



Department
for Transport

Examining the Maximum Weights of Agricultural Trailers and Combinations

November 2013

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Foreword

We are launching this open consultation, following a commitment in the Farming Regulation Taskforce Report, published in May 2011, to consult on the weight limit for agricultural trailers and combinations in GB.

The agricultural industry is an essential part of the UK economy. Total Income from Farming was provisionally estimated to be just over £4.7 billion in 2012. Actions to maximise the efficiency of the agricultural industry, such as allowing them to carry more, will ease time delays for agricultural operators and increase productivity for farmers in the UK; in the long-term, productivity growth in agriculture allows farm commodities to be grown and harvested more cheaply.

As well as benefiting farmers, this benefits food manufacturers and consumers as most of these cost reductions are passed on to the non-farm economy as lower commodity prices.

That is why we are launching this open consultation, following a commitment to consult in the Farming Regulation Taskforce Report, published in May 2011.

Responses to questions set out here will help to examine whether the weight limits for agricultural trailers and combinations are set at the right level. We are asking for additional evidence, which will help us make future decisions.

We look forward to hearing your views.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'R. Goodwill', with a small dot at the end.

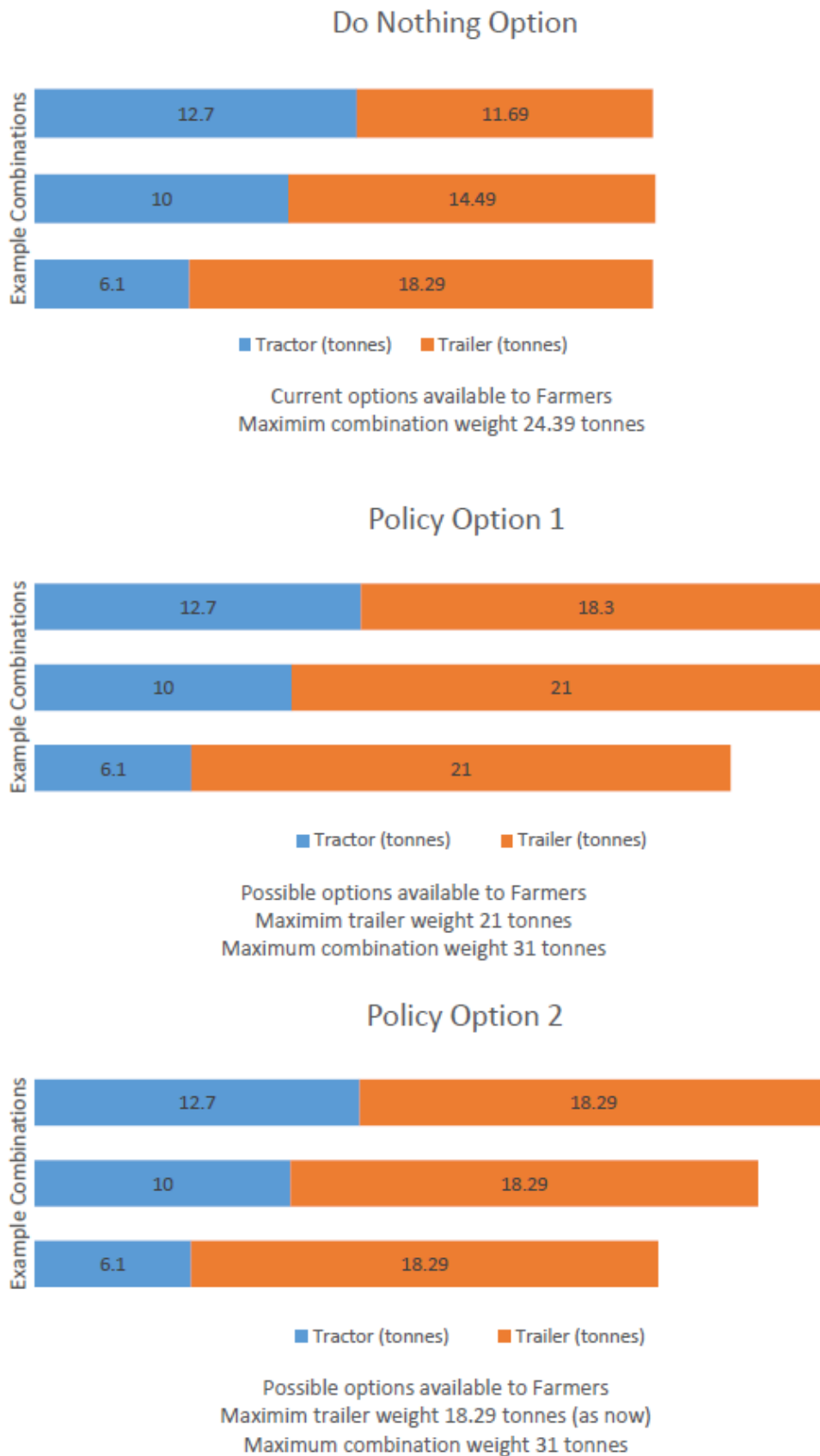
Robert Goodwill MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport

Executive summary

- 1.1 A report¹ of the Independent Farming Regulation Taskforce was published in May 2011 and includes recommendations that the Government examine the maximum weights of agricultural trailers and combinations and the maximum speed of regular tractors. These commitments fell under the Department for Transport's (DfT) remit.
- 1.2 The consultation to examine the maximum speed limit for regular tractors on public roads is being published separately. This consultation document concentrates on examining the maximum weights of agricultural trailers and combinations.
- 1.3 The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 specify maximum weights for agricultural vehicles. Currently, the maximum weight of agricultural trailers and combinations is 18.29t and 24.39t. The Farming Taskforce report concluded that the current limits do not reflect the capabilities of modern farm machinery, preventing farmers from using particular trailers on public roads and causing unnecessary time delays for farmers as they have to make more trips to do their work. In other EU countries, tractors can often tow higher weights, and this suggests there might be a competitiveness issue between UK farmers and those in the rest of the EU.
- 1.4 The report recommended to Government that the maximum weights of trailers and combinations are increased from 18.29 tonnes and 24.39 tonnes to 21 tonnes and 31 tonnes respectively. It recommended that machinery of this weight would be required to be registered with an appropriate scheme to ensure roadworthiness, and that industry would develop such a scheme in partnership with the DfT.
- 1.5 We are also considering an additional option of increased weight of combination permitted (while keeping the same maximum trailer weight). We are asking consultees to tell us their preferred option. The diagram below shows some real-life impacts of each option (see Chart 1).

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

Chart 1:



- 1.6 The Impact Assessment (IA) (Annex A) summarises the monetised costs and benefits by Option and Scenario. Please provide any comments on the analysis of costs and benefits.
- 1.7 In this consultation we are seeking views on:
- a) Your preferred policy option or further options
 - b) The balance of costs and savings
 - c) The voluntary annual test
 - d) Road safety costs
 - e) Implementation costs
 - f) Non-compliance
 - g) Impacts on road wear and tear
 - h) Fuel consumption
 - i) The impact on small firms
 - j) Noise levels
- 1.8 We welcome responses from anyone interested in the issues covered by the consultation document. We believe the following stakeholders may have a particular interest:
- a) Agricultural workers and farming associations
 - b) Agricultural engineers
 - c) Haulage companies
 - d) Road safety groups
 - e) Government enforcement bodies or Police forces and organisations
 - f) Local authorities
 - g) Road users

How to respond

The consultation period began on 7 November and will run until 30 January. Please ensure that your response reaches us before the closing date. If you would like further copies of this consultation document, it can be found at www.gov.uk/dft or you can contact the Department if you would like alternative formats (Braille, audio CD, etc).

Please either complete the online survey or send consultation responses by email to agriculturalweightlimit@dft.gsi.gov.uk or post to Vehicle Speed Limits, 3/28, 33 Horseferry Road, London, SW1P 4DR.

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.

Freedom of Information

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 2004.

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.

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.

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.

Next Steps

The Department wants to consider evidence on all potential effects of raising weight limits before making a decision on what to do next. A summary of responses, including the next steps, will be published at www.gov.uk/dft. Paper copies will be available on request.

Consultation questions

1.9 For each question below please explain the reason(s) for your answer and provide evidence when available.

- Q.1** Do nothing – this means not changing the law and the weight limits remaining as they are. Is this your preferred policy option? Please explain your answer.
- Q.2** Policy option 1: Agricultural vehicle operators would volunteer for an annual test, outlined in the law, in order to qualify for *increased maximum trailer and maximum combination weights*. The maximum weight of agricultural trailers would increase to 21t (from 18.29t) and the maximum weight of combinations would increase to 31t (from 24.39). Is this your preferred policy option? Please explain your answer.
- Q.3** Policy option 2: Agricultural vehicle operators would volunteer for an annual test, outlined in the law, in order to qualify for *increased weight of combination* permitted (while keeping the same maximum trailer weight). The maximum weight of agricultural trailers would stay the same at 18.29 and the maximum weight of combinations would be 31t. Is this your preferred policy option? Please explain your answer.
- Q.4** The industry has proposed weight limits of up to 33t maximum train weight for a tandem axle trailer with an axle spacing of greater than or equal to 1.8 metres, and 37 tonnes train weight for a tri axle trailer with road friendly suspension. What are your views on these limits?
- Q.5** Do you think that a test requirement is necessary as part of any of the options above? I.e. should the limits be changed keeping existing enforcement provisions? If so, what are your views on this test, for example, where should a test occur, who should it be undertaken by, what should be tested?
- Q.6** Do you consider there to be any additional policy options, or variants of policy options 1 and 2? Please explain fully and provide any evidence you may have.
- Q.7** The Impact Assessment assumes that the voluntary annual test would be a self-funded scheme (i.e. the agricultural vehicle operators incur the costs of testing). Do you agree that it should be self-funding?
- Q.8** If you are responding as an agricultural vehicle operator, what do you consider to be a reasonable cost for the voluntary annual test?
- Q.9** Do you feel the balance of savings and costs of extra weight detailed in the Impact Assessment reflects your own experience or expectations?
- Q.10** Do you have any evidence on the frequency or severity of collisions involving tractors towing agricultural trailers on public roads and what effect an increase in the maximum weight limit would have on the safety of all other road users?

- Q.11** Do you have any evidence on what effects if any the policy will have on road wear and tear and road maintenance requirements?
- Q.12** Do you think there will be a direct transition cost of implementation which government or the private sector will incur as a result of the weight limit change? Please provide any evidence or figures you may have.
- Q.13** Do you have any evidence on the impact of this proposal on fuel consumption?
- Q.14** Do you think that increased weight limits would lead to a shift from other modes of haulage into agricultural haulage?
- Q.15** How do you think the proposals will impact on small firms?
- Q.16** Please provide any evidence you may have on the number of agricultural operators who fail to comply with the current weight limits.
- Q.17** Do you believe that current enforcement practices will need to change if the weight limits are increased?
- Q.18** Do you think that an increase of the maximum agricultural weights will have a significant impact on noise levels? Please provide any evidence you may have.
- Q.19** Do you think that all of the potential costs and benefits of the policy options have been considered in the Impact Assessment? Please provide details if you think costs or benefits have not been included.

Annex B Consultation principles

The consultation is being conducted in line with the Government's key consultation principles which are listed below. Further information is available on the Better Regulation Executive website at <https://update.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/consultation-principles-guidance>

If you have any comments about the consultation process please contact:

Consultation Co-ordinator
Department for Transport
Zone 1/14 Great Minster House
London SW1P 4DR
Email consultation@dft.gsi.gov.uk

Consultation principles

- departments will follow a range of timescales rather than defaulting to a 12-week period, particularly where extensive engagement has occurred before;
- departments will need to give more thought to how they engage with and consult with those who are affected;
- consultation should be 'digital by default', but other forms should be used where these are needed to reach the groups affected by a policy; and
- the principles of the Compact between government and the voluntary and community sector will continue to be respected.