the rural community here?  
*Please Tick*

Yes		No	
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Supporting data:

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