



 environment
Northern Ireland link

Manifesto 2011



Introduction

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the networking and forum body for organisations interested in the environment of Northern Ireland. It represents 55 full Members (voluntary organisations) and 48 Associate Members (statutory organisations, companies or individuals).

Full Members collectively represent over 100,000 individuals, employ over 2,300 staff with over 3,000 volunteers and 262 subsidiary groups. NIEL Full Members have a collective annual turnover of over £60 million and manage over 265,000 acres of land. Members are involved in environmental issues of all types and at all levels from the local community to the global environment. NIEL brings together a wide range of knowledge, experience and expertise which can be used to help develop policy, practice and implementation across a wide range of environmental fields.

NIEL – providing a link to the voluntary environmental sector in Northern Ireland

NIEL has produced this paper to inform political parties of our policy priorities for 2011 to 2015. These priorities have been identified and approved by our member organisations and working groups. They represent a set of clear, realistic and achievable priorities to protect the environment of Northern Ireland.

NIEL hopes that this paper will be part of an ongoing dialogue with political parties in Northern Ireland in the build up to the 2011 elections and beyond. We can:

- Facilitate meetings with our member organisations to discuss these priorities in greater detail
- Provide supporting and related information
- Provide information on other policy ideas

While this paper represents the collective views of all members of NIEL, each member has detailed policy positions. If you are interested in finding out more about our members' work and activities, NIEL can provide contact details.

Northern Ireland Environment Link

Environmental Manifesto for Northern Ireland 2011

Proposals for the Programme for Government (PfG)

Climate Change: Introduce a Northern Ireland Climate Bill in 2012 with a legally binding target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 3% per annum accompanied by a budget to deliver the targets.

Green New Deal: Invest in an ambitious programme of measures to simultaneously cut carbon emissions, create thousands of new jobs, help secure our energy supply, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build a competitive low-carbon economy.

Green Infrastructure: Develop a landscape-scale approach that ensures sustainable land and sea ecosystem management for the long term benefit of Northern Ireland's people and environment.

Environmental Performance: Produce a White Paper on the Environment by 2012 identifying Government's major objectives in the fields of waste management, climate change, biodiversity, water, landscape and built heritage.

Environmental Partnerships: Develop delivery partnerships between government and eNGOs to deliver on key government environmental targets.

Planning: Introduce by 2012 a revised and fit-for-purpose suite of policy planning statements that provide a robust and consistent policy framework for sustainable landuse.

Marine Environment: Introduce a robust Northern Ireland Marine Bill in 2011 to secure the vision of "clean, healthy, safe, productive, biologically diverse oceans and seas".

Transport: Ensure that at least 50% of Government investment in transport supports sustainable transport measures.

Woodland: Develop a partnership approach to deliver the Executive's commitment to double woodland cover in the next 50 years.

Waste: Set a target of recycling 70% of all wastes by 2020, to be delivered through development of appropriate infrastructure, changing public behaviour and establishing necessary regulations.

Freshwater: Provide resources for the full implementation of the Water Framework Directive to support a sustainable approach to water management.

Environmental Education: Set a target of 85% of Northern Ireland schools to be actively engaged in the Eco-Schools process by 2015 and ensure adequate funding for its achievement.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Introduce a Northern Ireland Climate Bill in 2012 with a legally binding target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 3% per annum accompanied by a budget to deliver the targets.

Without a legal framework to ensure that our carbon dioxide emissions reduce at a similar rate to the rest of the UK we compromise the ability of our economy to perform competitively in the low-carbon future.



The Stern Review made it clear that reductions in emissions are achievable and the cost of such reductions is not excessive. However, these costs will increase significantly the longer appropriate action is delayed. Executive leadership is required, and should include setting a target for a 'Carbon Neutral' Government Estate by 2020 and the full implementation of the recommendations of the Environment Committee Inquiry into Climate Change to act as drivers for action on climate change.

The Northern Ireland Executive should lead in promoting a culture shift to a low carbon society by setting legally binding regional targets that deliver locally the commitments of the UK Climate Change Bill. There are clear moral and economic arguments for contributing our fair share of cuts to carbon dioxide emissions as not only is climate change affecting us here in Northern Ireland, it is already destroying the lives and livelihoods of many of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world.

GREEN NEW DEAL

Invest in an ambitious programme of measures to simultaneously cut carbon emissions, create thousands of new jobs, help secure our energy supply, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build a competitive low-carbon economy.

The Green New Deal offers Government an opportunity to tackle the environmental, economic and social issues that face our society through the adoption of an integrated approach to the 'triple crunch' of recession, rising energy prices/decreasing energy security and climate change.

The role of Government in achieving the benefits of the Green New Deal is clearly critical, through offering strong leadership, providing funding which can leverage substantial additional investment, and developing the necessary policy framework. The potential benefits include a way to move out of the recession, significant job opportunities, escape from near total dependence on imported fossil fuels, significant reductions in fuel poverty, cuts in our carbon emissions in line with international obligations, and laying the foundations of a competitive low-carbon economy.



On 5 October 2010 the Northern Ireland Assembly gave unanimous support to implementing a Green New Deal in Northern Ireland. This cross-party endorsement must be reflected in a Green New Deal being prioritised within the new Programme for Government.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Develop a landscape-scale approach that ensures sustainable land and sea ecosystem management for the long term benefit of Northern Ireland's people and environment.

The National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA – due out in early 2011) shows the extent to which ecosystem services underpin our economy and human well-being and will set a baseline for future work. The international study on The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) has shown that the cost of sustaining biodiversity and ecosystem services is significantly lower than the cost of allowing them to decline. To date Northern Ireland's economic framework has failed to recognise and account for the true value of its natural resources and the services they provide.

Northern Ireland requires a network of high biodiversity value protected sites within a wider environment managed to deliver a multiplicity of different ecosystem services. This not only maximises delivery of many different outputs, it also provides the resilience needed for the natural environment to deal with natural and man made challenges such as climate change.

Land use change and subsequent habitat loss are major drivers of declines in biodiversity and ecosystem services. Supporting more sustainable land and sea use should therefore be a major overarching target for Government and needs to be prioritised within the forthcoming PfG and Environmental White Paper. It is critical that competing demands on land and sea are managed to avoid further degradation of the natural resource base as a thriving natural environment is essential to economic growth and a healthy society.

The importance of landscape-scale conservation and the development and protection of the 'green infrastructure', which supports all other activities must be central to the Environment White Paper with recognition not only of the range of competing demands on land, but also of the need for the land to be healthy, productive and biologically diverse. A multi-faceted approach to habitat restoration and improvement on a landscape scale with better connectivity between and management of designated wildlife sites is therefore required. In this context the enabling legislation for designation of National Parks should be progressed. Policies and fiscal support packages should encourage landowners to deliver 'public goods'.

Green infrastructure is a network of green spaces that help conserve natural ecosystems and provide benefits to human populations through water purification, flood control, carbon capture, food production and recreation. Such spaces include woodlands, coastlines, flood plains, hedgerows, city parks and street trees.



ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

Produce a White Paper on the Environment by 2012 identifying Government's major objectives in the fields of waste management, climate change, biodiversity, water, landscape and built heritage.

In May 2008 the then Minister of the Environment committed to developing Northern Ireland's first White Paper on the Environment to be published during the lifetime of this Assembly. This document was to identify Government's major objectives in the fields of waste management, climate change, biodiversity, water, landscape and built heritage. The Paper would also map Departmental commitments, how the Department would work with other Departments to protect and enhance the environment and fulfil our European obligations. As we degrade and undermine the health of our natural environment we threaten the ecosystem services that it provides including flood alleviation, food production and carbon sequestration, with significant detrimental impacts on our economy and well-being.

A White Paper is needed to establish an integrated delivery framework to protect the natural environment and the ecosystem services it provides. An extensive array of policies and mechanisms currently determine how land and resources are used and managed but much of the existing policy framework is fragmented, decisions are taken by a range of different bodies in isolation from each other, investment in management is low and enforcement can be limited. There are significant opportunities to achieve much greater overall benefit if these policies were more effectively aligned. There is a need to embed environmental outcomes across government, and at all levels, to drive integration across policy areas to ensure coherence, cost-effectiveness and positive environmental outcomes. The value of inter-sectoral partnerships in delivery of environmental outcomes should also be enshrined within the White Paper.



ENVIRONMENTAL PARTNERSHIPS

Develop delivery partnerships between government and eNGOs to deliver on key government environmental targets.

Funding for environmental protection has to date been insufficient to halt the decline in many aspects of the environment. Given that public spending will be further restricted over the coming years, it is important that the available resources are used effectively.

Recent independent research into the environmental sector in Northern Ireland identified the added value environmental NGOs bring to achieving governmental targets. There are opportunities for developing further partnerships and co-operative delivery arrangements between government and eNGOs. That will benefit the environment and assist in achieving Government and international targets.

Active development of partnerships – building on the strengths of different sectors – has the best chance of delivering the required outcomes. The third sector is particularly strong in developing partnerships, accessing funding and promoting issues to the public.

Government should look to partnership delivery in areas, which span Agencies or Departments, such as environmental education or waste management, where delivery by third parties can be especially effective in delivering cost-effective multiple goals and benefits. Government should also work with others to maximise the leverage options to obtain funding for delivery of environmental priorities and objectives. The value of inter-sectoral partnerships in delivery of environmental outcomes should be strongly enshrined within the new PfG and forthcoming Environment White Paper.

PLANNING

Introduce by 2012 a revised and fit-for-purpose suite of policy planning statements that provide a robust and consistent policy framework for sustainable land use.

Policy Planning Statements (PPSs) contain policies on land use and other planning matters and set out the main considerations to be taken into account in reaching planning decisions on proposals for development. A number of PPSs specifically relating to sustainable development of our natural resources and the protection of our built heritage are out of date and do not adequately consider emerging issues such as climate change. While the existing PfG commits to having an up-to-date suite of PPSs in place by 2011, including a new PPS1 to set out the general principles underlying the planning system, this target is unlikely to be met. In addition to PPS1, priority must be given to the urgent revision and publication of PPS2 Planning and Nature Conservation.

These revised PPSs, in tandem with the Regional Development Strategy, are urgently required if we are to have the necessary fit-for-purpose policy framework that sustains, protects and enhances our built and natural environment. Cumulative impacts of the infrastructure requirements of developments and their impacts on ecosystem services need to be considered.

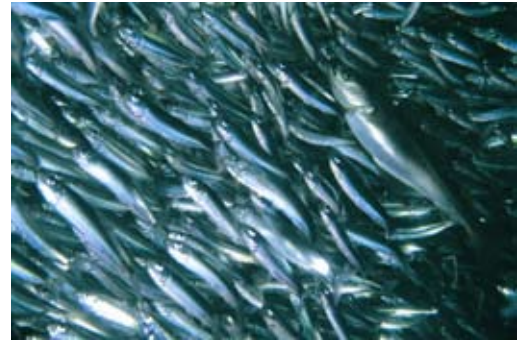
The Community Planning and Power of Wellbeing aspects of the RPA need to be progressed, and pilot projects extended to all Councils, including capacity building of Councillors and progress of necessary legislation.



MARINE ENVIRONMENT

Introduce a robust Northern Ireland Marine Bill in 2011 to secure the vision of “clean, healthy, safe, productive, biologically diverse oceans and seas”.

As well as providing direct economic returns (fishing, power, raw materials, etc) the Northern Ireland sea area provides a wealth of ecosystem services, which depend on intact, healthy, and diverse habitats. Northern Ireland not only lags behind the rest of the UK in having no Marine Act, it is also behind in the actions needed to deliver sustainable seas. Toxic algal blooms, nutrient enriched estuaries, overexploited commercial fish stocks, introduced invasive species, habitat destruction, increased sea temperatures, coastal erosion, littered beaches and sewage pollution are all having negative impacts on this unique resource.



It is therefore essential that robust and effective legislation, in the form of a Northern Ireland Marine Bill, is developed without delay in order to provide the legislative mechanisms that will ensure a truly sustainable future for our seas. This Marine Bill must include an efficient system of Marine Spatial Planning and a statutory duty to designate an effective and an ecologically functioning network of Marine Protected Areas by 2012. A locally accountable Northern Ireland Marine Management Organisation (MMO) that works to ensure cross-border integration and the application of the ecosystem approach in the management of the seas could offer substantial economic advantages as well as providing operational benefits for the management of Northern Ireland's unique marine environment.

TRANSPORT

Ensure that at least 50% of Government investment in transport supports sustainable transport measures.

Despite policy commitments to sustainable transport, the current PfG allocates 80% of the transport spend to roads-based measures. Investment in public transport on a per capita basis in England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland is at least twice that of Northern Ireland. While domestic transport emissions in the UK increased by 9% from 1990 to 2006, in Northern Ireland they increased by a staggering 51%. The transport sector now accounts for 25% of Northern Ireland's total greenhouse gas emissions.

Northern Ireland's transport policy requires a radical overhaul if we are to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. Government must show leadership, reconsider their investment priorities, embrace new technology and promote behaviour change.

Although recent investment in public transport has produced encouraging results, much more can be done. Travelwise reports that a 10% increase in the number of frequent cyclists would result in a cost saving of £200 million per year for the NHS, while the introduction of a default 20mph speed limit in all residential areas would help to improve road safety, encourage walking, cycling and public transport use, reduce fuel consumption and CO₂ emissions and decrease noise.

Continued over-reliance on the private car will have an increasingly negative impact on Northern Ireland's economic, societal and environmental well-being. Spend figures for transport modes need to ensure that at least 50% of Government investment in transport goes to sustainable transport measures.



WOODLAND

Develop a partnership approach to deliver the Executive's commitment to double woodland cover in the next 50 years.

Northern Ireland is one of the least wooded regions in Europe with woodland covering a mere 6.4% of the land area compared to 11.8% in the UK, 9.7% in the Republic of Ireland and 44.3% across Europe as a whole. At a time of enormous pressure on public finances woods and trees are not an optional luxury, but offer genuine value for money because they can deliver on many agendas simultaneously. Between 1973 and 2008 approximately 17,000 hectares of woodland were created which averages a yearly rate of only 500 hectares. This is well below the short and long term targets the Executive has set. Tree planting rates will need to increase to 1,740 ha per year if Northern Ireland is to achieve its aspiration to double woodland cover in the next 50 years and deliver the many benefits this will bring. The public, private and voluntary sectors must work in partnership to expand, promote and protect our native woodland heritage.



Woods and trees have a pivotal role in helping the Northern Ireland Executive achieve many key objectives including tackling challenges of climate change mitigation and adaptation, halting wildlife loss, reducing flooding, supporting productive agriculture, improving public health (both physical and mental) and shaping places where people want to live, work and spend their leisure time.

WASTE

Set a target of recycling 70% of all wastes by 2020, to be delivered through development of appropriate infrastructure, changing public behaviour and establishing necessary regulations.

Reducing the amount of waste produced and obtaining maximum value from resources currently discarded decreases costs, addresses climate change commitments, reduces use of resources, saves natural habitats, reduces pollution, improves human health and encourages people to manage resources responsibly.

Setting a challenging target for recycling will drive the necessary reduction in the amount of waste produced and reduce the amount going to landfill to ensure we meet international targets and avoid EU fines.



The household waste recycling rate in Northern Ireland increased from 4.9% in 1999 to 34.4% in 2008/9, with an increase of 2.5% during 2007/8. An annual increase of about 3% is therefore possible and this should be maintained and improved upon with targeted programmes and infrastructural provision, including separate collections for major waste streams. An annual improvement of 3% will deliver a 70% recycling rate by 2020. It is essential that collected materials are of high enough quality to allow for profitable reprocessing and that local markets for reused and reprocessed goods are encouraged.

Implementation of the revised Waste Framework Directive provides the opportunity to review available technologies, establish challenging targets, and provide a focus to inform the public of the need for waste prevention and recycling. Promotion and delivery of Communications and Waste Prevention Strategies will enable the achievement of this target.

FRESHWATER

Provide resources for the full implementation of the Water Framework Directive to support a sustainable approach to water management.

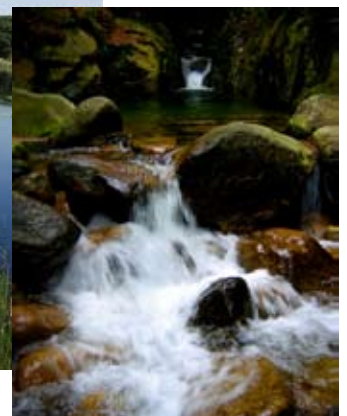
Currently over 70% of our water bodies fail to reach Good Ecological Status. If this is not addressed there could be significant financial and environmental costs as well as possible European fines. Sustainable water management will benefit our water quality, flood abatement, climate change mitigation, landscape and wildlife and provide valuable recreational and aesthetic benefits to residents and visitors.



Government must ensure that there are adequate resources in place to support the full implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD) as many areas of work required by the Directive remain uncompleted and River Basin Management Plans remain reliant on existing measures. The recently completed Atkins Global Regulatory Impact Assessment (October 2009) into the cost of implementing the WFD in full in Northern Ireland found that while it would cost society £12.2m to implement the WFD, we would receive benefits totaling some £23-25m.

Improvements are required in the levels of monitoring and enforcement related to pollution of water bodies and in particular the problems caused by agriculture, industry, road construction and defective septic tanks. While efforts to harness renewable energy production from hydropower are welcome, consideration must be given to the current and future impact of climate change on the flow regimes within rivers.

If we are to benefit from a supply of clean water both now and in an uncertain future of a changing climate, increased effort is required to inform the public about the true value of water. The public should be encouraged to use water more efficiently and to safeguard this resource, and developments should be required to collect and reuse rainwater and greywater.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Set a target of 85% of Northern Ireland schools to be actively engaged in the Eco-Schools process by 2015 and ensure adequate funding for its achievement.

Increasing the public awareness of environmental matters and encouraging all people to consider environmental impacts of all their decisions are vital if Northern Ireland is to become more sustainable and improve its environmental performance. Much can be done by providing information for adults, but educating young people is clearly a priority if we are to achieve this change in attitudes and behaviour. A variety of programmes are run by environmental NGOs targeting children of all ages.

The Eco-Schools programme is an internationally recognised education programme for sustainable development which develops the attitudes of children and encourages them to take a responsible view of their environment. Through a partnership between environmental groups, Councils, Government Departments and businesses, the programme helps children develop environmentally responsible attitudes and positive behaviour that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. The children in turn influence their families and wider communities to make changes towards more sustainable lifestyles. Research clearly demonstrates the success of the Eco-schools approach within Northern Ireland with significant measurable impacts on pupils and schools in terms of energy usage, water consumption, waste being sent to landfill and car use.

Currently in Northern Ireland almost 55% of all 1,207 schools are registered as Eco-Schools. The Eco-Schools programme, properly resourced, has the ability to effectively change behaviours in Northern Ireland in a lasting way. At present Eco-Schools in Northern Ireland receives only a small fraction of the support provided by other devolved governments. Increased support for the programme is required if we are to realise the achievable target of 85% of schools being actively engaged in the Eco-Schools process by 2015.



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