

**the way ahead  
2009-11**



# policy priorities for Northern Ireland's environment: the 2010 review



# policy priorities for Northern Ireland's environment: **the 2010 review**

**the way ahead  
2009-11**



---

## Contents

---

3	Foreword Full Members
4	2009 Significant Events
6	2009 Review of Policy Priorities
6	<b>Sustainable Development</b>
8	<b>Climate Change and Energy</b>
10	<b>Planning</b>
12	<b>Environmental Protection</b>
14	2010 Looking Ahead

NIEL is supported by



# Foreword

In early 2009 Northern Ireland Environment Link produced its latest version of *The Way Ahead*, stating its policy priorities for the coming period. We will be producing a major document to correspond to each Programme for Government, and between these we will provide annual Progress Reports based on the major priorities identified for each Programme period. The next major policy analysis will be produced in the autumn of 2010 to include our policy recommendations for the next Programme for Government scheduled to be produced in early 2011.

This document looks at progress in the past year towards the policy priorities identified in early 2009 and looks ahead to what we would like to see done to protect our environment in the coming year. These will be the major areas that NIEL as a whole works to progress.

## NIEL full members

Action Renewables	Forest of Belfast	Organic Centre
ARENA Network	Grass Roots Conservation Group	Rural College and Derrynoid Centre
Belfast Healthy Cities	Green Action Belfast	Rural Community Network
Belfast Hills Partnership	Greencastle Area Residents Group	Rural Development Council
British Council NI	Hedge Laying Association of Ireland	Speedwell Trust
Bryson Charitable Group	Holywell Trust	Supporting Communities NI
Campaign for the Protection of the Countryside NI	Institute of Public Health in Ireland	Sustainable NI
Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust	International Tree Foundation NI	Sustrans
Cavehill Conservation Campaign	Irish Hare Initiative	Talnoy Avian Care Trust
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health NI	Lough Neagh and Lower Bann Advisory Committees	Tidy NI
Colin Glen Trust	Lough Neagh Partnership	Ulster Angling Federation
Community Development and Health Network	Monkstown Community Forum	Ulster Archaeological Society
Community Places	Mountaineering Ireland	Ulster Architectural Heritage Society
Conservation Volunteers NI	Mourne Heritage Trust	Ulster Coarse Fishing Federation
Council for British Archaeology	National Trust	Ulster Society for the Protection of the C'side
County Armagh Wildlife Society	NI Badger Group	Ulster Wildlife Trust
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group NI	NI Cycling Initiative	Waste and Resources Action Programme
Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens	NI Energy Agency	Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust
Field Studies Council	North Belfast Partnership	Woodland Trust
		WWF NI

## 19th + 20th Climate Change: Dealing with the Reality

The Conference and public lecture looked at the body of research on human-induced climate change, the implications for Northern Ireland and the business opportunities presented. Key speakers included Prof. Iain Stewart (University of Plymouth), Prof. Chris Turney (University of Exeter) and Prof. Julian Orford (QUB). The goal was to raise the issue up the political agenda and counteract opinions that the science was inconclusive.

## 26th Environment Committee Climate Change Inquiry Launched

Committee Chairperson, Patsy McGlone MLA, said: "This is an important inquiry in identifying the costs, actions and obligations for the north to ensure we play our part in meeting climate change targets. It's important we work out the best course of action for the future and how the Assembly might scrutinise more effectively the responsibilities of all departments when it comes to climate change." The report including 52 recommendations was released in November 2009.

## 27th Minister Wilson grants planning permission for visitor facilities at Giant's Causeway

Welcoming the Minister's decision, National Trust Director for Northern Ireland, Hilary McGrady, said: "This approval means that the Giant's Causeway will continue to be cared for for future generations. Subject to funding being in place and tendering being completed, we hope to be on-site by the end of this year with the new visitor centre open in 2011." Funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund was obtained in January 2010 enabling work to begin in late 2010.

## 17th Building Regulations (Amendment) Bill approved

The Bill extended the principles for building regulations to include the protection and enhancement of the environment and the promotion of sustainable development. An amendment was agreed by the Assembly to tighten up the requirement on District Councils to take account of protected buildings in their consideration of applications for approval. Royal Assent was given on 2nd March.

## 2nd Marine + Coastal Access Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

## 24th Draft Renewables Obligation Order (NI) 2009

The most significant change to the NIRO was the introduction of banding, which will enable the provision of higher levels of support to new technologies. A number of small technical and administrative changes were also made to the Order to remove barriers to participation in the NIRO.

## 28th Earth Hour 2009

WWF event where people across the globe were asked to turn out lights for one hour.

## 7th Invasive Species Ireland Forum

The environmental and economic consequences of alien species were discussed, and some local examples explored.

## 20th Executive defers water charges for another year

## 22nd First UK Carbon Budget

The inclusion of a legally binding carbon budget was highly significant and welcome. However, by setting the reduction target at 34% for 2020 the government did not go as far as the scientific community recommended. Most scientists agree that UK emissions should be reduced by at least 42% by 2020; the government said it would reconsider the target if an international climate deal was agreed at Copenhagen

## NI Assembly Environment Committee Inquiry into Climate Change

Oral evidence sessions.

## 22nd BCC rejects North Foreshore incinerator

Belfast City Council voted against plans for a waste incinerator on the North Foreshore. However, councillors did support an application for a mechanical biological treatment centre (primary treatment for waste). Arc 21 had proposed the facility be built by 2016. Without new waste treatment facilities in 2012/13 the council could face penalties of about £3.7 million each year.

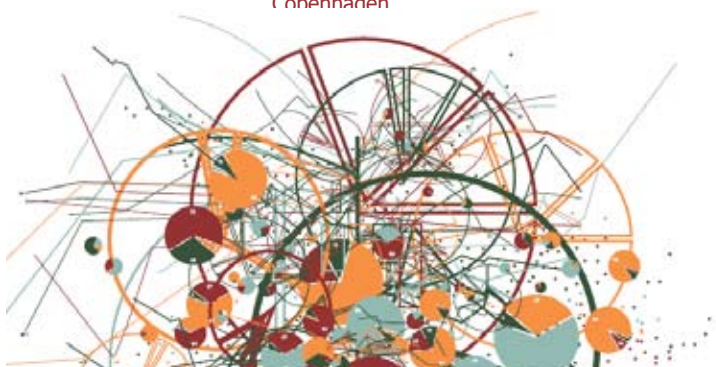
## 23rd National Trust launches the Giant Appeal

£14.5 million fundraising campaign for the Giant's Causeway launched.

## 29th National Parks legislation

New enabling legislation is outlined.

# 2009 significant events



Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

4

**1st New Environment Minister**

Edwin Poots became Environment Minister, replacing Sammy Wilson who became Finance Minister. Minister Poots said, "From local government to planning, from our natural and built heritage and environmental regulation to road safety, these are issues that touch the life of every citizen in Northern Ireland."

**6th Draft Planning Reform released for consultation**

The wide-ranging proposals outlined in the consultation paper, which will impact on almost every aspect of the planning system, combined with the transfer of responsibility for the majority of the functions to local councils in 2011, represent the most far-reaching changes to the planning system in over 30 years. A major consultation exercise followed, with concern expressed by environmental organisations on many aspects. The "Reform of the Planning System in Northern Ireland: Your chance to influence change" consultation paper closed on 2nd October 2009 and a consultation summary report will be published once the final policy position has been cleared by the Northern Ireland executive.

**9th Draft Strategic Energy Framework released for consultation**

Arlene Foster said: "Global agreement will only work if action is taken at the local level. Climate change brings dangers but it also brings opportunities. If Northern Ireland is to prosper we will need to grasp those opportunities. The era of low energy prices is over. The Northern Ireland Executive will continue to encourage the use of renewable power, and work to bring the improvements in infrastructure needed to enhance security and diversity of energy supply and to support economic activity." The Strategic Energy Framework included a proposal to introduce a 40% renewable electricity target by 2020.

**'Wonky' fruit and vegetables back on sale**

EU rules governing the aesthetic appearance of fruit and veg have been scrapped.

**1st Regulation to prohibit the use of lead shot over wetlands**

**14th Regional Transport Strategy Review announced**

Since its publication in 2002, the speed and direction of change in society has overtaken the current regional transportation strategy, so a review is timely. The population, economy and the number of vehicles on the roads have grown much more quickly than had been originally forecast, while environmental issues and the challenge of addressing climate change have moved up everyone's agenda.

**4th to 6th Members of the Assembly Environment Committee Brussels Trip**

Trip to Brussels to find out how EU law applies to Northern Ireland.

**12th UK Climate Change Committee Report**

The Committee's first annual report to Parliament on the progress that has been made by Government so far in reducing emissions and the implications of the recession and 'credit crunch' for meeting carbon budgets had regional launches including in Northern Ireland. The report sets out the emission reduction indicators that will be used to judge progress and provides a detailed analysis of the policies required to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases from electricity generation, buildings and industry, heat and transport. Northern Ireland needs to play its part in delivering these policies.

**26th Draft Sustainable Development Strategy**

Nearly two years after declaring First Steps for Sustainability out of step with Northern Ireland's Programme for Government, OFMDFM released Everyone's Involved, their new sustainable development strategy. Consultation ends in January 2010 with a Strategy to be released shortly thereafter. There is general disquiet that the new Strategy is not 'fit for purpose' and needs considerable work to provide the framework for SD which Northern Ireland badly needs.

**NIEA rein in funding**

Government 'efficiency savings' have hit DoE and NIEA particularly hard, and the future for eNGO funding is uncertain; the Environmental Education Forum was an early casualty with funding immediately terminated.

**1st NIBG Report Delivery of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy released**

We are roughly half way from 2002, when the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy was signed off, to the 2016 target of halting biodiversity loss. This is the second report on progress towards that target. Throughout the report, the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group assesses current progress and makes recommendations aimed at meeting the 2016 target. Information on progress to date is limited and much work is still needed.

**3rd NI Green New Deal Group**

Members of the Northern Ireland Green New Deal Group discuss the opportunities for economic recovery and social and environmental enhancement found within such a package for Northern Ireland. The NI Green New Deal Group and the goals of this package will assist and direct government and policy makers in the transition towards a low carbon economy: from refurbishing tens of thousands of existing homes, enhancing their energy efficiency; to the transformation of our transport system to be fit for purpose in the coming era of high oil and carbon prices.

**12th UK Marine Bill given Royal Assent**

The UK Marine Bill became law in November and Scotland plans to ratify its own Marine Act before the end of the year. However, Northern Ireland will not have equivalent legislation until at least 2012 and current proposals exclude some significant aspects such as marine nature conservation, marine planning and establishing a network of Marine Protected Areas.

**7th Assembly Debate on Environment Committee Inquiry into Climate Change**

Report produced with 52 recommendations including setting of challenging local targets, a carbon neutral government estate by 2015, advice and guidance for local government on improving carbon performance and support for Green New Deal proposals.

**7th to 18th United Nations Climate Change Conference Copenhagen**

It was billed as one of the most significant events in human history yet most delegates left feeling disappointed and betrayed.

The conference produced an Accord that recognised the need to limit global temperature rises to no more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels. This was "recognised" by the 193 nations that took part in the negotiations but no legally binding treaty was agreed. Countries must detail by 1 February 2010 their pledges for curbing carbon emissions by 2020. The next phase of negotiations is expected to be held in Mexico from 29th November to 10th December 2010.

**22nd River Basin Management Plans released**

The NIEA released plans for our three River Basins as per the deadlines of the Water Framework Directive. Minister Poots said, "Using river basin planning, we will take an integrated approach to the protection, improvement and sustainable use of the water environment, from source to sea."



5
---

Jul
-----

Sep
-----

Oct
-----

Nov
-----

Dec
-----

# 2009 review sustainable development



## Recommendation 1

**A revised Strategy and Implementation Plans that adhere to Sustainable Development principles and are challenging beyond just economic growth targets must be published and delivered.**

### Status



### Progress

A new draft strategy "Everyone's Involved" was released for consultation in October 2009. The draft strategy has a central core of 20 'Commitments' but these are generally vague and unambitious, and there are no targets. Reworking of 'Priority Areas' omits some crucial areas, the role of the Strategy in providing an overarching framework for government action is not grasped and climate change is only fleetingly mentioned. The crucial aspect of integration across government is not adequately addressed and commitment to and mechanisms for involving other sectors are unsatisfactory. Departmental Implementation Plans promised for 2009 are now expected in the first few months of 2010.

### Action for 2010

**The new strategy should be strengthened after engagement with stakeholders and quickly adopted. Detailed, ambitious and SMART implementation plans for all Government Departments and Agencies should be developed in parallel and released early in 2010. Full involvement of all sectors must be ensured through appropriate stakeholder mechanisms and structures.**

## Recommendation 2

**A Minister should be designated with specific responsibility for sustainable development.**

### Status



### Progress

The overall responsibility of the strategy rests with OFMDFM; however, no one Minister or Junior Minister has been identified to lead the delivery of the Strategy. A department will be identified with responsibility for leading progress on each target identified in the new Implementation Plan. A new Sustainable Development Commissioner is to be appointed in the New Year.

### Action for 2010

**The identification of a high profile champion for sustainable development across government and wider society remains essential. This champion should uphold the duty on all public authorities to have regard for sustainable development, lead the monitoring of progress against the targets and hold the lead departments to account for their performance. If a Minister cannot be tasked with this work, alternative mechanisms within the Assembly must be developed to do so.**

## Recommendation 3

**Policies and structures (Communications Strategy, Departmental and Sectoral Implementation Plans, Indicators, Government Purchasing Guidelines, Sustainability Assessments and Stakeholder Forum) to support sustainable development should be introduced and delivered.**

### Status



### Progress

Although commitments have been made in the new strategy to explore and introduce policies and structures to support sustainable development, concern remains that these commitments are mostly vague and unacceptably weak. For example, there is a commitment only to 'explore' communication mechanisms rather than to urgently roll-out a full communications strategy.

### Action for 2010

**Supporting documents and policies such as Communications Strategy, Departmental and Sectoral Implementation Plans, Indicators, Government Purchasing Guidelines, Sustainability Assessments, Stakeholder Forum and Guidance on the SD Duty are required urgently. Resources should be identified to deliver the cross-cutting aspects of the strategy as a priority. The active participation of a wide range of stakeholders from the business, NGO and local government sectors is required to ensure full acceptance and willing delivery of these plans in wider society.**

## Recommendation 4

**Delivering Sustainable Development should be a key purpose for post-RPA Councils.**

### Status



### Progress

The Statutory Duty on all public authorities to have regard for sustainable development applies to current councils and will continue to apply to post-RPA councils. The new Strategy contains a commitment to ensure that appropriate guidance is available to support sustainable development. The role of sustainable development as a driver and focus for the new council structures is not fully appreciated and should be promoted. As yet no requirement has been placed on the new councils to assess the sustainability of their areas; such a requirement could be an important additional driver of sustainable development.

### Action for 2010

**New councils should be instructed to ensure a sustainable approach is adopted in their areas and guidance provided on how to do this, including sharing of best practice and monitoring of progress, perhaps through a process such as the Local Area Assessment process used in England. Each new council should develop a Sustainability Implementation Plan for their area to act as a central driver for all actions.**



Significant progress achieved



Significant effort still required



No progress or backward step

# 2009 review climate change



## Recommendation 1

**A Northern Ireland Climate Bill with a Northern Ireland specific legally binding reduction target of at least 3% per annum should be introduced.**

### Status



### Progress

A Climate Change Bill has not been introduced at the Assembly. The target in the Programme for Government (25% emissions reduction by 2025) is not legally binding and does not represent our fair share of the emissions reductions recommended by scientists. The Committee on Climate Change noted that Northern Ireland's carbon dioxide emissions have been rising by about 0.3% per year for the last five years. Despite early progress against 1990 emissions levels we are now heading in the wrong direction.

### Action for 2010

**The Environment Minister, Edwin Poots MLA, has not ruled out introducing a Climate Change Bill, but not in the current Assembly. The Department should immediately begin the preparation to introduce this Bill. The experience gained in Westminster and Scotland in drafting and achieving Royal Assent for their Climate Change Acts should be transferred to Northern Ireland to ensure its orderly but swift passage through the Assembly. The recommendations of the Environment Committee's Climate Change Inquiry Report should be urgently implemented. The Target of making the government estate 'carbon neutral by 2020' should be adopted as a driver for saving cost, energy and carbon.**

## Recommendation 2

The EU target of sourcing 15% of all our energy (electricity, heat and transport) from renewable sources by 2020 should be adopted.

### Status



### Progress

The draft Strategic Energy Framework, which was released in June 2009, outlines Northern Ireland's possible contribution to the EU energy targets. The low penetration of renewable fuels in the heat and transport sectors necessitates that renewable electricity generation will have to meet most of this target. Therefore the inclusion of a suggested target of 40% renewable electricity by 2020 is very encouraging.

### Action for 2010

**The Framework should be formally adopted, related strategies for biomass, heat, grid strengthening and financing introduced, and an appropriately resourced action plan put in place to ensure that delivery is secured, simultaneously addressing energy security, cost, renewables penetration and carbon targets.**

## Recommendation 3

The indicative spend figures for transport modes should be revised to ensure that at least 50% of Government investment goes to sustainable transport measures.

### Status



### Progress

The Department for Regional Development (DRD) has released a discussion document as part of the Review of the Regional Transportation Strategy. It notes that 82% of transport spend will go to 'roads based measures'. The Department has proposed that a new 'high level' strategy will be developed to detail the key transport outcomes it wants to achieve. The finer detail of how to achieve these outcomes, including expenditure requirements, will be contained in Transport Plans, which are to be developed after the Strategy is finalised. The creation of a transport policy team in DRD with a clear sustainability remit was a positive development. Continued commitment to building new roads was less encouraging.

### Action for 2010

**The new Strategy is urgently required. The historic underfunding of active and public transport must be addressed, therefore in the short to medium term minimum indicative spending plans for sustainable transport should be established at 50%. Large road infrastructure projects currently being progressed should be reassessed to establish if they meet cost and carbon reduction criteria and are 'fit for purpose' for their entire anticipated life cycle.**

## Recommendation 4

An adaptation strategy to detail how human infrastructure and natural systems will be managed to help them adapt to a range of climate change scenarios should be developed.

### Status



### Progress

The UK Climate Impacts Projections 2009 detailed some of the expected consequences of climate change in Northern Ireland; projected impacts include more of the flooding experienced across the UK and Ireland in 2009 and in Northern Ireland in 2008. The Water Environment Regulations 2009 introduced the requirement on DARD to consider the impact of climate change when preparing flood risk assessments and management plans. The River Basin Management Plans also introduce a number of required actions to help adapt to climate change. Under the UK Climate Change Act, Northern Ireland must lay objectives for climate change adaptation and proposals and policies for meeting these objectives in 2012.

### Action for 2010

**Work should begin on a comprehensive adaptation strategy. This should include risk assessments, which must become a material consideration as soon as possible in policy development and programme design. All infrastructure being built now must be 'fit for purpose' and cost effective for its entire anticipated life cycle.**



Significant progress achieved



Significant effort still required



No progress or backward step

# 2009 review planning

## Recommendation 1

**A revised vision for planning – to deliver sustainable development – should be central to Planning Reform.**

### Status



### Progress

Planning Reform focuses on procedural elements with the expressed desire to speed up the planning process to facilitate economic development. Although the need to contribute to sustainable development was noted in the draft Planning Reform documents it was not proposed to make sustainable development the fundamental purpose of planning.

### Action for 2010

**The reform agenda should be much more ambitious. The economic downturn has decreased the pressure on planning officers by reducing the number of cases they have to deal with. This represents a welcome relief to the planning system and should reduce the calls for an overly simplistic but quick system. The flawed argument that processing speed should be the main indicator of planning quality should be replaced with a true purpose for planning: "to deliver sustainable development."**



## Recommendation 2

**The new Regional Development Strategy (RDS) should provide the spatial framework for planning in Northern Ireland and Planning Policy Statements (PPS) should provide strong direction on the key considerations that apply across the region.**

### Status



### Progress

A new draft RDS, developed with input from a wide stakeholder working group, was due to be released in summer 2009, however, the release of a draft strategy has been delayed within the Executive. Draft Planning Reform papers propose that local authorities should be given more responsibility for interpreting and implementing policy documents including the RDS and PPSs. It is proposed that local policies and area plans will be tested for coherence with strategic documents.

### Action for 2010

**An ambitious and coherent draft RDS should be released urgently and PPSs should not be weakened through Planning Reform. It is important that strategic policies for climate change, nature conservation, heritage conservation, etc. should be developed at the regional level and applied across Northern Ireland within new the new area planning processes.**

## Recommendation 3

**A Limited Third Party Right of Appeal (TPRA) should be introduced.**

### Status



### Progress

The Minister for the Environment, Edwin Poots, has previously stated his support for the principle behind TPRA. A limited TPRA supports the principles behind reform in terms of building public confidence, trust, greater transparency of the system and upholding the public interest. A limited TPRA would enhance local democracy by increasing the direct accountability of planning authorities to their citizens. The Minister issued assurances that TPRA would be considered fully, but stated that it could not be implemented concurrently with other aspects of planning reform due to the tight timetable of the RPA.

### Action for 2010

**Proposals for limited TPRA should be developed and should form part of the delivery timetable of the RPA to build trust in the planning system.**

## Recommendation 4

**Capacity Building schemes – including community planning pilots – in preparation for the full implementation of the Review of Public Administration should be devised and delivered.**

### Status



### Progress

Transition Committees operated voluntarily in 2009 and will be given a statutory function from January 2010. Councils, NILGA and SNI have shown commitment to meeting the RPA timetables but there are major doubts surrounding the ability of local authorities to fund the development and implementation of new structures.

### Action for 2010

**Central government must provide guidance and funding to the Transition Committees in order to ensure that the new super-councils are able to deliver their new powers for wellbeing and community planning from 2011 now.**



# 2009 review environmental protection

## Recommendation 1

**The status and performance of the NIEA should be reviewed concurrently with the review of departments and implementation of the RPA.**

### Status



### Progress

There is no plan to conduct a review of the NIEA in the current Assembly term. The funding cuts that are currently being imposed on the NIEA highlight the need for operational distance to be established between the different arms of DOE. The commitment to reviewing departmental structures has been reaffirmed by the major parties in the Assembly, but this is unlikely prior to elections in 2011. Funding cuts will continue and probably increase, and the voluntary sector is an obvious and easy target for such cuts.

### Action for 2010

**As departmental structures and functions are reviewed, the value of strong environmental protection should be incorporated into the decision making process. The arguments for support of the voluntary sector as of the worth and excellent value-for-money needs to be clearly articulated if the sector is to remain strong and enjoy increasing respect. The value of inter-sectoral partnerships in delivery of environmental goods should be strongly promoted.**



## Recommendation 2

**An Enforcement Strategy should be developed to help the prosecution team in NIEA to deliver environmental outcomes.**

### Status



### Progress

A Draft Enforcement Strategy was released for consultation in June. The Strategy is welcome; however, it retains a strong focus on waste crimes. More must be done to increase capacity in the enforcement teams across the full range of environmental issues. The proposals in the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill to introduce criminal offences for wildlife crimes are encouraging.

### Action for 2010

**The enforcement strategy should be fully implemented and the team enhanced and properly resourced to deal with all aspects of environmental crime. Further powers should be added through the Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill. The fundamental importance of protecting and enhancing the natural and cultural environment needs to be fully recognised in the Assembly and in the public mind and enshrined in the next Programme for Government.**

## Recommendation 3

**Investment should be targeted towards developing waste infrastructure and delivering a communications strategy that reflects the waste hierarchy and promotes the integrated management of resources and waste streams.**

### Status



### Progress

Belfast City Council voted against siting an 'energy from waste' plant on the North Foreshore. While the technology initially proposed for the site may not be optimal, the decision may also result in ARC 21 failing to meet Landfill Directive targets and ultimately could lead to heavy infraction fines for Northern Ireland. Work on delivering the waste communication and prevention strategies has belatedly begun, and the Consultation on the Revised Waste Framework Directive released in November provides encouraging targets and redefinitions which should encourage resource management as opposed to waste disposal solutions.

### Action for 2010

**Implementation of the new Waste Framework Directive provides the opportunity to review available technologies, establish challenging recycling and reuse targets and provide a focus to inform the public of the need for waste prevention, increased reuse and recycling, and energy from waste technologies. Concentration should be on finalising and delivering Communications and Waste Prevention Strategies which support strong and stretching targets, such as 70% recycling by 2020.**

## Recommendation 4

**A shared vision for a sustainable rural Northern Ireland should be developed.**

### Status



### Progress

The Environment Committee Independent Working Group's investigation into the provisions for non-farming rural dwellers in PPS 21 found that the policy should not be further weakened. The importance of renewable energy to the rural economy was highlighted by the ARD Committee Inquiry. The Rural White Paper Stakeholder Advisory Group has submitted recommendations to the DARD Minister, which if implemented will improve rural sustainability.

### Action for 2010

**The Rural White Paper should have sustainability and resilience at its core. The RDS should include a vision as to how Northern Ireland views its resources in the context of climate change and the need to improve our resource efficiency. A true understanding of the value of the natural environment as it relates to climate change (mitigation and adaptation), sustainability, cultural heritage and ecosystem services should be promoted to the Assembly and public.**



# 2010 looking ahead

## **International Year of Biodiversity**

There are global, EU and UK targets to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010. Northern Ireland has a similar target for 2016. Events are planned to highlight the benefits of biodiversity during the year.

## **Early**

### **Transition Councils**

Transition Committees and Management Teams, and Regional Implementation Groups will have statutory status from January 2010 and will work to establish good governance arrangements and priorities for the new councils throughout 2010 in preparation for full RPA implementation in early 2011.

### **Forestry Bill**

The Bill, which includes provisions for the introduction of felling licences, is currently at the Committee Stage and is planned to be enacted during 2010. Further emphasis should be placed on encouraging and resourcing sustainable woodland restoration, creation and management and enhanced protection for ancient woodland.

### **Sustainable Development Strategy**

The new strategy, 'Everyone's Involved', should be adopted early in 2010. While the draft strategy requires strengthening, the emphasis should be placed on the timely introduction of robust and ambitious implementation plans and supporting understanding and delivery structures throughout society.



## Northern Ireland Priority Species Report

NIEA will publish a report on the results of the Northern Ireland Priority Species Review undertaken by the recently formed Northern Ireland Species Delivery Group. It is anticipated that the current list containing 271 priority species will rise to approximately 472 species. It is envisaged that management arrangements for many species will primarily be delivered through habitat delivery groups, designated site management or undertaking research and surveys.

## Northern Ireland Wildlife and Natural Environmental Bill

The Bill will make provisions for protecting biodiversity, amend the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order and part 4 of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, abolish game licences and game dealers' licences, and connected purposes. If the Bill progresses through its Second and Committee Stages as planned it is envisaged that the Order should be on the statute books by June 2010. There is the opportunity to impose a Duty on all public authorities to further the conservation of biodiversity

## Westminster Elections

The elections must be held by the end of May 2010. With major decisions to be made on how to restore the UK economy and to deliver on carbon reduction targets the outcome of the election will be very significant.

## Clean Neighbourhoods Act

By providing the necessary powers to local government this legislation will ensure anti-social behaviours which blight our landscape, impact on people's health and pollute our streets and waterways (costing £30m annually to clean up) can be consistently and effectively dealt with. English legislation includes 'dark skies' provision within their Act and this should be followed here for carbon and cost savings and biodiversity advantages.

## Planning Policy Statement 2: Nature Conservation

The long-delayed revision of PPS 2 is expected in draft in March 2010. The policy will describe how nature conservation concerns should be integrated into the planning process.

## Northern Ireland Marine Bill Policy Proposals

In April the Department of the Environment will publish proposals on what they expect to be the main elements of a Northern Ireland Marine Bill. The Department expresses confidence that it can progress policy development to enable Northern Ireland to 'catch up' with the rest of the UK in Marine Act legislation by 2012.

## Strategic Energy Framework

It is hoped this will include a target for 40% renewable electricity and 10% renewable heat by 2020, with an interim target of 12% renewable electricity by 2012.

## National Parks Legislation

Minister Poots plans to introduce legislation to enable the designation of National Parks in Northern Ireland. The proposals are expected set out the purpose and aims of National Parks, including an aim concerning the promotion of economic and social development. They will also cover criteria for identifying potential National Parks, management and funding arrangements, statutory duties and powers, and a clear and rational process by which parks would be designated. After the new legislation is in place, the next stage will be to identify candidate sites for designation, but there are no plans for any specific area to be designated at this stage.

## Late

## Rapid Transit Policy Proposals

The consultation on the detailed policy proposals for the Belfast rapid transit system began in late 2009. The agreed policy principles will have a major impact on the final design of the system in Belfast.

## Regional Development Strategy

The Minister for Regional Development ordered a review of the Regional Development Strategy in 2008. The aim is to prepare a "new Regional Development Strategy which is fit for purpose, up to date, and which takes account of recent emerging trends affecting how we plan for the future". Drafts have been delayed but it is hoped that it will be finalized during 2010.

## Regional Transportation Strategy

The Department for Regional Development released a discussion paper on the review of the Regional Transportation Strategy (RTS) in 2009. A draft new RTS is expected to be published before the finalised strategy is adopted by the Assembly in late 2010.

## Rural White Paper

The Rural White Paper Stakeholder Advisory Group which worked throughout 2009 will be presenting its recommendations to the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development and the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee early in the New Year. The draft Rural White Paper is expected to be released for consultation in Autumn 2010. The year will also see the mid-term evaluation of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme and the publication of an EC paper looking at the Common Agriculture Policy after 2012.

## Water Framework Directive

2010 is the deadline for EU Member States to introduce pricing policies. Each Member State must ensure that from 2010 water pricing policies provide adequate incentives to use water resources effectively and that the various economic sectors contribute to the recovery of the costs of water services, including those relating to the environment and resources.



## **Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)**

is the networking and forum body for organisations interested in the environment of Northern Ireland. It represents 58 full members (voluntary organisations) and 50 associate members (statutory organisations, companies or individuals).

Full members collectively represent over 89,000 individuals, 262 subsidiary groups, have an annual turnover of nearly £70 million and manage over 314,000 acres of land. Members are involved in environmental issues of all types and at all levels from the local community to the global environment.



89 Loopland Drive  
Belfast BT6 9DW  
Northern Ireland

T 028 9045 5770  
F 028 9094 2151

**[info@nienvironmentlink.org](mailto:info@nienvironmentlink.org)**  
**[www.nienvironmentlink.org](http://www.nienvironmentlink.org)**



Printed on recycled paper