

Driving Hours Directive

Fears that this may damage Scottish agriculture surface.

George Lyon, Liberal Democrat MEP for Scotland, has warned against the extension of the European working time directive with fears increasing that the UK Government will be forced to extend the regulation to cover self-employed drivers.

The European Commission, recognising the dangers of including self-employed drivers in the Directive, sought to exclude them from the working time rules. This proposal was struck down by the European Parliament by a small margin.

Until now the UK Government has resisted implementation of the rules but it is now feared it will be left with no choice but to extend a mandatory 48-hour week to cover the self-employed. Such a move could have a devastating impact on the haulage industry, including the Scottish agricultural sector with animal transports required to comply with another layer of bureaucracy.

Mr Lyon has written to the European Transport Commissioner asking him to urgently reconsider the issue.

Commenting, Mr Lyon said:

"I do not believe that self-employed lorry drivers need to be protected from themselves. In striking down the Commission's common sense exclusion of self-employed drivers from the Directive the European Parliament has set a dangerous precedent. It was quite clear this issue is being driven by ideology and not common sense.

"There is not a shred of evidence to suggest that limiting working hours improves road safety. It will add another layer of bureaucracy and additional costs to the road haulage industry which is all ready overburdened by regulation, excessive fuel costs and the effects of the recession.

"It would not only cover actual driving time but any associated activities which means that thousands of one man businesses who haul livestock straw and fertilisers could be

caught out by this impractical piece of bureaucracy.

"It is my fear that these proposals set us on a very slippery slope towards working time legislation for all self-employed workers.

"I have written to the Commissioner urging him to bring their proposals to exclude self-employed drivers before Parliament again to try and reverse the decision before the UK and other Governments are forced to implement these very damaging plans."

Scott Walker, NFU Scotland Policy Director, commented:

"This development is potentially worrying for the many Scottish farmers who depend on being able to transport farming goods such as livestock, feed and straw on a flexible basis. Some do this in order to supplement their income, while for others it is a necessity if no local haulage firm exists.

"These farmers may also be providing a vital service for neighbouring businesses and, in teaming up with fellow farmers to transport goods, are making sensible use of their vehicles and driving hours."