

Dear Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly Executive,

We urge all those developing our soon to be published Programme for Government to show the vision that is now needed to deliver the changes required for the long-term benefit of Northern Ireland.

Firstly, we would like to welcome the leadership that has achieved local democracy and taken Northern Ireland to a post-conflict society. However, many of society's needs have not been addressed: fuel poverty, social exclusion, environmental degradation and food and energy security to name a few.

We believe that this next Assembly period requires further focus on what really matters to the long-term health and wellbeing of the people of Northern Ireland. We need to change the way we do business and the way we define progress in addressing current economic issues whilst providing for a future society that lives within our environmental limits and supports all citizens to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. We believe a low carbon transition in Northern Ireland is an essential missing link between the civil and political transition involved in the peace process and the search for economic prosperity and social justice.

Therefore, the Programme for Government requires innovative policies, challenging targets and actions for delivery are needed to achieve a future Northern Ireland where:

- **We are no longer 99% reliant on increasingly expensive imported energy, our energy supply is secure, and we have a thriving renewable energy sector supporting thousands of new jobs and attracting major investment;**
- Our economy is competitive and low-carbon, with innovative solutions to social and technological issues;
- **New laws and annual targets ensure carbon emissions are reduced by 80% from 1990 levels by 2050;**
- Resilient and healthy landscapes and seas are valued as underpinning our quality of life and economy through a new vision for agriculture, land use and planning in our seas;
- **Food security is addressed, with more local food being produced, and our land and seas are managed to provide multiple public services;**
- The degradation of our ecosystems is halted, and damaged and lost biodiversity is restored with the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy strengthened to achieve this;
- **An independent champion for sustainability and environmental protection is in place (an independent environmental protection agency) preventing costly indecision and slow action on safeguarding our environment which leaves Northern Ireland taxpayers repeatedly exposed to the risk of enormous fines for breach of EU environmental law;**
- A range of protected areas at sea is introduced, and simplified coordination of marine activities for all sea users through a Marine Management Organisation;
- **A modern planning system (by 2016) is created that delivers a thriving economy whilst protecting our natural, built and cultural heritage providing thousands of affordable homes on brownfield sites with a new vision of towns and cities, designing them with the future in mind. All development will be truly sustainable and of a quality that promote longer-term societal benefits, and deliver improved health and wellbeing for their residents;** and
- A modernised and integrated transport system is developed, providing improved railway lines, more cycle tracks and priority bus lanes.

We urge you to ensure that the Programme for Government contains these commitments that will improve the wellbeing of our people and our economy as well as the environment. We need an appropriate economic development model, which, unlike the current one, is low carbon, contributes to quality of life and benefits the environment, and does not increase the inequalities in society.

Northern Ireland does not have another decade to wait for devolution to 'bed in' and so we are looking to our politicians to show the spirit and vision that is needed to take Northern Ireland to become a leader in sustainability and an example of what local democracy can achieve. Work is needed now across government boundaries, involving all sectors, to find creative and visionary solutions to provide a real legacy to be proud of for the future.

We will work towards this agenda for future prosperity, will you?

Yours faithfully

Professor John Barry, Institute for a Sustainable World,
Queen's University, Belfast

Professor Sue Christie, Chief Executive, Northern Ireland
Environment Link

Richard Devlin, Northern Ireland Marine Task Force

Dr. Geraint Ellis, School of Planning, Architecture and Civil
Engineering, Queen's University, Belfast

Professor Jim Kitchen

Professor Greg Lloyd, School of the Built Environment,
University of Ulster

Geoff Nuttall, Head of WWF Northern Ireland

James Orr, Director for Northern Ireland, Friends of the Earth

Billy Reid, Interim Director, National Trust

Dr. James Robinson, Director, RSPB Northern Ireland

Heather Thompson, Chief Executive, Ulster Wildlife Trust

Professor Sharon Turner, School of Law, Queen's University, Belfast