

## NI Environmental Policy Update and Expected Timelines

Whilst DAERA have been prioritising EU Exit and Covid-19 pandemic issues, policy and legislative work has been progressing to varying degrees in a range of additional environmental areas. Below is a summary of NIEL's understanding of the current position in relation to these environmental issues.

Policy Area	Background	Update(s)	Delivery/ Timescale
<b>Climate Change</b>	As part of the deal to restore devolved government in NI, parties signed up to the New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) Document which contained the following commitment on Climate Change, that: <i>The Executive should bring forward a Climate Change Act to give environmental targets a strong legal underpinning.</i>	NI Assembly declared a 'climate emergency' in Feb 2020 and passed a further motion calling for a Climate Change Act in July. In October an "oven ready" climate change bill drafted by a group of legal experts, scientists, academics and environmentalists was presented to the Assembly through a Private Members' Bill.	On the 9 December the AERA Minister launched a consultation on the NI Executive's first ever CC Bill. The consultation will be open for comments for eight weeks closing Monday 1st February 2021. The consultation will inform and facilitate the development of a Climate Change Bill, with the aim of delivering its legislative passage within the term of the current Assembly mandate which ends in March 2022.
<b>UK Environment Bill</b>	Bill passage through Westminster delayed due to Covid. Important governance provisions in Bill extend to NI namely: environmental improvement plans; principles; & Governance i.e., proposed Office for Environmental Protection (OEP)	Delay in Bill means none of the Bill's provisions can be implemented by Jan 2021. Interim arrangements being planned. Proposed <i>NI Environment Strategy</i> (see below) will constitute NI Environmental Improvement plan; Proposed NI Environmental principles policy statement drafted; Proposals for NI OEP being developed as well as work on interim arrangements. Minister keen for NI to mirror DEFRA interim arrangements where appropriate.	Assumption that Royal Assent of the UK Bill will occur Spring 2021. Once UK Bill passed no NI provisions can be brought into operation without Assembly debate and approval. DAERA <a href="#">discussion document</a> launched 10 December seeking views on: 1) Environmental Improvement Plans; 2) A policy statement on the application of environmental principles; and 3) Arrangements for environmental oversight NI OEP.
<b>NI Environment Strategy</b>	Clauses within the UK Environment Bill (see above) requires preparation of an environmental improvement plan (EIP)	High level public discussion document released Nov 2019 and closed February 2020. Over 2,500 responses. Majority of	The EIP (Environment Strategy) must be laid before the NI Assembly no later than 12 months after the

	that sets out steps to be taken to significantly improve the natural environment. DAERA must monitor the implementation of the EIP, publish annual implementation reports & review the EIP every 5 years. The proposed NI Environment Strategy will be the NI EIP.	respondents believing it should be an Executive level Strategy, with support for independent EPA. Summary of responses (including NIEL submission) available on DAERA website. Drafting of Consultation document on new Environment Strategy underway.	commencement of these clauses. Anticipated that consultation on Environment Strategy will be launched by end March 2021.
<b>Independent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)</b>	Northern Ireland remains the only country of the UK that does not have a separate and independent statutory nature conservation body. The New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) agreement, stated that the Executive will: <i>Establish an Independent Environmental Protection Agency. A Subsequent motion calling on the AERA Minister: To begin immediately work to establish an independent environmental protection agency based on models of best practice, that will be appointed within 12 months</i> was also passed in the NI Assembly in February 2020.	To date, work has not commenced on establishing a NI EPA. Since the EU Referendum the departmental focus has been on facilitating the creation of a NI OEP (see above) as part of the UK Environment Bill. Due to their <u>distinct</u> but complimentary remit and responsibilities, eNGOs support the establishment and oversight from both the OEP and an independent EPA. It is important not to conflate the EPA and the OEP as they would fulfil very different roles with differing powers. Should decision be taken by NI Assembly to create a NI OEP it is likely to operate alongside the current NIEA who will continue to fulfil its current regulatory role.	Once work on a NI OEP is complete attention likely to shift to consideration of an Independent Environmental Protection Agency. No timeline available.
<b>New Agri-Environment Scheme</b>	As NI will no longer be part of the CAP from 2021, this presents the opportunity to design a bespoke agricultural (and agri-environmental policy) better suited to our particular needs and circumstances.	There was a consultation on a future agriculture policy framework in 2018 with environmental sustainability identified as one of the key outcomes required from the future policy. Consideration being given towards rewarding farmers for delivering environmental outcomes.	Final Policy Framework anticipated in the New Year. 2021 should see design and testing of new agri-environment schemes including pilot projects designed to achieve improved environmental outcomes.
<b>Plastics</b>	The New Decade, New Approach (NDNA) agreement, committed the Executive to	Action Plan recently approved to reduce plastics within the government estate. Cross-departmental plan to be fully	Ministerial announcement on 17 November on plan to introduce restrictions on 9 single use plastic

	creating a plan to eliminate plastic pollution.	implemented over next year with outright ban from October 2021. Department in process of developing an overarching programme for reducing plastic waste more generally including marine litter, introduction of deposit return scheme, review of Carrier Bag Levy, support for awareness raising & behavioural change.	items – consultation planned early 2021 with regulation planned for March 2022. Using powers with UK Environment Bill officials also looking at options to charge for certain single use plastic items.
<b>Circular Economy</b>	Incorporates a wide range of actions and activities as to how to use materials and resources more sustainably.	EU Circular Economy Package has been transposed into NI law and to become operational by end of December 2020. Package introduces major changes to deliver new recycling targets.	New recycling targets as part of Package include: 55%, 60%, & 65% by weight of municipal waste by 2025, 2030 and 2035 respectively; further reduction in waste going to landfill, introduction of deposit return schemes and extension of producer responsibility for packaging. UK-wide consultation on many of these requirements expected in Spring 2021.
<b>Clean Air Strategy</b>	Scientific research has proven the strong link between poor air quality and poor health. Air quality is not only linked to health but also the current transport and climate change agendas.	In response, on 23 November 2020 DAERA launched a public discussion document on the first NI Clean Air Strategy. The document outlines a range of important topics that impact on air quality such as Transport, Agricultural Emissions, Industrial Emissions and Local Air Quality Management.	The <a href="#">consultation</a> closes on 15 February 2021 and responses will guide the development of policy options which will be presented in the final Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland.
<b>Ammonia Strategy</b>	Ammonia is a powerful air pollutant. It is a big issue for NI with major implications for biodiversity, air and water quality and therefore human health. It is a significantly bigger issue in NI in comparison to other parts of the UK.	An Ammonia Action Plan has been drafted by officials and outlines a comprehensive approach to ammonia reduction, habitat protection and restoration, along with an economic analysis of the ammonia reduction	No definitive timeline specified as of yet for release of consultation but expected soon (late 2020/early 2021)

		measures. The draft plan will be subject to consultation.	
<b>NI Peatland Strategy</b>	Peatland covers a significant part of NI, most notably peatland with semi-natural vegetation which covers approximately 12% of the land area. Peatlands are among the most carbon-rich ecosystems and play a key role in mitigating climate change. Healthy peatlands store carbon, support biodiversity and reduce flood risk.	DAERA are currently developing a Peatland Strategy for Northern Ireland which will provide a framework for conserving our intact semi-natural peatlands and restoring degraded semi-natural peatlands.	The Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy is being taken forward under the auspices of the UK Peatland Strategy and it is envisaged that it will be subject to public consultation in early 2021.
<b>Biodiversity Strategy</b>	NIEL is very concerned about the general decline in Northern Ireland's biodiversity and the many negative impacts this has on our environment and people.	The current NI Biodiversity Strategy runs to the end of this year. While initial work has been done on drafting a new strategy, a completed draft will not be available until after the outcome of the Convention of Biological Diversity Conference of the Parties (COP15) planned next year. This is because the COP is likely to contain agreements/high level targets that will need to be reflected in the new biodiversity strategy.	DAERA plan to conduct a review of the existing Biodiversity Strategy to coincide with the new targets that will be agreed by the CBD in 2021. It is therefore likely, notwithstanding further delays to the COP 15 event due to the Covid-19 crisis that this review will be completed in late 2021.
<b>Green Growth Strategy</b>	In June 2020, the Minister outlined his concept for a <a href="#">Green Growth approach for Northern Ireland</a> which recommended economic renewal that recognises the importance of our environment and advocates a pathway to a sustainable future, as part of the recovery from Covid-19. It is to be an overarching Executive level Strategy led by DAERA. The overall aim of this programme of work is to help transform our society to net zero emissions by 2050, protect and enhance our environment and	As an Executive Strategy, it will require a shared vision and a collaborative inter-departmental approach. Planning is underway for an Inter-Ministerial Group to oversee the development of the Strategy and Delivery Framework under which sits a Strategic Oversight Group comprising of senior officials within the departments to drive forward the actions. Co-design will be central to the Strategy. Under the Strategy will be a Delivery Framework consisting of foundation programmes (e.g. Forests for	It is anticipated that a draft Green Growth Strategy and Delivery Framework can be ready for consultation early next year and launched by next spring. It is envisaged as a 30-year strategy.

	sustainably grow our economy. Targets will therefore include carbon reduction, water quality and biodiversity, green jobs, transport etc.	Our Future), Green Growth Agreements with external partners, local councils, businesses & organisations. A Green Growth Community will also be established.	
--	---	---	--