

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 (DAERA).

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.

Fisheries and Water Environment Bill - A Bill to make provision in relation to fishing and aquaculture in the marine and aquatic environment; and for connected purposes.

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

Developing a	Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Adopting a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Implementing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Revising a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Designing a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Delivering a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		

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 Fisheries and Water Environment Bill.

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

The Department relies heavily on the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966 as a key piece of primary legislation which guides the work in relation to fishing and fisheries. A new Bill is needed to modernise and give effect to Northern Ireland's fisheries policies so that these are consistent with the post-EU exit fisheries management framework provided by the UK Fisheries Act 2020 and high-level, strategic policies in the UK Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) - the existing legislation, will not allow DAERA to meet the requirements of the new framework. Good water quality is essential for multiple industries including agriculture, fisheries, mining and manufacturing. It is also a necessity for health, hygiene and overall well-being. The Department wants to ensure the regulatory and policy frameworks in place protect water quality, eco-systems and the wider environment and the enforcement regime governing water pollution is fair, with clear appropriate penalties in order to deter all polluters.

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.

Definition needs to include coastal communities. The main fishery harbours in Northern Ireland are in Co. Down located in the villages of Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie. However, several smaller fishing villages, which have a cultural and historical association with fishing industries, are dotted around the Northern Ireland coastline. One of the key objectives within the policy planning and development is to promote the development of vibrant, accessible and sustainable coastal communities. In many coastal communities, marine related employment has continued through family generations, thereby increasing its importance in creating strong community and family bonds to our marine and coastal area.

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

Coastal communities form part of some settlements which are larger than 5,000.

Whilst the fishery harbour villages of Ardglass and Portavogie have population settlements of less than 5,000 - Ardglass, 1,761, and Portavogie, 2,274 (according to the 2021 Census), the harbour town of Kilkeel has a population of over 6,000.

In addition, some settlements such as Portrush, Portstewart and Donaghadee (which have populations over 5,000), and indeed the city of Bangor, all have links to marine and fishing industries.

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.

As those within the sea fisheries, aquaculture, agriculture and seafood sectors, are predominantly persons living and working in rural areas, they are most impacted by any changes to policies, strategies, plans and public services that may be introduced to coincide with the development of the Fisheries and Water Environment Bill and any primary legislation.

The vision for the Bill is to provide the Department with the powers to ensure that fishing, fisheries and aquaculture are developed in alignment with the eight fisheries objectives in the UK Fisheries Act 2020. Through the Fisheries and Water Environment Bill, the Department wants to standardise maximum penalties for water pollution offences and introduce additional enforcement tools, these measures will apply to all polluters equally not just those in rural communities.

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.

Fishing activities and the processing of the landed products are predominantly conducted by persons living or working in rural coastal areas. Consequently, any changes to regulations and enforcement for marine and fisheries purposes are likely to impact people in rural coastal communities more so than persons from urban areas financially, through employment opportunities, local tourism and trade, and general health and wellbeing. Without the sustainable management of our stocks, we would not have a seafood sector which supports jobs and rural and coastal communities for the future.

People from and living in urban areas are less likely to work in the fisheries and associated industries and therefore less likely to be affected by any changes to policies, strategies, plans or public services related to these. The policies will also protect and improve water quality in rivers and lakes. This will benefit society generally but may be felt more by people in rural areas who generally live in closer proximity to rivers and lakes.

Financial penalties for waterway pollution will be applied consistently across all sectors, irrespective of geographic location. This means that both rural and urban polluters, as well as any operators found to be non-compliant with environmental regulations, will be subject to the same enforcement measures. The approach ensures fairness and accountability, reinforcing that environmental protection is a shared responsibility across all communities and industries. However, it is noted that enforcement activities for pollution are more likely to affect rural dwellers and rural businesses due to their proximity to waterways.

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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Tourism	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Education or Training in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poverty in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Crime or Community Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Agri-Environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please state)	<input type="text"/>

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.

N/A

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	<input type="checkbox"/>	Published Statistics	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with Other Organisations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Research Papers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Surveys or Questionnaires	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other Publications	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

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.

DAERA will be conducting an online public consultation (alongside this RNIA) inviting views and feedback on its proposals for the relevant sectors.

The responses received to this consultation will help to shape a detailed strategic plan to deliver the changes to the legislation and associated policies.

Co-design sessions have also enabled the Bill Team and policy teams to hear from associated stakeholders from multiple industries including fisheries, aquaculture, agriculture, mining and production and ensure that their views were translated into policy solutions.

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

The fishing sector in Northern Ireland comprises a range of material assets that are integral to food supply and socio-economic resilience. Key assets include a fleet of 265 licensed fishing vessels, primarily based in Kilkeel, Arglass and Portavogie, supported by associated infrastructure including harbours, slipways, fish processing facilities, ice plants and cold storage units. These physical assets are crucial to the landing, harvesting and distribution of key commercial species such as Nephrops, scallops, herring, and mackerel. The development of the Bill is required to support the socio-economic needs of people in these rural areas and to provide a more streamlined and modern regulatory system that benefits all involved in the fishing, aquaculture and seafood industries and particularly the rural communities that they support.

The Joint Fisheries Statement (JFS) recognises both the social and economic importance of fishing, recreational sea fishing and aquaculture to many of our coastal communities and recognises how a healthy and resilient marine environment is the foundation for a prosperous seafood sector and thriving coastal communities, and that sustainable use and conservation of the sea is central to the fisheries management approach.

“A vibrant and prosperous seafood sector, supporting thriving coastal communities, depends upon a healthy and resilient marine environment. The sustainable use and conservation of the sea’s natural capital for present and future generations is therefore central to our fisheries management approach.”

“The fisheries policy authorities will aim to ensure coastal fisheries, and the communities that benefit from them, are able to adapt to the current and future needs of the seafood sector and associated support industries, recognising the differing, yet often complementary, local dynamics with other industries. The potential of the fishing industry to secure and improve livelihoods in coastal communities is acknowledged.”

The Bill will extend the objectives of the Fisheries Act 2020 to inland environments.

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.

DAERA strives to work together with a range of stakeholders and the wider rural communities to have a positive impact on the figures above, and to encourage better social and economic outcomes for these rural areas, through safe and fair regulations and policies.

Water pollution affects drinking water safety, recreation, and local biodiversity. Rural communities often live close to affected water bodies, so improving water quality directly benefits their health and quality of life.

Improved Water Quality: Measures will contribute towards improved water quality in rivers and lakes. This will lead to enhanced biodiversity, fish habitats, reduced cost for water treatment and improvement in the aesthetic standard of water bodies.

Support for Tourism: Improved water quality in rivers and lakes encourages use of the countryside, sustains the viability of rural businesses, and as a result benefits rural communities as a whole.

Changes to business practices – whilst no new offences are being created, the introduction of increased penalties for certain offences may mean that some businesses may need to adopt revised measures to deal with waste.

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, aquaculture and seafood industries are generally considered to be rural based and pride themselves on delivering valuable employment opportunities to these areas, and therefore any changes or revisions to the policies and legislation around these areas will aim to support and enhance the life of the people in those rural communities and industries as well as the environment and sustainability of stocks.

The needs of rural people will continue to be right at the centre of the legislation design process, and they will be supported throughout implementation with long-term direction and guidance, stability, and support in terms of future certainty of income and confidence for future generations success and maximising the benefits to these communities.

As our policies and legislation will impact upon a range of people, particularly those living and working within rural environments and associated sectors, it will be of utmost benefit to liaise with these partners and people through a public consultation process. Co-design of policy with relevant stakeholders has ensured that the problems are understood earlier, and the proposed policy options are informed by multiple perspectives. Many sector representatives have engaged and continue to do so, with the policy teams to develop these proposed changes.

The overarching objective of the water quality policy is to deter all forms of pollution by ensuring robust enforcement of the following legislative frameworks:

- The Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999
- The Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997

The policy is designed to uphold and improve water quality by discouraging and penalising activities that result in pollution.

The Department will fully consider all responses received as part of the consultation process.

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. ☒

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