

Abridged Version

Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland

Public Discussion Document



September 2019

A living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk



**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**

Cover image courtesy of TourismNI

You can get a copy of this document in other formats, such as:

- Large print
- Braille
- Audio CD
- Computer disk
- Other languages

To get a copy of this document in another format contact:

Neighbourhood Environment Quality Branch

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Regulatory and Natural Resources Policy Division

2nd Floor, Klondyke Building

1 Cromac Avenue

Gasworks Business Park

Belfast

BT7 2JA

Email: esni@daera-ni.gov.uk

Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Programme for Government	2
3. Environmental Principles	2
4. An Environment Strategy - why now?	3
5. How are we doing?	4
6. Our approach.....	4
7. Strategy Scope.....	5
8. Strategic Themes	7
9. Environmental Governance.....	12
10. Draft Outcomes.....	12
11. What’s the Big Idea?	13
12. How to Respond	14
Freedom of Information Act 2000 - Confidentiality of Consultations	15
Annex A - Comments from event on 7 May 2019	16
Annex B - PfG Outcomes shown with possible Environment Strategy outcomes and DAERA’s vision	18

1. Introduction

The environment is very important to all of us - we are a part of nature too and clean air, good water and being able to use outdoor spaces can improve our lives. Many of the things that we do affect the environment in a bad way but there is a lot we can do to make it better. How we engage with nature can protect and improve our water, air, soil, living world and landscape. This is important because these elements support our lives, businesses and jobs, communities, families and our health.

We are lucky to have a mostly good environment - it is one of the main reasons people from other places visit, spending money here and telling others about our country - but it can still be made better and should be properly protected so that it can be enjoyed for many years.

A Northern Ireland Environment Strategy (“the Environment Strategy”) is needed to improve the environment, create opportunities for business, improve people’s health and well-being, and help to protect the planet.

DAERA will need the help of others, such as: other departments and agencies; private businesses; community groups; and the general public.

2. Programme for Government

The Programme for Government (PfG) is how the NI Executive (the Ministers of all the NI Departments) sets out what it wants to do during each Assembly period (usually 5 years). Although the Assembly isn’t working at the moment, the departments are still trying to achieve the PfG outcomes. DAERA is responsible for Outcome 2: ***We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment*** and 5 of the indicators that show how we are doing.

3. Environmental Principles

At the moment we are also guided by a set of environmental principles (things we need to think about when we make new policy or law) in the EU Treaties. After Brexit we will still have environmental principles, but in UK or NI law.

The UK Government's Environment Bill will include environmental principles for England and a future DAERA Minister may be able to use these here.

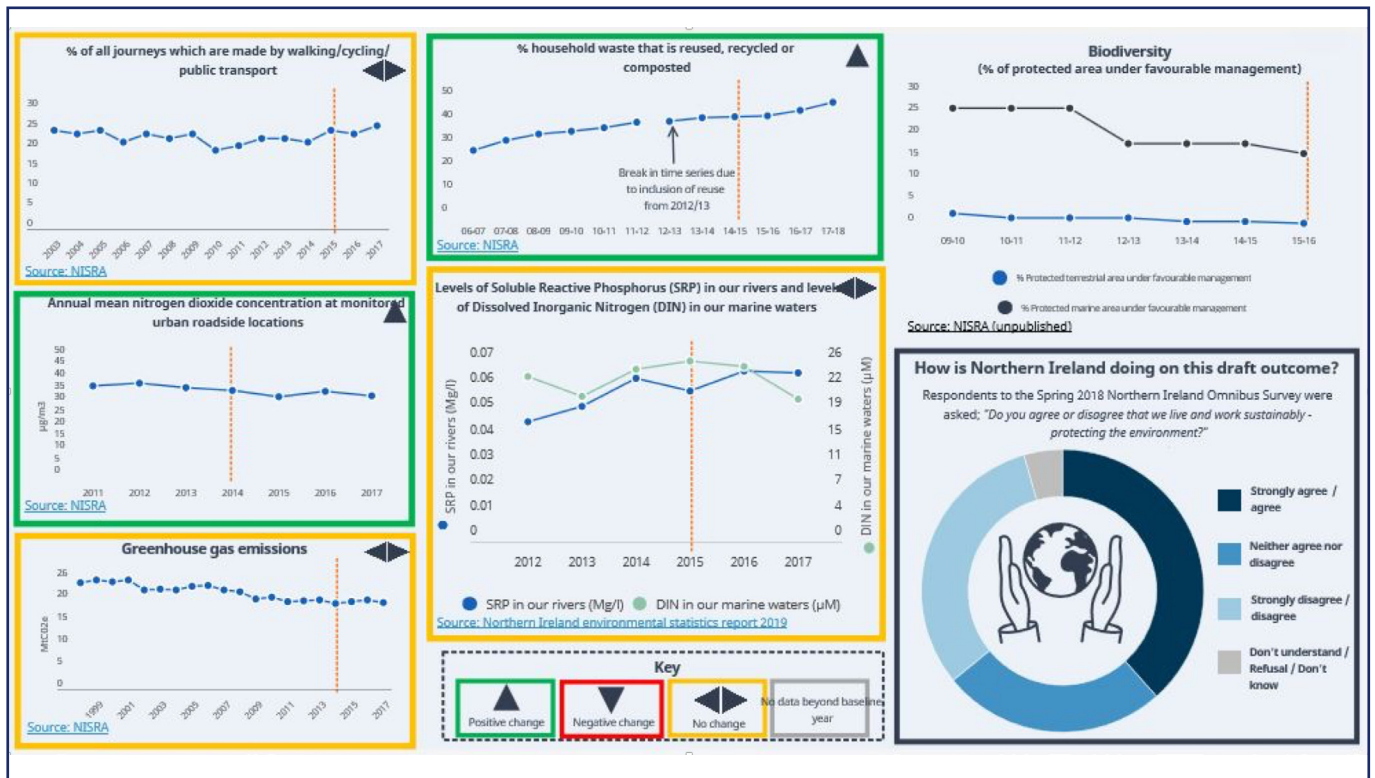
4. An Environment Strategy - why now?

Northern Ireland has never had an environment strategy before - these are some of the reasons we think we need one now:

- we have many environmental problems, including: waste; air quality; local environmental quality (things like litter and dog fouling); loss of biodiversity (all living things). Some environmental problems are connected to farming, such as some greenhouse gas emissions, the effect of nitrogen and phosphorus (mostly from fertilisers) on water quality and the impact of ammonia emissions on protected sites and species;
- a lot of experts have said that there is a “climate and environment emergency” and members of the UK Parliament have asked the UK Government to declare a climate emergency. There is also more public awareness (particularly amongst younger people) and concern about what is happening to our planet through issues such as climate change and plastic waste.
- the UK Government published a 25 year plan for the environment last year, setting out what it is going to do about the environment (mostly in England) after Brexit.
- Brexit will also affect us here - for example: how will farmers get payments to support their farms; who will check we are protecting the environment properly; how will we manage the fishing industry? DAERA wants to continue to protect and improve the environment after Brexit and support farming and other businesses; and
- there are still some big gaps in what we know about the environment here. Colleagues in Defra are currently looking at new ways to measure how they are doing and this is also something we will have to consider.

5. How are we doing?

We are doing some things very well - the carrier bag levy and household recycling, for example, but other targets have been harder to achieve, like reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. The diagram below shows how we are doing on the indicators for Outcome 2 of the PfG but more information can be found in the [Environmental Statistics Report](#).



6. Our approach

We want people to tell us what they think our environment should look like in the future and what we should be trying to achieve. We have made a few suggestions but nothing is decided yet. We also spoke to a lot of interested people at an event on 7 May 2019 (you can see some of their comments at Annex A) but we want as many people as possible to tell us what they think. We will look carefully at every reply and use your views to help us to create the Environment Strategy.

7. Strategy Scope

Because “the environment” is about everything in nature, including humans, the new Environment Strategy needs to fit in with some other strategies, approved by the NI Executive, like the Sustainable Development Strategy, Public Health Strategy, and Economic Strategy. We think that the new Environment Strategy should be at the same level as these existing strategies.

Q1: Do you agree that the Environment Strategy should sit alongside existing Executive-endorsd strategies, such as the Sustainable Development, Public Health and Economic Strategies?

We want the new Environment Strategy to focus on results that will make a difference to the lives of people now and in the future.

At the very least, the Environment Strategy will cover these areas:

- **Climate Change (mitigation and adaptation)**

Mitigation means trying to reduce or stop greenhouse gas emissions (like carbon dioxide and methane).

Adaptation means trying to deal with how climate change affects us by preventing or reducing the damage it can cause (flood defences, for example).

- **Natural Environment and Landscapes**

The natural environment includes everything that is not man-made, from biodiversity (all living things) to things like mountains, caves and cliffs. Landscapes include the environment but also how people think and feel about it as they live their lives.

- **Resource Efficiency**

This means using the planet’s resources (water, timber, coal, oil etc.) in a way that reduces harm to the environment as much as possible.

- **Marine Environment**

The sea around Northern Ireland has lots of wildlife and habitats - it is about one third of our natural environment. The coast and sea can help to protect against storms, floods and erosion. These areas also help tourism, leisure, and fisheries, and produce renewable electricity.

- **Environmental Quality (Air, Water and Neighbourhood)**

Environmental quality is about how the environment affects human beings and other living things - air, water and neighbourhood environmental quality (litter, dog fouling and also buildings).

- **Fisheries (Inland and Sea) and Aquaculture**

Fisheries includes inland, inshore and sea fishing, along with aquaculture (the farming of fish, shellfish and aquatic plants). DAERA also has an important job to protect fish stocks.

- **Built environment**

This is the part of our surroundings built by humans. It includes buildings, but also human-made spaces, like parks, roads and railways, utilities networks (water, gas, electricity), flood defences etc.

Q2: Do you agree that these broad environmental areas are appropriate for the Environment Strategy?

If “No”, what alternatives would you like to see included?

8. Strategic Themes

At this stage the Department has developed 4 possible themes:

- **Environmental Engagement;**
- **Environmental Prosperity;**
- **Environmental Efficiency; and**
- **Environmental Quality.**

Q3: As described below, do you agree that these are appropriate strategic themes for the Environment Strategy?

If “No”, what alternative or additional themes/issues would you like to see in the strategy?

Environmental Engagement - we live, work and play in the environment (we are all part of it too) and when it is clean and healthy it is good for us in lots of ways but when it is not it can be very bad for us. The way we affect the environment can be good or bad too. How we connect, or engage, with the environment affects how well we understand it and look after it.

This theme also encompasses issues such as:

- education;
- general public awareness;
- the use of technology; and
- DAERA’s Knowledge Advisory Service (KAS).

Many younger people around the world are leading the way in trying to protect the environment. Programmes such as Eco-Schools have helped and all of our primary and secondary schools are part of this scheme. We support these schemes but will also look for other ways to help people learn about the environment.

We need to raise awareness of the environment and try to encourage good behaviour and prevent bad behaviour across all age groups. We also need to find out what makes people want to take care of their environment.

KAS has been set up to give advice to farmers and others to help them to develop their farm and food businesses in a way that is good for the environment.

Q4: Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Engagement strategic theme?

Environmental Prosperity - most people see that the natural environment has value in itself, rather than just from the things it can provide, but this does not always stop people from causing environmental damage. Some people are more likely to protect the environment if they think it will help the economy.

Some of the ways the environment helps the economy include:

- one of our largest industries, tourism, saw £939m being spent in the local economy in 2017-18 and supports around 60,000 full and part-time jobs¹;
- the agri-food sector is very important here, with agriculture adding £644m to the economy in 2017, and food/drinks processing £827m ²;
- the Green Economy, including: renewable energy; eco-tourism; energy efficiency; recycling etc., creates jobs and opportunities to make money as we try to make our environmental performance better;
- when our environment is good more people want to take part in leisure activities like: angling; cycling; walking; and watersports. These make money for people and businesses but also reduce healthcare costs because people are healthier and fitter.

¹ Northern Ireland Tourism Statistics April 2017 - March 2018 (NISRA)

² Northern Ireland Agri-Food Sector: Key Statistics July 2018 (DAERA)

A lot of this theme is about what we call “ecosystem services”, where the ecosystem (an area where living organisms interact in a particular way with the local environment to survive) provides a benefit just by being in a healthy state. Some examples of these ecosystem services include: healthy fish stocks; water filtration; pollination; and natural pest control.

Q5: Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Prosperity strategic theme?

Environmental Efficiency - there are a number of similar things in this theme, like:

Climate Change - most people agree that we should be reducing emissions of greenhouse gases but it may be more difficult for us to reduce emissions from some sources (farming, transport and energy, for example) than other parts of the UK.

We also need to adapt to the effects of climate change and DAERA is working on its 2nd Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme, setting out the actions we will take for the next five years.

Resource Efficiency - this means using the planet’s resources (water, timber, coal, oil etc.) in a way that reduces harm to the environment as much as possible. Increasing resource efficiency makes us more competitive, helps the economy to grow and creates more jobs.

Circular Economy - this means that we should only produce what we need of a particular product, re-use it as many times as possible and recycle or recover for other purposes. The aim is to make sure that nothing needs to be thrown away.

Sustainable Production and Consumption - this means that we should make sure that all services and goods are provided and used in a way that is good for people, the economy and the environment. This is what Environmental Efficiency is all about and what we want to achieve through the Environment Strategy.

Q6: Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Efficiency strategic theme?

Environmental Quality - some of the environmental quality issues that we expect the strategy to cover include:

Air Quality - the main air quality issues prevalent in Northern Ireland are:

- Nitrogen Dioxide, often as a result of road traffic;
- Particulate Matter, mainly produced by road transport and industry;
- Ammonia, mainly from farming, contributes to the formation of particulate matter.

Environmental Noise - one of the environmental issues most commonly complained about, in 2016/17 over 12,000 separate complaints were made, with 4 out of 5 being about domestic noise.

Biodiversity - includes the full range of life on Earth - all plants and animals and the ecosystems they are part of.

Although work to protect biodiversity is often on specially protected species and habitats, we need to make sure we protect all of the natural world.

Land Quality - Land use, for farming, industry, leisure, transport and residential purposes is central to our daily lives. Great care must be taken to ensure we are successful socially and economically, while at the same time protecting our environment. How we use our land can affect greenhouse gas emissions but also provides us with a natural way to store carbon through peatlands and forestry.

Unfortunately, too many people still damage our beautiful land to make money through fly-tipping, illegal landfilling, fuel laundering and other activities.

Water Quality - we need fresh water for all life - humans, animals and plants can't survive without it. Fresh water needs to be used carefully, wasting as little as possible. Water is also very important for recreation, leisure and tourism and provides important sources of food like fish, shellfish and even seaweed.

The Water Framework Directive (WFD) requires the protection and improvement of rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters and groundwater and all EU countries have to try to ensure that all waters reach 'good' or 'good environmental' status.

Neighbourhood Quality - covers a wide range of local environmental issues, including: litter; dog-fouling; dilapidation (buildings and other structures); graffiti; and fly-posting, which can make local areas less pleasant for residents and visitors. Having attractive and successful places in which people are happy to live, work and visit is very important for the economy, health and the environment.

Litter and dog-fouling are often the environmental issues most easily seen by the public but they are not just about what the area looks like - there are health risks from dog fouling and litter, and cleaning up the mess costs money. We do not yet have a litter strategy but Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful surveys a range of local areas and publishes a Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report³.

Enforcement of these local issues is usually dealt with by district councils, with the support of DAERA and others, but we know that other approaches, like education and awareness-raising are important too.

Q7: Do you have any comments on what specific issues should be included under a proposed Environmental Quality strategic theme?

³ [Cleaner Neighbourhoods Report 2017/18 \(Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful\)](#)

9. Environmental Governance

Environmental governance means how we manage protection of the environment but a lot of people think we need to think more about how well the environment is protected rather than just how we manage it. The Environment Strategy is one of the ways we are trying to achieve this.

We also need to think about how we make sure the environment is properly protected after Brexit. At the moment this is done by the European Commission and European Court of Justice. The UK Government plans to set up an Office for Environmental Protection (OEP), which will check how well the environment is being protected in England. A future DAERA Minister might decide that the OEP should do this here too but it would not replace any of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's duties.

The OEP might also report on how well the UK Government is doing with its 25-year plan for the environment. If we did the same, the OEP would report on how well we were achieving the aims of the Environment Strategy.

Q8: What do you see as the main environmental governance priorities for Northern Ireland?

10. Draft Outcomes

We want the Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland to focus on the environmental outcomes that we need to achieve. We don't want to tell people what these outcomes should be but some people have said it would be helpful to suggest what they might look like.

We have suggested 6 possible outcomes and these are shown in Annex B, with some of the Programme for Government outcomes and the department's vision of: ***A living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.*** We don't have to have 6 outcomes but it is important that we have a clear view about what you think they should be, and why.

The 6 suggested draft outcomes are:

- We achieve zero waste and a well-developed circular economy
- Everyone can access and is connected to a healthy environment
- We have reduced greenhouse gas emissions and improved climate resilience
- Biodiversity loss halted, ecosystems in a healthy state, and well managed landscapes
- We achieve sustainable consumption and production on land and sea
- We have excellent air, water, land and neighbourhood quality

Q9: Do you agree that these are appropriate draft outcomes for the Environment Strategy?

If “No”, what alternative or additional outcomes would you like to see?

11. What’s the Big Idea?

An Environment Strategy is important - it will say what we want our environment to be like in the future and how we will make that happen.

It needs big ideas and this is your opportunity to tell us about your big ideas for the environment. We may not be able to use all of these ideas but we promise to consider them all properly as we help a future Minister to decide what the Environment Strategy should look like.

Q10: What are your big ideas for the future protection and enhancement of the environment?

Q11: Do you have any other comments or contributions?

12. How to Respond

We are using the Citizen Space Hub, accessible via the relevant page on the [DAERA website](#), as the main way of collecting the information you give us. It is very easy to use and you can use a computer, tablet or mobile phone to reply. If you would prefer not to use Citizen Space, you can also use the response form on the DAERA consultation website and reply by e-mail to esni@daera-ni.gov.uk or hard copy to:

Neighbourhood Environment Quality Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Regulatory and Natural Resources Policy Division
2nd Floor, Klondyke Building
1 Cromac Avenue
Gasworks Business Park
Belfast
BT7 2JA

We would like to hear what you think as soon as possible no later than **5pm** on **23 December 2019**. Before you send your response please read the “Freedom of Information Act 2000 - Confidentiality of Consultation Responses” section below, which gives guidance on the legal position. If you require any further information, contact Lisa Frazer on 028 9056 9497.

Freedom of Information Act 2000 - Confidentiality of Consultations

The Department will publish a summary of responses after the closing date. All responses may be disclosed if someone asks to see them. The Department can only refuse to disclose a response in exceptional circumstances. Before you send your response, please read the guidance below about any information you give us.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public a right to see any information held by a public authority (the Department in this case). This right includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Department has to decide whether any information provided by you, including information about your identity, should be made public or not.

This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is likely to be released, except in special circumstances.

In simple terms, the Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act says:

- the Department should only accept information from other people 'in confidence' (promising it won't be released) if it is the only way to get information to do with the Department's functions;
- the Department should not agree to hold information received from other people 'in confidence' if it isn't actually confidential;
- the Department can only promise not to release information if it has good reasons that it can justify to the Information Commissioner.

For further information please contact the Information Commissioner's Office:

Tel: (028) 9027 8757

Email: ni@ico.org.uk

Website: <https://ico.org.uk/>

Annex A - Comments from event on 7 May 2019

Will an independent environment agency be needed to ensure delivery and to bring us up to date with other countries?

How do we move to become food secure as an island rather than our current insecurity?

Why has there been so little local work identifying and assessing our local ecosystems services. A programme of research developing examples across a number of farmed landscapes to assess public good and benefits should be delivered.

How will the strategy seek to balance the impacts of big manufacturers on the environment alongside the focus on agri-food production?

How can we meet Call4Nature call "... to encourage the transition to sustainable agricultural practices?"

Why has the Countryside Survey, a series of repeat eco land use surveys for Northern Ireland going back to the 1980s not been repeated? Excellent baseline data allowing for Gov. to assess environmental change following/reflecting policy change wasted.

Don't we just need to stop tiptoeing around the core issues and mandate ways of living and working that everyone now knows are essential to ensure a sustainable future - from building control standards for zero carbon builds to targets for renewables?

EFS funding helps in high nature value farming areas. Could future schemes consider a package for supporting the landscape? Delivering landscape character gains.

Will new environmental performance standards for the built environment be included in the strategy? This will be essential.

How do we ensure the environment can effectively compete with education and health for investment?

Will a behaviour insights /social science team be a gold investment?...to help target messaging, feedback from communities etc.

The UK is set to miss its target for Good Environmental Status for the seas by 2020 (MSDF). More of the same will only deliver the same result. How will the new strategy reverse this trend for the marine?

Will there be enough funding to gather the evidence necessary to underpin the development of sound environmental strategies and to monitor the outcomes in a robust way? Research budgets have been slashed - an evidence programme is essential.

We need to sell the combined economic, social and environmental benefits of new sustainable ways of living - and be smarter at facilitating the transition by stakeholder groups.

How do we improve our living, working, active landscape?

- Clear policy direction with clear objectives, targets and standards and transition funding for change process.
- Need to set out problems and solutions. Propositions for solutions.
- Managed access to the land and sea environment.
- A land use and marine integrated strategy.
- Holistic approach to environmental Issues.
- Measurable and legislative long term targets.
- Empowering people to make individual changes.
- Subsidies.
- More sustainable agricultural practices using resources required.
- Partnership working opportunities between multiple stakeholders across shared interests in particular natural assets
- Go for top 5 - 10 hitters - 80:20 principle.
- GDP traditional measures of wealth generation and job creation lead. Wellbeing and environment measures required to encourage new thinking.

What are the main obstacles & how do we overcome them?

- Current political understanding of environment.
- Capacity issue.
- Need level playing field.
- No Assembly.
- Weak environmental governance.
- Brexit uncertainty.
- Lack of/prioritisation of resources.
- Focused on growth rather than sustainability.
- The want to change and the opportunity for making those changes.
- More support to local government in terms of environmental information.
- Behavioural change across the board.
- Business reflects consumer behaviour.

Annex B - PfG Outcomes shown with possible Environment Strategy outcomes and DAERA's vision



Neighbourhood Environment Quality Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Regulatory and Natural Resources Policy Division
2nd Floor, Klondyke Building
1 Cromac Avenue
Gasworks Business Park
Belfast
BT7 2JA

ISBN: 978-1-83887-053-9



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk



**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**