

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.

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.

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.

N/A

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 and seafood sectors, are predominantly persons living and working in rural coastal 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.

Sustainable fishing means environmental, economic and social considerations are appropriately balanced when managing our fisheries to benefit present and future generations. It means ensuring that fish stocks can be fished, commercially and recreationally, both now and in the future. In doing so, both the short-term and the long-term impacts of decisions on fish stocks and the fishing sector will be considered; short-term socio-economic decisions should not significantly compromise the long-term health of the environment.

The policies in development should ensure the sustainability and health of ecosystems, ensuring we maintain and improve the economic and cultural benefits derived from the fishing and associated sectors within rural communities around the coasts and in proximity to inland waters.

Aquaculture establishments are similarly linked to coastal or inland waterways and may be more traditionally rural in nature. Farms are all located in rural areas. Inland waters all flow through rural areas during their course.

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.

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 a 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.

A Fishing Industry Social Survey Questionnaire exercise was conducted by DAERA (as part of a wider UK exercise), over a period of three weeks in February 2025 across 3 of Northern Ireland fishing harbours in Ardglass, Kilkeel, and Portavogie. Representatives from the local fishing industry were invited to attend and answer questions covering topics around their fishing activities and demographics, job satisfaction and security, health and wellbeing, and their views about current fisheries management and policies.

The survey provided a representative evidence base on the social context within which fishers operate and captured how this may change over time and in response to new policy and management measures, thus informing policy decisions.

The data collected will be of use to fisheries stakeholders when considering policy changes in future.

Co-design sessions also enabled the Bill team and policy teams to hear from associated stakeholders and ensure that their views were translated into policy solutions. Stakeholders were from angling, aquaculture and sea fishing sectors.

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.

The Fishing Industry in Northern Ireland contributes socially and economically to mainly coastal communities through employment and recreational fishing interests.

- i. In Northern Ireland there were 511 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs on board UK vessels in 2023 (as opposed to 544 in 2022 and 617 in 2021).
- ii. Overall, the size of the UK fishing fleet continued the decreasing trend that has been taking place for the last decade. The decline is particularly noticeable among the Northern Irish under 24m fleets (down to 186 in 2023, compared to 209 in 2022).
- iii. Fishing activity (days at sea) increased by an average of 4% in 2023 across all nations, after a slight decrease of 2% in 2022. This increase in fishing activity might be attributed to a gradual easing of fuel prices in the first half of 2023, or more favourable weather conditions. Notably, average days at sea in 2023 were the highest in the last five years, even since pre-pandemic levels in 2019. This increase in average days at sea was driven by increases in the Northern Irish over 24m fleet (36%), the Welsh 10-24m fleet (19%), and the English over 24m fleet (7%). Days at sea for vessels in the Northern Irish over 24m fleet were 130% higher in 2023 than in 2019, as mackerel quota (their main target species) increased after 2019.
- iv. Average fishing income per vessel increased or remained relatively constant across all nations in 2023, although increases in income were more subdued than in 2022. The one exception was the Northern Irish under 10m fleet which saw a decrease of 8% in 2023. This drop coincides with decreases in days at sea, landings, and the number of vessels in the fleet. On the other hand, average income in the Northern Irish over 24m fleet experienced a significant increase of 33%, driven by an increase in fishing activity and landings.
- v. Average profits recovered in 2023, notably, average profits increased for the Northern Irish and English over 24m fleets by 52% and 50%, respectively. For the Northern Irish over 24m fleet this was driven by an increase in landings, which were at their highest levels in five years. Figures above taken from [Economics of the UK Fishing Fleet 2023.pdf](#)

In 2024, vessels registered in Northern Ireland (NI) landed 50,821 tonnes of fish worth approximately £63.1 million into ports in the UK and abroad representing around 5.8% of the total value landed by UK vessels. Shellfish (e.g. nephrops, scallops, lobsters) accounted for 48.7% of the value of fish landed by NI vessels; pelagic (e.g. herring, mackerel) landings were 49.6% and demersal (e.g. haddock, cod) landings 1.6%. At present there are 36 active fish farms on 90 licensed sites (marine and land-based farms) cultivating fish; 54 for the cultivation of shellfish and 36 for the cultivation of finfish. Current species cultivated include Atlantic salmon, brown trout, rainbow trout, mussels and Pacific oysters. In 2022, the aquaculture sector produced 3532 tonnes of shellfish valued at £8.1 million and over 1056 tonnes of finfish valued at £5.9 million. In total the aquaculture sector directly employs around 101 full time and 40 part time employees. Recreational and commercial inland fishing is prevalent across the country, offering anglers a range of opportunities. To fish legally in Northern Ireland, you need (i) a rod licence and (ii) a permit or day ticket. In 2024, 26,381 licences were sold, and 19,571-day tickets and permits were issued.

DAERA strives to work together with a range of stakeholders and the wider rural fishing 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.

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.

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 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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