







Name of the individual making the submission (e.g. Tom Cleary, Anne Dunne)	Elaine Farrell
Name of the organisation that you are affiliated to (e.g. IBEC)	The Irish Farmers' Association
	
	
	

PLEASE NOTE THAT THE ADDRESS, PHONE NUMBER AND E-MAIL ADDRESS WILL NOT BE RELEASED AS PART OF DPERs INTENTION TO PUBLISH THE CONTENT OF ALL THE SUBMISSIONS THAT IT RECEIVES.

What are the positive features of the Act?

IFA recognises the objective of the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 to achieve greater transparency in regard to the lobbying of office holders and public officials on matters of public policy and other relevant decisions.

Lobbying is a legitimate activity which plays an important role in the efficient functioning of a modern democracy.

Does the Act fulfil the objectives it set out to achieve?

Have any unintended consequences occurred, in your view?

IFA has at all times held the position that it is essential that this new legislation does not place excessive, impractical or costly requirements on bodies engaged in legitimate lobbying.

IFA wishes to record that the new legislation has placed a heavy administrative and costly burden on the Association.

Do you think the Act can be improved in any way and, if so, how?

IFA has conveyed at Advisory Group meetings the short-comings in the web register/programme which are making it very difficult for organisations like IFA to file a concise accurate return, without duplications. We recognise that some improvements have been made in this area.

IFA recommends that a major investment is made in the technology so that the web-based register is much more user friendly. As a large user of the register, IFA would welcome dialogue and engagement on this before any investment is made.

IFA recommends that the review of the legislation must take into account the difference between an organisation of the size of IFA, carrying out legitimate lobbying, and other lobbyists, to reflect the magnitude of the lobbying being carried out. IFA is seeking simplification and a reduction of the compliance burden for registered lobby representatives.

Designated Public Officials (DPOs)

As per the legislation, there is an obligation on public bodies that employ DPOs to publish on their websites listings showing the name and grade of designated public officials. This requirement in the Act is important to assist in compliance with the legislation, and it is the only requirement placed on public officials. Regretfully, listings are not updated and thereby make filing returns difficult and lend to inaccuracies.

IFA recommends that SIPO must actively follow up on public bodies that do not keep their DPOs listings updated. In addition, there are many DPOs listed on the www.lobbying.ie register that are no longer DPOs or no longer retain these positions. IFA recommends that DPOs should be removed from the register after a set period of time. Some DPOs are on the register many times, having held previous posts. This creates confusion and also increases the risk of the wrong title / position being clicked on when completing a return.

Groups not covered by the Legislation

The Act provides for lobbying activities of representative organisations like IFA as follows: *"the person has one or more full-time employees and is a body which exists primarily to represent the interests of its members and the relevant communications are made on behalf of any of the members"*

IFA believes that, in the interests of fairness to all lobbyists, that sectoral groups with no official status and no employees, would be covered by the legislation and be responsible for reporting their lobbying.

What suggestions for changes, if any, would you make?

Regulation of Lobbying Advisory Group

IFA has at all stages, both in the passage of the legislation through the Houses of the Oireachtas and in its implementation through the Regulation of Lobbying Advisory Group, been constructive and pro-active in our efforts to be compliant.

The establishment of this Group has been worthwhile and provides the opportunity to address some issues of concern on the day to day operating of the web-based register.

IFA recommends that the review of the legislation maintains the Advisory Group, which assists lobbyists in being compliant with the Act. The Group should be tasked with making recommendations to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform on an ongoing basis, to ensure that the legislation is relevant and delivering what it set out to achieve. IFA proposes that the Group should meet at least once a year on an ongoing basis.

Extension of Designated Public Officials

There is provision in the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015 to extend the Designated Public Officials to below 'Assistant Secretary' grade. For IFA, this would impose sizable administration requirements on the organisation as the number of civil servants captured by the legislation would quadruple.

IFA recommends that the review of the legislation must not result in any extension of the DPOs to Principal Officers and others.

Ensuring accuracy of information

IFA has invested considerable staff resources, time and costs to ensure that our lobbying returns are reported accurately in the manner intended under the Act and the online Register.

SIPO will be well aware that the media reporting after each quarterly return has focused mainly on the number of returns per organisation and measured lobbying activity based on this, rather than on the content of the individual returns.

On reviewing returns on the website, it appears that some organisations are generating a number of returns from a single event / lobbying day etc, by making a separate return for each DPO communicated with / met at the same event. Clearly, some organisations see this as a way to increase their number of returns per quarter, which is not what is intended in the legislation.

However, the above approach is effectively creating multiple returns out of a single relevant matter.

IFA would encourage SIPO to address this misleading practice in order to eliminate the over reporting involved.

Please include in your submission:

- * Specific examples from your own experience which back up your position, where you are making points regarding the Act, and
- * Reasons for any suggestions for changes or improvements to the Act, and sufficient and appropriate current evidence / data / examples to support these suggestions.