

Appendix I - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

1A. Name of Public Authority.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

DAERA is producing an Irish Sea Demersal Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) to manage Nephrops, whiting, cod, haddock, plaice and sole. The Irish Sea Demersal FMP is to support sustainable fishing of these fish stocks thus ensuring lasting benefits to the rural and coastal communities and businesses that rely on them.

1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☒
Adopting a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Implementing a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Revising a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Designing a Public Service	☐		
Delivering a Public Service	☐		

1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

The Irish Sea Demersal Fisheries Management Plan

1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

An FMP “*must specify policies of the relevant authority or authorities for restoring the stock to, or maintaining it at, sustainable levels or for contributing to its restoration to, or maintenance at, sustainable levels*” – The Fisheries Act 2020.

1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).

☒

Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

☒

A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

☐

Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.

The three main fishery harbours in Northern Ireland are located in the Co. Down villages of Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie.

Coastal fishing communities in Northern Ireland with population settlements of less than 5,000;

Ardglass - 1,643 (2011 Census)

Portavogie - 2,122 (2011 Census)

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

Fishing communities form part of some settlements larger than 5,000, such as Kilkeel, but are nonetheless distinct in that the sea fishing sector is a primary employer in the area and has significant cultural and historical association with the respective settlements.

Population

Kilkeel - 6,633 (2021 Census)

Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes ☒ No ☐ If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

Most of the Northern Ireland fishers who target Nephrops and other demersal stocks within this FMP live in or near coastal rural villages that have fishing harbours or small ports around the Northern Ireland coast.

The Northern Ireland offshore region supports diverse fishing opportunities that make an important contribution to the economies of coastal communities and the introduction of management measures outlined in this document are intended to support fishing at sustainable levels while protecting the marine environment.

The processing of Nephrops is also largely based in these rural communities, and this practice employs residents from these villages and their surrounding rural areas.

2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

The policies that will be set out in this FMP are to ensure the continued sustainability and profitability of the various demersal fisheries in Northern Ireland, this will impact upon all fishermen and supported (downstream) industries.

Fishing activity and the processing of the landed product is predominantly conducted by persons living in rural coastal areas and therefore they will be potentially more impacted, and the FMP actions are likely to benefit people in rural coastal communities more than persons from urban areas.

2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.

Rural Businesses	☒
Rural Tourism	☐
Rural Housing	☐
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	☒
Education or Training in Rural Areas	☐
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	☐
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	☐
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	☐
Poverty in Rural Areas	☐
Deprivation in Rural Areas	☐
Rural Crime or Community Safety	☐
Rural Development	☒
Agri-Environment	☐
Other (Please state)	

If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.

2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.

SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?

Yes ☒ No ☐ If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	☒	Published Statistics	☒
Consultation with Other Organisations	☒	Research Papers	☐
Surveys or Questionnaires	☐	Other Publications	☐
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			☒

3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.

Collaborative engagement has taken place through the Irish Sea Demersal FMP Working Group which contains a wide range of relevant stakeholders including DAERA policy advisors, scientists, eNGOs, NI Fishing Industry representatives and other interested groups.

More focused one to one engagement with members of this Irish Sea Demersal FMP Working Group has also taken place.

Through this engagement, DAERA has listened to the needs of individuals and groups, as well as considering the available scientific evidence in developing this FMP.

DAERA has also considered any concerns raised when formulating the proposed management measures included in this FMP as well as any potential impact that these proposals could have.

3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?

Rural coastal communities are vulnerable to economic change, but the introduction of proposed fisheries management measures contained in the Irish Sea Demersal FMP is not expected to negatively impact the economic needs of people in rural areas. The proposed management measures will support fishing at sustainable levels while protecting the marine environment.

The demersal fishing sector is of considerable importance to the Northern Ireland fishing industry, local communities and the NI economy. In 2022, species caught by offshore demersal fishing by NI vessels, from Northern Ireland waters was worth an estimated £1.19 million.

If the response to Section 3A was **YES** GO TO Section 4A.

3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

N/A

SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

Northern Ireland's demersal fisheries continue to provide important employment and economic activity for rural and coastal communities. However, updated Seafish data for 2024 highlights ongoing challenges, with reductions in employment, fleet size, fishing activity, vessel income, operating profit and Gross Value Added (GVA) compared to 2023. Employment fell from 449 to 411 FTE jobs, vessel numbers decreased from 211 to 190, and average days at sea declined across all fleet segments. Income and profitability also decreased across the fleet despite lower fuel costs.

The evidence demonstrates the continued dependence of many rural and coastal communities on a viable fishing industry, particularly the 10–24m fleet which remains heavily reliant on Nephrops. Key issues include fleet contraction, labour and crewing pressures, regulatory impacts, operating costs, access to productive fishing grounds and stock sustainability. The Demersal FMP recognises the need to balance stock recovery and sustainable fisheries management with the social and economic wellbeing of fishing businesses and the communities that depend on them. While the FMP does not introduce immediate regulatory changes, any future measures will be subject to further evidence gathering, consultation and impact assessment to ensure impacts on rural and coastal communities are fully considered.

[2024 Economics of the UK Fishing Fleet — Seafish](#)

SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?

Yes

☒

No

☐

If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **5C**.

5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.

The Fishing Industry is considered to be a rural based activity. The FMP has been developed with the needs and views of the industry included throughout the process. The proposed management measures and possible legislative amendments required to implement these proposals are designed to specifically address the needs of the commercial and recreational fishermen and the wider industry's concerns over the future sustainability of the Irish Sea Demersal Fishery.

They are a direct and targeted response to the issues raised during the collaborative engagement which took place with wide range of relevant stakeholders including DAERA policy advisors, scientists, eNGOs, NI Fishing Industry representatives and other interested groups.

These measures are intended to help prevent over-exploitation of these fisheries and maintaining the stocks at future sustainable levels while also protecting the marine environment.

If the response to Section **5A** was **YES** GO TO Section **6A**.

5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.

N/A

SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.

☒

Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Stephanie Clarke
Position/Grade:	Staff Officer
Division/Branch	Sea Fisheries Policy and Grants Branch
Signature:	<i>Stephanie Clarke</i>
Date:	10/07/2026
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Fiona Taylor
Position/Grade:	Grade 7
Division/Branch:	Sea Fisheries Policy and Grants Branch
Signature:	<i>Fiona Taylor</i>
Date:	10/07/2026