

Consultation on Draft Northern Ireland Marine Litter Strategy

Comments by

Northern Ireland Environment Link

13 December 2012

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the networking and forum body for non-statutory organisations concerned with the environment of Northern Ireland. Its 62 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 agreed by 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.

Prof Sue Christie, Chief Executive
Northern Ireland Environment Link
89 Loopland Drive
Belfast, BT6 9DW
P: 028 9045 5770
E: Sue@nienvironmentlink.org
W: www.nienvironmentlink.org

Northern Ireland Environment Link is a Company limited by guarantee No NI034988 and a Charity registered with Inland Revenue No XR19598

NIEL welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft NI Marine Litter Strategy, and we support the more detailed consultation comments of TIDY NI, and other NIEL members.

1. Are you content with our proposals for the Draft Strategy such as the structure, period and division into two strategic goals and four strands? If you wish to make alternative proposals please provide details of your supporting rationale.

NIEL welcomes the Draft Strategy, which recognises the pre-requisite need for a change in societal behaviour if we are to succeed in bringing about a meaningful reduction in marine litter. We also welcome the content of the action plan, which seeks to engage with a wide range of stakeholders. Properly resourced, this strategy details a very positive and proactive approach to tackling littering behaviour that has real potential to succeed, particularly if linked to a civic pride programme operating across Northern Ireland.

The importance of bringing about a behavioural change amongst wider society (not just beach-goers / coastal communities) should be stressed even more within the strategy – perhaps even becoming one of the strategic goals.

2. Are you content that the strategy is reported on to a body such as the Good Beach Summit where a significant number of stakeholders are represented? If not, please provide alternative suggestions and details of your supporting rationale.

NIEL agrees that the Good Beach Summit is a good forum in which to report back on the strategy. However, this cannot be relied upon as the sole method if we are to engage with all stakeholders. The Northern Ireland Environmental Quality Forum is one additional way all councils can be communicated with (via its main forum and the sub-groups covering education and enforcement). As indicated above, NIEL would stress that the success of the campaign hinges on behavioural change and, as such, this will require progress to be reported directly to the public as well.

3. Are the inventories of existing measures contained within the Draft Action Plans complete? Are there any measures we have overlooked? Please state.

There is currently a strong focus on the enforcement role of Councils, which NIEL supports. However, Councils also play a significant role in tackling anti-social behaviours (for example, littering, dog fouling) through campaigns, media, community support and education. NIEL would like to see a greater recognition of this kind of approach in the actions under different strands.

There is also scope to engage other organisations, widening ownership of the problem of marine litter.

4. Are you aware of any challenges that organisations and individuals might face in implementing the Draft Strategy and do you have any proposals on how these could be managed or overcome?

The Draft Strategy proposes enhanced proactive enforcement activity at beaches and suggests several ways this might be delivered including joint Council/PSNI litter patrols, the adoption of flexible working patterns to ensure enforcement is undertaken at appropriately busy times on the beach and for officers to work in pairs. These changes in work programming might have resource implications for Councils. In dealing with this, NIEL would suggest less frequent coverage but with maximum profile being given to such actions in the press including, where necessary, publicity for any prosecutions.

An occasional, costly, occurrence at beaches is the rapid arrival of large crowds of people who have organised beach parties, often using social media. A solution to this would involve the communication of increased passenger numbers on public transport (by, for example, Translink) to relevant authorities (PSNI and Council enforcement staff), ideally leading to the removal of alcohol prior to entering the beach, resulting in fewer incidents of anti-social behaviour and littering.