

Survey of CNCC Stakeholders

Introduction

Business Consultancy Service (BCS) of the Public Sector Reform Division (PSRD), Department of Finance (DoF) is the principle source of internal consultancy services across the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). BCS has been engaged by the DAERA to carry out a review of the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC).

Why we have Contacted You?

As part of this review a questionnaire has been developed for stakeholders of CNCC. This is where we hope that you will be able to help us. The questionnaire should only take around 10 minutes should be straight-forward to complete.

Data Protection and Information Assurance

Please note that while all contact information and responses provided will be used in the review it will be non-attributable, will be kept in confidence and all information will be retained in line with data protection requirements.

1. What is your name and the name of your organisation?

Northern Ireland Environment Link

2. Please give a short description of your organisation and its relationship with the CNCC?

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the networking and forum body for non-statutory organisations concerned with the environment of Northern Ireland. Its 70+ Full Members represent over 90,000 individuals, 262 subsidiary groups, have an annual turnover of £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. 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.

These comments are made on behalf of Members, but some members may be providing independent comments as well. If you would like to discuss these comments further we would be delighted to do so.



3. In the year 2016/17 have you engaged with CNCC in the following areas? (Tick all that apply)

- | | | | | | |
|------|--|------------|--------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| 3(a) | Matters relating to nature conservation | <u>Yes</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3(b) | Matters affecting the natural beauty or amenity of any area or place in Northern Ireland | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <u>No</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3(c) | Establishment and Management of National Parks | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <u>No</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3(d) | Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <u>No</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3(e) | Establishment and management of nature reserves | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <u>No</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3(f) | Establishment and management of Marine Conservation Zones | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <u>No</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3(g) | District council nature reserves provided under Article 22 of the 1985 Order | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <u>No</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3(h) | Areas of Special Scientific Interest | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <u>No</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3(i) | Needs of agriculture, forestry and fisheries | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <u>No</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3(j) | Under the terms of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <u>No</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3(k) | Payments of grants to voluntary bodies | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <u>No</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3(l) | Promotional and educational activities | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <u>No</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3(m) | Is there any other reason you required independent advice from CNCC? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <u>No</u> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If yes please give details of how often, the level of engagement, the outcome and your view on how successful the engagement was.

NIEL acts as the coordinator of policy responses for the environmental NGO (eNGO) sector. We have minimal direct engagement with CNCC and are not aware of what issues CNCC is currently dealing with and to what extent it has succeeded in having its advice accepted in government policy.

We would welcome much more transparency around the role of CNCC and a closer working relationship to allow the sector to inform and be informed by CNCC priorities and work programme.

We were grateful for the input of the CNCC Chair to the NIEL Land Matters Task Force throughout 2014/15. This kind of synergy is important to help deliver a coherent and consistent approach to policy development.

4. Did you engage with CNCC due to a statutory requirement?

Yes please go to question 4(b).

No please go to question 5.

4 (b) If the Statutory Requirement rationale did not exist would you still engage with CNCC?

Yes No

Please provide further detail on the rationale for your response.

**5. Please select all other relevant rationales for engaging with CNCC (as opposed to other bodies)
(Please tick all that are relevant)**

Ministerial Preference

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act

Used them previously

CNCC have particular areas of expertise that we do not have

We do have staff who have the expertise but they do not have the independence

Other (please specify)

As an eNGO we have no statutory requirement to engage with CNCC. Representatives of CNCC are involved in other activities within the eNGO sector as an individual or as part of another organisation, not as representatives of CNCC.

Despite the need to ensure clear lines of separation between eNGOs and the statutory advisory role of CNCC, there is scope for much greater collaboration. Many of our members have a practical conservation role and are involved in managing land and protected sites across Northern Ireland. Therefore, CNCC should have a firm grasp of the key issues and priorities being raised by the eNGO sector.

6. Were there other non-statutory advisory options considered?

Yes

No

Don't know

If No, why not?

7. If yes, what other options were explored and why were they not used?

Option 1

Option 2

8. How clear were you on the role of CNCC?

Very Clear

Clear

Not very clear

Not at all clear

9. If you were not clear, what do you think are the reasons behind your lack of clarity

Currently there is a lack of active engagement by CNCC in sectoral activity, leading to a lack of clarity. This has become a more marked trend in recent years. There is lack of understanding and clarity around the following issues:

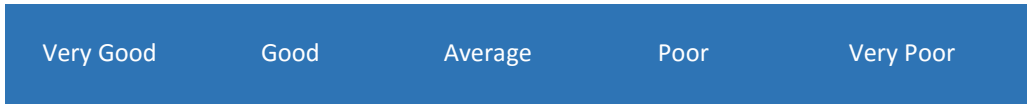
- Who directs the activities of CNCC? To what extent does CNCC’s role extend beyond responding to issues raised by government to instead adopt a more proactive role in identifying and progressing issues of strategic importance?
- With the absence of a Minister during Assembly suspension, how is the CNCC work programme determined?
- What budget and resourcing does CNCC have?
- Who sets the CNCC work programme and is this publicly available?
- Are CNCC progress reports prepared and available to view?
- Is the advice that CNCC provides publicly available to view and comment on?
- As mentioned on the DAERA website, CNCC sub-groups can be established to consider particular issues. What issues are they addressing and who determines whether a sub-group should be established?
- What is CNCC’s role in contributing to Brexit Policy development?

We do not currently engage formally with CNCC. While recognising that there needs to be clear lines of separation between a statutory advisory group and eNGO groups seeking to influence government, there is scope for much greater clarity around the function of CNCC and how it can better interact with, and reflect the key issues identified by the eNGO sector. The relationship between CNCC and the eNGO sector would also be enhanced by facilitating greater awareness of CNCC activities within the eNGO sector by providing more publicly available information on the topics listed above. Closer engagement would enable CNCC to gather evidence and knowledge from the eNGO sector to inform their deliberations.

11. What would the affect be to you or your organisation if CNCC did not exist?

While current engagement with CNCC is low, there is scope for developing a much closer relationship between CNCC and the sector.

12. How would you rate the following aspects of CNCC?



Knowledge	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	x	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Quality of Advice	Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

13(a). Overall to what extent does CNCC provide value for outcomes in what it does for you?

	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor	Don't Know
Value	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

13(b). How does CNCC bring added value?

Northern Ireland has suffered economically, environmentally and socially as a result of regulatory failures stemming from the lack of independent, well-resourced structures for environmental regulation. While CNCC cannot entirely fill this void, it has a vital role to play in providing some level of independent advice to inform government decision making. In light of Brexit and the environmental governance gap that currently exists in Northern Ireland the future role of CNCC should be considered in the context of wider post-Brexit governance arrangements.

13(c). If you answered poor, very poor or don't know please provide the detail why you arrived at this decision?

See response to Q9. We do not have sufficient visibility of the issues CNCC is prioritising, at whose behest, and therefore we cannot comment on the level of advice provided to government, and the impacts/outcomes flowing from such advice.

13. (d) Taking everything into consideration, overall how effective or ineffective did you find the experience in which you engaged with CNCC?

Very Effective	Effective	Neither effective nor ineffective	In-effective	Very ineffective
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14. Do you consider the functions of CNCC need to be delivered through a statutory body?

Yes Y

No

Don't know

15. Provide reasons behind your choice.

Northern Ireland already suffers from a lack of independence around environmental decision making and regulation. It is vital that CNCC continues to operate outside of government to provide independent advice, and that it should have a statutory basis on which its role and remit are founded.

16. (a) Could the functions of CNCC be delivered by an informal stakeholder grouping, a task and finish group for particular strategic issues, or an expert committee?

Yes (Please go to Question 16(b))

No N (Please go to Question 17)

Don't know

16(b). If yes, what form could the group take and what functions could it deliver?

NIEL already coordinates a range of working groups and task forces that liaise directly with government on a range of policy issues. The sector plays a key role in helping to shape government policy priorities and this constructive relationship between the sector and government should continue. However, there is still a need for a formal structure with a statutory basis, such as CNCC to provide independent advice across a breadth of environmental issues. Rather than establishing a task and finish group that can be created and disbanded on an ad hoc basis, CNCC provides a constant sounding board for independent advice. This is particularly important given the Departmental restructuring and the need to

ensure that environmental issues are strongly represented across all divisions of the new Department. CNCC also plays a central role in advising on planning matters, and should do so in future. The NI countryside and landscape resource already suffers from under-protection compared to the rest of the UK. Replacing CNCC with informal stakeholder groups would be inadequate and further undermine the pursuit of strong and effective countryside protection.

16(c) What would be the advantages and disadvantages of moving to a less formal structure?

Stakeholder groupings and task and finish groups would enable more specialist expertise to be drawn upon depending on the topic. However, replacing CNCC with stakeholder groupings would be perceived as a tokenistic attempt to replace what should be an important structure for ensuring the interests of nature and countryside protection feature prominently on the government agenda. A better approach would be to enable CNCC to invite particular stakeholders to sit on CNCC sub-groups to input on specialist issues. It is important that CNCC should have a statutory basis, to provide long-term, consistent, and objective evidence based advice which commands the respect and authority of those being advised (departmental and ministerial) and of wider society.

17. Are the functions of CNCC deemed specialist?

Yes

No

Don't know

18. What, if any, additional functions do you think CNCC should do and/or what additional external expertise do you think CNCC needs? Please provide detail below.

Stakeholder engagement and communications

19. Do the functions of CNCC need to be, and be seen to be, delivered with absolute political impartiality?

Yes

No

Don't know

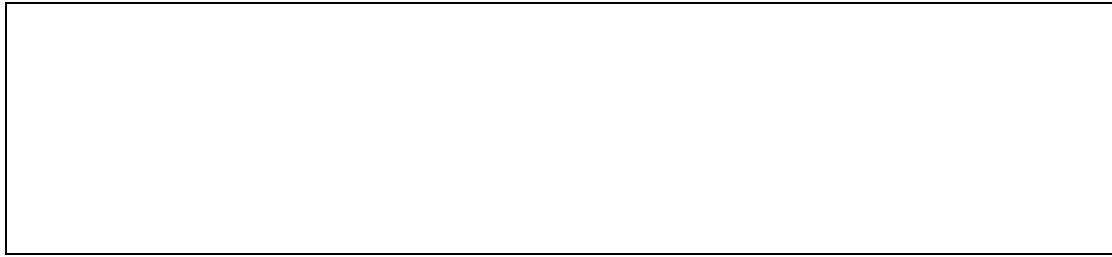
Give reason for your choice

Yes. Advice and decision making needs to be in the public interest and reflect the needs and priorities for the environment, not the interests of a political party or Minister.

CNCC should be apolitical and should be open to accepting information advice from other practitioners and stakeholders to inform their positions and advice to government/Ministers.

20. Please provide any further comments to support your view or that you would like to add to your response

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. To discuss any of our answers in more depth, please contact the NIEL office on 028 90 455770



Thank you for completing this survey.

The next steps are the Review Team will analyse the results and your input will be considered as part of the review. If you wish to give further information please contact either Benny Mathews or Peter McElhinney whose details are below.

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