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Graham Ward  
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From the Secretary of State  
The Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP



Our ref: PO113257/VJ

18<sup>th</sup> December 2008

Dear Mr Ward

I write following the question you raised on behalf of the Regional Rural Affairs Forum at the recent Cabinet meeting in Leeds, specifically how the Government would recommend that the 'rural voice' be suitably represented in the regional Governance arrangements that will replace the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly.

For those functions of Regional Assemblies that will continue, it will be for the new Local Authority Leaders' Boards and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) jointly to decide the new regional governance arrangements. This will include responsibility for the regional strategy, comprising of its drafting, implementation plan and the monitoring of its delivery. However, the detail has been kept flexible to ensure that the best solution for each region is agreed within the region, and by partners who have the most detailed knowledge of what would work best.

The Government is committed to developing its processes through an open and collaborative approach involving stakeholders. In terms of the regional strategy, there will be a wider legal duty to consult and engage stakeholders from all communities in this process. In particular, the RDA and Leaders' Board will be required to prepare, and comply with, a published statement setting out how they will liaise with social, economic and environmental stakeholders, including those who represent rural communities.

There are many innovative and effective approaches used in many regions to engage with a wider range of stakeholders, and the Government would welcome the opportunity to build on these examples and share best practice. Therefore, the RDA and Leaders Board may wish to explore alternative arrangements for ensuring an open forum for effective dialogue with partners such as establishing a consultative committee; seconding expertise

from stakeholders; or possibly appointing a stakeholder representative(s) to a Leaders Board or on a joint regional Strategy Committee.

Through a detailed consultation process involving change management programmes, regional partners will allow the 'rural voice' to be recognised and valued.

Handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hilary Benn'.

**HILARY BENN**