



Northern Ireland  
**environment  
link**



# 2019-20 Annual Report

Our vision is for a valued, resilient, healthy environment

028 9045 5770

| [www.nienvironmentlink.org](http://www.nienvironmentlink.org)

| @EnvironmentNI

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Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the forum and networking body for organisations interested in the environment of Northern Ireland. It assists members to develop views on issues affecting the environment and to influence policy and practice impacting on the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland. Our 60+ Full Members represent 190,000 individuals, attract 1.5m visitors per annum and have an annual turnover of over £65 million in Northern Ireland. NIEL also has 40+ Associate Members composed of statutory organisations, companies and individuals with an interest in the environment. Northern Ireland Environment Link's Vision is for 'a valued, resilient, healthy environment'.

<b>Chair</b>	Stephen Aston (Independent Member)	
<b>Vice Chair</b>	Joanne Sherwood (RSPB NI)	
<b>Treasurer</b>	Terry Waugh (Action Renewables)	
<b>Co Secretary</b>	Craig McGuicken (NIEL)	
<b>Trustees</b>	Anne Casement (Independent Member)	
	Patrick Casement (Independent Member)	
	Nichola Hughes (Sustainable Northern Ireland)	
	Ian Humphreys (Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful)	
	Jim Kitchen (Independent Member)	
	Dawn Miskelly (Ulster Wildlife)	
	Ian Nuttall (Independent Member)	
	Lizzy Pinkerton (Belfast Hills Partnership)	
	Diane Ruddock (National Trust)	
	Murray Watt (Supporting Communities NI)	
<b>Staff</b>	Craig McGuicken – Chief Executive Officer	
	Sean Kelly – Development Manager	
	Malachy Campbell – Senior Policy Officer	Joined October 2019
	Ruari Fairtlough – Finance Manager	
	Iona Meyer – Network, Events and Membership Coordinator	
	Connor McLean – Communications & IT Officer	
	Dr Jonathan Bell – Policy & Projects Manager	Resigned September 2019
	Dr David McBurney – NI Open Government Network Coordinator	Project concluded July 2019
	Jane McCullough – Climate NI Manager	
	Stephen Jones – Climate NI Project Officer	
	Amy Bell – Climate NI Programme Assistant	Joined July 2019
	Michelle Grimes – Climate NI Programme Assistant	Joined October 2019
Cassandra Moll – Climate NI Project Assistant	Resigned August 2019	
	Kerry Melville – Belfast Food Network Coordinator	

## A message from Patrick Casement



My term as Chairman of NIEL finished at the end of February 2020, and I wanted to record some of the highs and lows of my six years in the role, a period of considerable change and challenge.

The first big challenge was the funding crisis of 2015, when the Department of the Environment announced that it was greatly reducing or stopping its funding of eNGOs. We were fortunate to have a powerful ally in Anna Lo, the Chair of the Assembly Environment Committee, who immediately agreed to summon the Minister, Mark Durkan, before the Committee, and asked us to brief them prior to his appearance. NIEL members turned up in large numbers to the briefing, where we presented a powerful case for continued Departmental support, and then we all moved to the Senate Chamber for the Committee session. The Minister and his Permanent Secretary were clearly taken aback by the packed public gallery, and struggled as the Committee grilled them over their decision. Shortly after, a U-turn was announced and funding restored, but the sector had received a clear warning that we needed to diversify our sources of income. The sector had been aware of this, and NIEL had recently initiated its very successful Catalyst programme for members with a grant from Heritage Lottery. The Catalyst programme went on to train and support a wide range of organisations and individuals in the coming years.

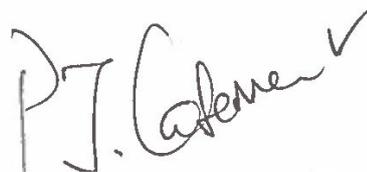
A year later came the Brexit referendum, and the decision to leave the EU. We rapidly assessed the threats (and some opportunities) this might pose to the environment, and organised a lobbying campaign to bring these to the attention of decision makers at all levels. This initiated a round of briefings which included the AERA Committee at Stormont, the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee, the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, the All-island Civic Forum, the NI and Ireland Offices of the EU, the EU's DG Environment, the EU's Brexit team and a range of MEPs from the UK and beyond. I was then asked to give evidence to the Environment Committee of the European Parliament. Meanwhile we had managed to obtain a seat at DAERA's Brexit Committee looking at the implications for agriculture, fisheries and the environment, which subsequently split into four committees, Trade and Agriculture, Environment, Marine and Fisheries, and Rural Communities. NIEL was the only body represented on all of these, ensuring a strong voice for the environment across the board. It had become clear that an internal co-ordinating group was needed to take all this work forward, and so we set up Nature Matters NI specifically to address the issues arising from the UK's departure from the EU. It continues to operate, having successfully raised the profile of nature conservation in the Brexit discussions and planning for the future.

Both of these major challenges have stretched the sector's capacity considerably, but have also had the effect of drawing us closer together into a cohesive and united voice. This has been further strengthened by our development of closer links to our sister organisations in GB, with regular meetings of Chairs and Chief Executives as well as a series of successful conferences. In addition, I have been particularly pleased by the development of a close relationship with the Irish Environmental Network over the last few years.

As well as forging stronger links within our own sector NIEL has actively sought a closer relationship with other groupings over the last few years. These include agriculture, through the UFU and more recently, the Nature Friendly Farming Network, the wider community voluntary sector through NICVA, and the academic and research sectors through universities and AFBI. We have established a great deal of common ground with each of these to our mutual benefit. One disappointment is that after considerable effort we have failed to establish a really strong relationship with the health sector in spite of the now well-documented links between health and the natural environment.

NIEL has continued to support its members more directly, through its work on policy and consultation responses, its frequent and relevant member updates, conferences, and the management and support of a range of taskforces covering a range of topics. We have also managed and supported the very successful Climate NI programme and the Belfast Food Network. We also provided the secretariat to the Open Government NI, which has now acquired a life of its own.

Through these and many other initiatives and activities I believe that NIEL is in a stronger and more effective position than ever, genuinely reflecting and representing the agendas and concerns of the whole of the environmental sector. I am proud to have played a small part in this, superbly supported by the wonderful staff, the excellent Board and the wider membership of the organisation. It has been a pleasure and a privilege to have been involved with such a dedicated group of people working together with a powerful sense of common purpose and co-operation for a better environment.



Patrick Casement

## A View from NIEL



I am delighted to be the new Chair of NIEL and it is a real privilege to have the secure foundation shaped by Patrick Casement's leadership over the last six years. His strength of character, knowledge and authority have brought a new level of recognition for the NIEL membership. Patrick provided a clear and calm voice that positively influenced change and reinforced confidence in the ability and quality of NIEL's exceptional staff and Board members.

The tide of 'change and challenge' he faced continues amid a new awakening forged by the dramatic events and critical climate and biodiversity facts of 2020. There is a new reality, a new public recognition and a new turning point that requires us to work even more closely with business, with government and with communities.

We have been reminded to think again - and to act now, act together and to invest in a new future. The environment is often seen as a barrier to economic development. It is the opposite. It is a bridge to a better future and the next step towards progress. Progress that enables nature to recover and for us to harness its power to help resolve climate change through planting and renewable energy, and use its considerable capacity to improve our health and well being.

Northern Ireland has a remarkable wealth of natural capital. However, if we want lasting prosperity and a better environment we need to work towards a visible reversal of biodiversity loss, the restoration of the abundance of nature and develop a new relationship with nature's landscape - by building our natural heritage and benefitting from it. We have re-discovered what the environment can do for us. Now we all have to ask what we can do for our environment, and every member, every business and every family has a part to play.



Stephen Aston  
Chair, Northern Ireland Environment Link

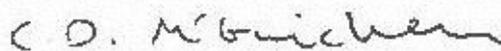


Writing an Annual Report in the Autumn, referring to events that happened a year earlier, is always challenging - but particularly so this year. Things have changed so much since the onset of the coronavirus that the period under review, 2019-20, really does seem like a foreign country.

In my Foreword last year, I noted that as a sector we needed to improve our 'Resilience'. How much more important is that now in the light of everything that we have experienced over the past year? I hope that Members feel that NIEL is doing our best to support them. In 2018-19 we developed a new Strategic Plan, which has a greater focus on our Members and on improving capacity within the sector. With the support of DAERA we have been able to provide access to a Funding Database for all NIEL members, and we hope that this proves valuable in the coming months.

NIEL, like all voluntary organisations, relies upon a committed and talented group of Board Members, and I just wanted to note my particular thanks to two Board Members who are stepping down at this year's AGM. Terry Waugh and Patrick Casement, as Treasurer and Chair respectively, have provided excellent leadership to the organisation and they will both be missed.

At the same time, I'm pleased to welcome Stephen Aston as the new Chair of NIEL. There are lots of challenges ahead, but also some opportunities, and the NIEL Board will have an important role in navigating the way for the whole sector.



Craig McGuicken  
Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Environment Link

This annual report details the activities and initiatives delivered by NIEL in accordance with the organisation’s purposes for the public benefit.

- ◆ Advance and promote for the public benefit environmental conservation, protection, improvement and sustainability in NI.
- ◆ Raise awareness of environmental issues by providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and promoting a collective voice on environmental matters.
- ◆ Advance the education of all sections of the public in environmental and ecological sciences.

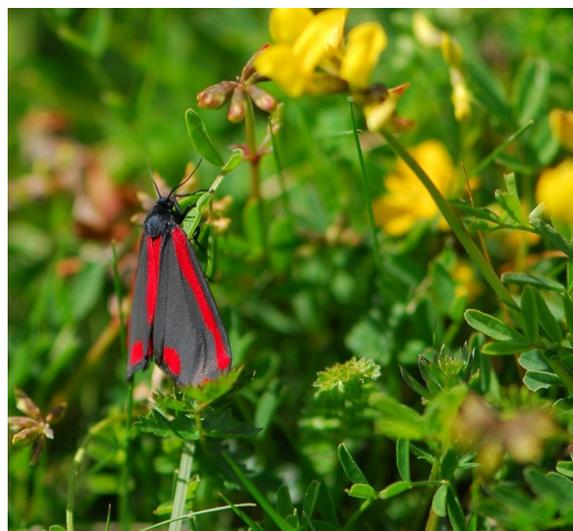
The Board of Directors have had due regard to Charity Commission guidance in the preparation of this report.

### Strategic Aim 1: Environmental Policy & Advocacy

*Advance the conservation, management and access of the environment through development of relevant policy and advocacy*

#### Brexit

In response to the outcome of the EU Referendum, NIEL established the NIEL Brexit Coalition involving a wide range of organisations and individuals dedicated to securing the best future for our environment post Brexit. Throughout the year we continued to undertake several Brexit related environmental campaigns and activities through “Nature Matters NI” our public facing campaign designed to raise awareness of Brexit and its implications for Agriculture & Land-Use, Nature & Environmental Protection, Fisheries & Marine and Cross Border Environmental Protection. Key outputs included publication in April 2019 of our report ‘Brexit, the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, and the Environment: Issues arising and possible solutions’ and production of a range of briefing papers for decision makers on the need for bespoke NI Environment and Agricultural Bills and No Deal Scenario Planning.





### **DAERA Stakeholder Engagement Group**

NIEL continue to be represented on four DAERA Brexit Stakeholder groups namely Trade & Agriculture, Environment, Fisheries & Marine, and Rural Society. A key part of our on-going participation in these groups has been to provide a co-ordinated and coherent voice for the sector on a wide range of environmental issues which have emerged as a result of the UK's decision to leave the EU.

### **Vision 2020**

The Vision 2020 annual report card was published in August 2019, setting out progress in NI towards the delivery of a range of statutory environmental targets. The latest report card is available [online](#).

### **Northern Ireland Environment Week 2019 (NIEW)**

As part of NI Environment Week, in November 2019, NIEL collaborated with a range of external organisations to deliver a number of outreach events to garner support for the creation of the first ever Environment Strategy for NI. A key output from these events with youth, rural and civic society organisations was the design of a cross-sectoral 'common platform' document setting out a series of environmental 'asks' which a broad cross section of wider society could actively support. These asks have been integrated into our work around green recovery.

### **Ammonia Impacts Workshop**

With the issue of Ammonia emissions and Nitrogen deposition and their impact upon our environment rising up the agenda, NIEL held a site visit and workshop in April 2019 featuring presentations from DAERA, NIEA, the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and Plantlife UK. A Proceedings and Recommendations Report was produced listing the actions and measures delegates felt needed to be enacted to tackle the issue of ammonia deposition.

## Environmental Policy Consultations

NIEL responded to a range of policy consultations including: Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme for NI, the Environment Strategy for NI Discussion Document and the Waste Management Plan for Northern Ireland.

A comprehensive list of policy consultation responses is available on the NIEL website.

Consultation	Organisation	Deadline
Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme in England, Wales and Northern Ireland	DEFRA & DAERA	12th May 2019
Reforming the UK Packaging and Producer Responsibility System	DEFRA & DAERA	12th May 2019
Review of the UK Aggregates Levy	HMRC	5th July 2019
Petroleum Licence Application PLA2/16 and PLA1/16	Dept for the Economy	5th July 2019
Our Green and Pleasant Land Pre-consultation Paper	DUP	6th September 2019
Belfast Open Spaces Strategy	Belfast City Council	6th September 2019
Belfast Green & Blue Infrastructure Plan	Belfast City Council	6th September 2019
Scoping a New Forestry Plan for East Fermanagh and East Tyrone Forests and Woodland	Forest Service	4th October 2019
Scoping a New Forestry Plan for West Tyrone Forests and Woodland	Forest Service	4th October 2019
DAERA Science Strategy Framework Consultation	DAERA	22nd October 2019
Management measures for widely spread Invasive Alien Species (IAS) in Northern Ireland	DAERA	23rd October 2019
ELUK Statement on the UK's Second Progress Report on Decision VI/8k concerning compliance with the Aarhus Convention	UNECE	29th October 2019
NI Water Draft Strategy 2021-2046	NI Water	6th November 2019
Waste Management Plan for Northern Ireland	DAERA	11th December 2019
Draft Social and Environmental Guidance for Water and Sewerage Services (2021-27)	Dept for Infrastructure	20th December 2019
Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland Discussion Document	DAERA	23rd December 2019
Dormant Accounts Fund - Northern Ireland	The National Lottery	30th December 2019



## Strategic Aim 2: Partnership & Collaboration

*Advance collaboration within and beyond the Environmental NGO sector*

### Task Forces & Working Groups

We would encourage members to engage with Task Forces/Working Groups that are relevant to their own work areas – if you are interested in participating in any of the below, please contact Sean Kelly - [sean@nienvironmentlink.org](mailto:sean@nienvironmentlink.org)

#### *Economics of Nature Working Group*

The Economics of Nature Working Group (EoN) is a cross-sectoral coalition which aims to raise awareness and understanding of the Natural Capital concept, and assess the potential of this approach to inform policy and decision-making in Northern Ireland.

The Economics of Nature Working Group met in April and July 2019.

#### *Environment Plan Working Group*

In 2018, the UK government published, 'A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment', setting out what it will do to improve the environment within a generation. In response, NIEL established an informal group to help develop ideas for a similar plan in NI. The group created 'Sectoral Priorities for Improving the Environment' and informed the NIEL response to the DAERA Environment Strategy discussion document. These priorities formed the basis for much of our advocacy during the year and throughout 2020-21.



### *Planning and Land Matters Task Force*

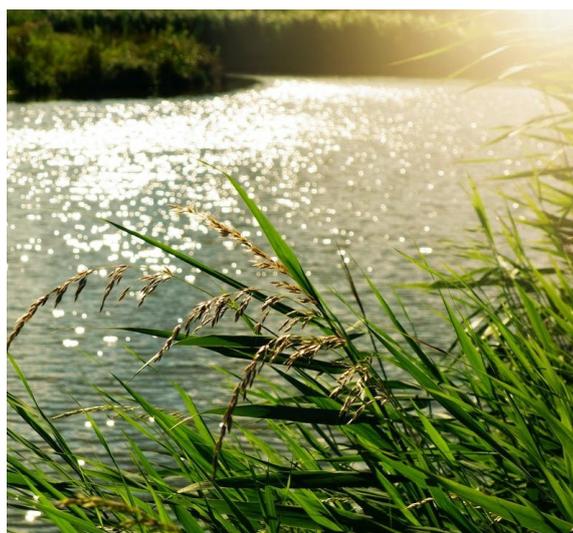
The NI Planning & Land Matters Task Force (PLMTF) is a coalition of sectoral organisations seeking to influence and inform appropriate management, planning and protection of Northern Ireland's limited land and landscape resource. The PLMTF provided input to consultations such as the Belfast Open Spaces Strategy and the Belfast Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan.

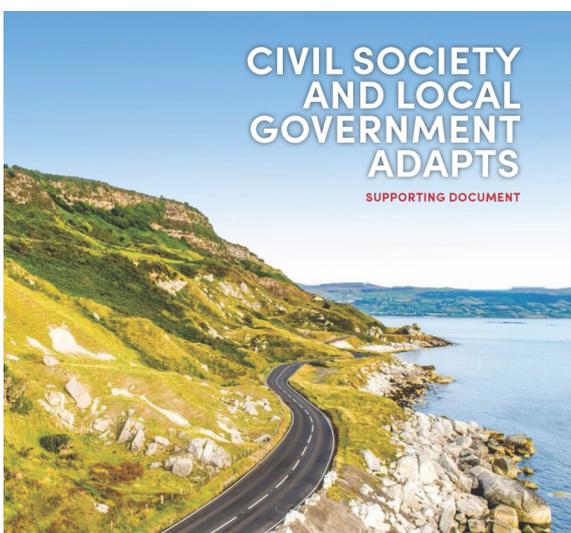
### *Freshwater Task Force*

The Northern Ireland Freshwater Taskforce (FWTF) represents a range of organisations working together to ensure that Northern Ireland preserves and improves freshwater ecosystems. Select activities throughout the year included meetings with the Water Framework Directive SPAR group (May 2019) to discuss a range of issues affecting water quality and responded to numerous Departmental consultations such as River Basin Management Plans - timeline and processes; NI Water Draft Strategy 2021-2046; and Draft Social and Environmental Guidance for Water and Sewerage Services (2021-27).

### *Resource Efficiency Working Group*

The Resource Efficiency Working Group provided input to several policy consultations throughout the year, including the Waste Management Plan for Northern Ireland, the consultation on Reforming the UK Packaging and Producer Responsibility System, the consultation on Introducing a Deposit Return Scheme and others.





### Climate Coalition NI

In December 2019, NIEL started to explore the possibility of re-establishing a working group on climate change. (The previous coalition, Stop Climate Chaos NI, had been inactive for a number of years). After some initial informal discussions, a preliminary meeting with NIEL Members was organised in December 2019. It was subsequently agreed that NIEL should re-establish a climate change focussed coalition. Another informal meeting was held in February and a Terms of Reference was drafted for the coalition, with an overarching aim of advocating for legislation for a Northern Ireland Climate Change Act to be introduced before the end of 2021.

### Climate Northern Ireland

Over the past year Climate Northern Ireland (CNI) delivered a broad programme of work funded by DAERA. This work progressed valuable steps in NI climate change adaptation, built on existing partnerships, and developed exciting new collaborations. Some of the key elements included:

The Climate NI Steering Group steering group consists of 26 organisations from across academia, the private sector, the community and voluntary sector, local and central government. In May, Richard Kirk stood down as Chair and Ciarán Fox, Director of Royal Society of Ulster Architects took over the role.

Second Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP2) 2019-2024 - DAERA commissioned Climate NI to develop a chapter on how civil society and local government will contribute to addressing the climate change risks identified for NI. During this year Climate NI gathered a huge amount of information which resulted in the publication of an additional document - Civil Society and Local Government Adapts Supporting Document. The NICCAP and Supporting Document were published in September 2019.

Climate NI staff attended the European Climate Change Adaptation (ECCA) Conference in Portugal at the end of May. Climate NI led a session on 'Connecting the Dots: challenges and opportunities of place-based adaptation from a regional perspective in the UK and Ireland' with Climate Ireland, Adaptation Scotland and the Environment Agency. Climate NI also gave a presentation on the engagement of non-government stakeholders in adaptation policy.

In May, Climate NI hosted an event with the Met Office to showcase the updated UKCP18 climate projections for NI.

DAERA and the Committee on Climate Change held a stakeholder engagement event for the Third Climate Change Risk Assessment in December. Climate NI invited non-governmental stakeholders to this event and delivered a presentation.

The CLIMATE Project (funded by NPA Interreg VB) is working to review good practice for local authority adaptation planning and will create and pilot a toolkit to guide and support local authorities through the process. NIEL is working with lead partner, Derry City and Strabane District Council, and alongside other European partners to support DCSDC through the development of the first local authority climate change adaptation plan in NI. At the final conference in Iceland, Climate NI presented on the Adaptation Planning Model: Dissemination and Legacy.

As part of the CLIMATE project, Climate NI are developing a tool to support local authorities across NI with their own climate change adaptation plans. At the end of the year, the Local Government Climate Action Network was established to share learning from the CLIMATE project and provide training to representatives from all councils in NI. CNI also delivered the final reporting and evaluation of the CLIMATE Project.





### **Strategic Aim 3: Membership and Capacity**

*Increase the capacity and sustainability of the environmental NGO sector in NI*

#### **Education for Sustainable Development**

The Education for Sustainable Development Forum (ESDF) is a networking organisation that promotes a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of environmental education in NI. ESDF published 10 e-bulletins during the year, providing a range of information and updates for its members. During the year the ESD Resource Guide was also updated. Towards the end of the year we received funding from DAERA to begin a review of environmental education with a view to developing a strategy in 2020-21.

#### **The Joint Forum**

NIEL represent the Environment Sector on the Joint Forum, which is made up of representatives from Government and the VCSE sector. The Forum provides a mechanism to facilitate open discussion of key issues which shape the relationship between the voluntary and public sectors; it also seeks to examine and influence the impact of public policy and support opportunities for greater co-operation and joined up activity. Full meetings of the Forum were held in June and October 2019 and March 2020. During the year progress was made on a number of issues with particular focus on 'Addressing Bureaucracy' and 'Funding, Commissioning & Procurement processes' which will be taken forward into 2020-21.

#### **Way Forward for Archaeology in Northern Ireland**

The Department for Communities (DfC) has brought together a wide range of stakeholders to look at the long term strategic development of the archaeology sector in NI.

As part of this process, NIEL was appointed as secretariat, assisting a range of working groups looking at issues including Research, Policy, Skills and Communications.

The first draft of the Archaeology Strategy was completed in June 2019, and shared with a wide range of stakeholders at an event on the 1st July in East Belfast Network Centre. The document was well received, and a wide range of feedback provided. Over the following months the Strategy was further developed, with Steering Group meetings in August, October, November and January. Further consultation was undertaken with stakeholders, with 2 further iterations distributed and feedback received. The new strategy for Archaeology will be published in 2020-21.

### Grassroots Challenge

From its creation in 2016, NIEL has been proud to be a delivery partner for the Grassroots Challenge Project. The project gives young people the opportunity to gain essential skills, knowledge and training to take action for wildlife in their neighbourhood, whilst also improving their confidence, employability and wellbeing. The project has seen thousands of young people get active for wildlife and the environment through Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster, Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Special Schools across Northern Ireland. We were pleased to deliver Grassroots Democracy Day events in Parliament Buildings Stormont in May and June 2019 and supported the Celebratory Event held in November 2019. We have also included some of the learning from the project in our advocacy for a Green Recovery.





#### **NIEL Funding 4 the Environment**

As part of our commitment to help improve the sustainability and resilience of the Environment sector, NIEL, with the financial support of NIEA, purchased a new online funding database at the end of the year. The database has a very wide range of funding opportunities and is updated on a weekly basis. It is available free of charge to all NIEL members and we hope that organisations are able to maximise the benefits from it.

#### **Environment Links UK (ELUK)**

During 2019-20 ELUK continued to develop our joint working, with a continued significant focus on Brexit issues. For more on this please see Strategic Aim 1.



ELUK also responded jointly on the UK Marine Strategy and on the Aarhus Convention. Online meetings were held throughout the year, and a Meeting of Chairs and Directors was held in Birmingham in October. As always the discussion was wide ranging, from Brexit to financial resilience to plans for the next ELUK Conference which is being planned for Belfast in 2021. The meeting was also an opportunity to meet the new Directors of WCL and SEL - Richard Benwell and Deborah Long.

## Full Members

Action Renewables  
Balinderry Rivers Trust  
Belfast Charitable Society  
Belfast Civic Trust  
Belfast Healthy Cities  
Belfast Hills Partnership  
British Trust for Ornithology  
Broughshane Improvement Committee  
Buglife  
Business in the Community  
Butterfly Conservation  
Carntogher Community Association  
Carrickfergus Community Cultivators  
Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust  
Cavehill Conservation Campaign  
Chartered Institute for Archaeologists  
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health  
Colin Glen Trust  
Community Places  
Copeland Bird Observatory  
Council for British Archaeology  
County Armagh Wildlife Society  
Creggan Country Park  
EcoSeeds  
Enriched Earth Ecovillage  
Field Studies Council  
Glens Red Squirrel Group  
Grass Roots Conservation Group  
Holywell Trust  
Institute of Public Health in Ireland  
Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful  
Lagan Valley Regional Park  
Landscape Institute Northern Ireland  
Lecale Conservation  
Lough Erne Heritage  
Lough Neagh Partnership  
Mountaineering Ireland  
Mourne Heritage Trust  
National Trust  
Natural Copeland  
Northern Ireland Badger Group  
Northern Ireland Forest School Association  
Organic Centre  
Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland  
Ringhaddy Area Residents  
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds  
Rural Community Network  
Social Farms & Gardens  
Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership  
Supporting Communities NI  
Sustainable Northern Ireland  
Sustrans  
The Conservation Volunteers  
The Woodland Trust  
True Harvest Seeds  
Ulster Angling Federation  
Ulster Archaeological Society  
Ulster Federation of Rambling Clubs  
Ulster Wildlife  
Waste and Resources Action Programme  
Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust



### **Associate Members (Organisations)**

Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council  
 Association of Professional Game Angling Instructors  
 Delamont Country Park  
 EcoTourism Ireland  
 Education Authority - Belfast Region  
 Education Authority - South Eastern Region  
 Education Authority - Southern Region  
 Envirocentre  
 Glenhordial Permaculture Farm  
 Made In Trebania  
 Mid and East Antrim Borough Council  
 RES UK and Ireland  
 The Hermitage Cottage  
 The Northern Ireland Housing Executive

### **Associate Members (Individuals)**

Anderson, Zoe	Robinson, Lorraine
Casement, Anne	Saunders, Jim
Casement, Patrick	Sims, Gary
Christie, Peter	Stelfox, Dawson
Christie, Sue	Stephens, Jude
Curry, Robin	Williams, Brian
Foster, Bill	Workman, Sacha
Green, Frances	
Hernan, Robert Emmet	
Heron, Alastair	
Hood, Isabel	
Jack, Brian	
Knott, David	
McAdam, Jim	
McCabe, Stephen	
Moorhead, Heather	
Nelson, Roy	
O'Neill, Leah	
O'Sullivan, Philip	
Orford, Julian	

## Strategic Aim 4: Communications

*Communicate effectively with our members, partners, stakeholders and other target audiences*

### *NIEL website*

Analytics continue to record considerable interest in the website, with 23,500 visits recorded in the April 2019 - March 2020 period (an increase of 47% on the previous year). 147,100 webpages were viewed throughout April 2018 - March 2019 (an increase of 28% on the previous year).

### *NIEL e-Bulletin*

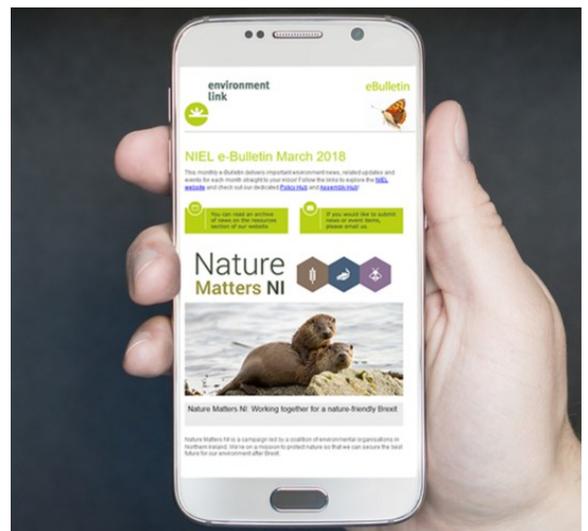
The e-Bulletin maintains a very high open rate of 42.6%. NIEL issues e-Bulletins on a monthly basis and publishes special issues on a range of topics and projects.

### *Social Media*

NIEL social media analytics for the 2019/2020 period showed a moderate increase in following, with the Facebook page growing from 1,200 followers to 1,360 followers (13% increase) and Twitter followers growing from 1,720 to 1,950 (13% increase). NIEL's LinkedIn company profile has seen moderate growth, reaching 335 followers (39% increase) this year.

### *Environmental News, Research and Analysis*

In recognition of the key role that the European and other international institutions play in the development of environmental policy at the local level, NIEL continued to produce a monthly environmental news-sheet entitled Environmental News, Research and Analysis (ENRA) which provides the latest international research information and policy analysis relevant to Northern Ireland.





### Linking with the Historic Environment

Most of NIEL's work is around the 'Natural Environment', but given the breadth of the environment sector and of the NIEL membership, we have endeavoured to maintain as strong a relationship as possible with the Historic Environment Division.

Together with some member organisations, NIEL has been an important participant in the creation of a Historic Environment stakeholder group. Together we have been working to show how fundamental heritage is to our society - how it supports our economy, strengthens our communities and is crucial in shaping our character.

A key aspect of this work is around advocacy. The NIEL CEO has Chaired the Marketing & Comms Group during 2019-20, and NIEL have managed the sectoral website 'NI Heritage Delivers'. Towards the end of the year the group members developed a funding proposal which we hope to take forward in 2020-21.



NIEL also led on the development of a series of Heritage Audits - for Bellaghy, Hillsborough, Lower Ards and Carrickfergus, which were completed and published in Spring 2020. The intention of the audits is to examine the heritage assets in the area, the organisations involved in the management and use of the assets, and the benefits being derived from them. The exercise has proven valuable in recommending further opportunities for realising economic and community value from heritage.



## Belfast Food Network

The Belfast Food Network (BFN) is a cross-sector partnership of public sector organisations, NGOs and businesses working together to foster the development of Belfast as a Sustainable Food City, and build a sustainable food movement across Northern Ireland. The Network seeks to promote sustainable food as a means of enabling positive social, economic and environmental benefits for Belfast and beyond.

BFN is part of the pioneering, and rapidly growing, Sustainable Food Cities network, which is an alliance of cities and towns, each of which is harnessing sustainable food as a vehicle for driving positive change. Belfast was one of the six founding cities of the UK-wide programme, now engaging forty-one cities, towns and districts. From obesity and diet-related ill-health to food poverty and waste, climate change and biodiversity loss, food is at the heart of some of our greatest social, economic and environmental problems, but it's also a vital part of the solutions.

Throughout the year we have delivered a range of projects with partners including the Now Project, Food NI, Nourish Scotland and RSPB. One particular area of focus was local government, and it is encouraging to see the level of interest in Sustainable Food in some of our local councils. This reflects a wider UK movement, where SFC is placing more emphasis on developing food partnerships in 'places' rather than just cities.

Towards the end of the year, the Covid crisis struck and this has had an enormous impact, and highlighted many of the problems with our food system. In 2020-21 our response to the pandemic will be our overwhelming focus.





## **Strategic Aim 5: NIEL - An Organisation Ready for the Future**

*To be an effective organisation with improved levels of resource and capacity*

### **NIEL Strategic Plan 2019-22**

A major part of our work in 2018-19 had been the development of a new Strategic Plan. The previous plan had served NIEL well, and had been focused on the 2 main areas of our work - Policy and Partnerships. We undertook a thorough review of the previous Strategy, and felt that many aspects were still apt. For example, we retained our Mission and Vision Statements. We also agreed that Policy and Partnerships should still be the focus of our work. However, we recognised that as a Membership organisation we want to have more attention on our Members and how we can support them. With this in mind we added 2 further strategic priorities - 'Building Membership Capacity' and 'Communications'. We are obviously experiencing many societal and political changes at present, and so the new Strategic Plan is only for 3 years until 2022.

### **Strategic Aim 1: Environmental Policy and Advocacy**

*Advance the conservation, management and access of the environment through development of relevant policy and advocacy*

1. To improve environmental policy in NI which delivers better environmental outcomes
2. To support better evidence-based knowledge/ understanding of environmental performance and policy within Government, eNGOs and other sectors
3. To secure the best possible future for our environment post-Brexit
4. Maximise opportunities to react to emerging policy developments

## **Strategic Aim 2: Partnership & Collaboration**

*Advance collaboration within and beyond the Environmental NGO sector*

1. To improve environmental outcomes through strengthened engagement between the eNGO sector and Government (central and local)
2. To develop a better informed and networked sector with enhanced access to eNGOs across the UK and internationally
3. To enhance environmental engagement beyond the traditional sector
4. Support NIEL's projects, forums and networks

## **Strategic Aim 3: Membership and Capacity**

*Increase the capacity and sustainability of the environmental NGO sector in NI*

1. To enhance the capacity of eNGOs to deliver environmental outcomes
2. To help develop an effective environmental education sector, which is better connected with clearer understanding of roles and opportunities
3. Consolidate and expand NIEL membership

## **Strategic Aim 4: Communications**

*Communicate effectively with our members, partners, stakeholders and other target audiences.*

1. To support a more connected and informed sector through provision of networking and learning opportunities
2. To increase public, political and cross-sectoral awareness of environmental issues





### **Strategic Aim 5: NIEL - An Organisation Ready for the Future**

*To be an effective organisation with improved levels of resource and capacity*

1. Support staff to fulfil their potential
2. Ensure effective Governance of the organisation
3. Develop the financial resilience of NIEL

#### **Staff Training**

- ◆ Mental Health Awareness Training (All Staff) - Apr 2019
- ◆ Meeting Facilitation Training (All Staff) - Aug 2019
- ◆ Cyber Resilience Training - Sept 2019
- ◆ Financial Procedures Training - Mar 2020
- ◆ Chief Executive Training - Mar 2020

#### **Staff Changes**

- ◆ David McBurney's post with the NI Open Government Network ended in July 2019.
- ◆ Cassandra Moll resigned as Climate NI Project Assistant in August 2019.
- ◆ Jonathan Bell resigned as Policy & Projects Manager in September 2019.
- ◆ Amy Bell joined as Climate NI Programme Assistant in July 2019.
- ◆ Michelle Grimes joined as Climate NI Programme Assistant in October 2019.
- ◆ Malachy Campbell joined as Senior Policy Officer in October 2019.

## Funding

NIEL, along with many other environmental NGOs started a new funding period with DAERA in 2019-20. As well as the core grant from DAERA, NIEL also accessed a range of in-year funding. Our other very significant funding came from Esmée Fairbairn, who have provided a 3-year grant for core expenses.

NIEL were also successful in our bid to the DAERA Environment Fund for some additional important and timely pieces of work, including research into farmer views on current and future agricultural policy, and research into stakeholder views on Ammonia and its impacts in Northern Ireland with proposals as to how to resolve this sensitive issue. Both pieces of work have fed into our programmes in 2020-21, and will be covered more thoroughly in next year's report.

We also accessed funding from: Department for Communities, Building Change Trust, National Lottery Community Fund, INTERREG VB Northern Periphery Area, and Community Foundation NI.

## Finances and Subscriptions

NIEL is a membership organisation and receives income from subscriptions. The organisation budget is prepared in December and finalised at the beginning of the following Financial Year. Accounts are prepared for each meeting of the Finance and Human Resources Committee, which meets four times per year, in advance of the Board. The financial report is included on all Board Agendas. The end of year accounts are reviewed at the FHR closest to the AGM, and also sent out in advance to all Board Members.





### **Board of Directors**

The Board of Directors met on the following dates:

- ◆ 27th June 2019;
- ◆ 19th September 2019;
- ◆ 5th December 2019 (also AGM); and
- ◆ 19th March 2020 (postponed due to covid)

The FHR Sub Committee met on the following dates:

- ◆ 5th June 2019;
- ◆ 3rd September 2019;
- ◆ 19th November 2019; and
- ◆ 5th March 2020

The SIM Sub Committee met on 16th December 2019.

### **Risk Register**

The Risk Register is a standing item on the FHR Agenda and reviewed quarterly by the NIEL Board of Directors to ensure that emerging risks that could potentially impact on the organisation are identified and mitigation measures are agreed.

## Events

NIEL hosted, co-hosted and participated in a broad range of events throughout the year. A full list is available on our website – [www.nienvironmentlink.org/events](http://www.nienvironmentlink.org/events)

Event	Location	Date
Ammonia Stakeholder Event	Seamus Heaney Centre, Bellaghy	4th Apr 2019
Environment Strategy Workshop	Belmont Tower, Belfast	8th Apr 2019
NI Open Government Network Strategy Day	NICVA, Belfast	10th Apr 2019
Delivering the UN Sustainable Development Goals: What Role for the NI Voluntary and Community Sector?	NICVA, Belfast	18th Apr 2019
Environment Strategy Workshop II	Belmont Tower, Belfast	7th May 2019
Belfast Food Network event at Stormont	Stormont Buildings	21st May 2019
UKCP18: Northern Ireland Climate Projections Explained	Belfast City Hall	22nd May 2019
Democracy Day at Stormont	Stormont Buildings	24th May 2019
European Climate Change Adaptation (ECCA) 2019	Lisbon, Portugal	28th - 31st May 2019
Open Government Partnership Global Summit	Ottawa, Canada	29th - 31st May 2019
CLIMATE Project Stakeholder Meeting & Site Visit	Sundsvall, Sweden	10th - 14th Jun 2019
Environment Strategy Consultation Launch Event	Belmont Tower, Belfast	11th Jun 2019
Democracy Day at Stormont II	Stormont Buildings	13th Jun 2019
Archaeology Strategy/Framework for Northern Ireland	East Belfast Network Centre	1st Jul 2019
Environment Links UK Chairs Meeting	Birmingham, England	15th - 16th Oct 2019
NICVA & NIEL Environment Strategy Workshop	NICVA, Belfast	8th Nov 2019
CLIMATE Project Stakeholder Meeting & Site Visit	Reykjavik, Iceland	20th - 25th Nov 2019
Grassroots Challenge Celebration Event	Stormont Buildings	22nd Nov 2019
NIEL Annual General Meeting	RSPB Window on Wildlife	5th Dec 2019
Resilient Belfast Launch Event	Portview Trade Centre, Belfast	6th Feb 2020
PEACE PLUS eNGO Information Event	NIEL, Belfast	11th Feb 2020

**Company Registration Number NI034988**  
**HMRC Charity Reference Number XR19598**  
**NI Charities Commission Reference Number NIC101074**

# **Northern Ireland Environment Link**

*A private company limited by guarantee without share capital - exempt from using "limited"*

## **Summary Financial Statement for the year ended 31st March 2020**

**Northern Ireland Environment Link**

**DIRECTORS' STATEMENT  
ON THE SUMMARY FINANCIAL STATEMENT**

The directors present herewith the summary financial statement of Northern Ireland Environment Link for the year ended 31st March 2020 and confirm the following:

- the summary financial statement is only a summary of information derived from the charity's annual accounts;
- the summary financial statement does not contain any additional information derived from the directors' report;
- the full annual accounts, the independent auditor's report and the trustees'/directors' report can be obtained on application to Northern Ireland Environment Link;
- the annual accounts were approved by the Board on 3rd December, 2020

This directors' statement was approved by the board of directors on 3rd December, 2020 and signed on its behalf by:

**Stephen Aston**

Chair - Board of Directors / Trustees

**INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' STATEMENT TO THE MEMBERS  
OF NORTHERN IRELAND ENVIRONMENT LINK**

We have examined the summary financial statement of Northern Ireland Environment Link.

**Respective responsibilities of directors and examiner**

The directors are responsible for preparing the summary financial statement in accordance with applicable law. Our responsibility is to report to you our opinion on the consistency of the summary financial statement with the full annual accounts and Directors' Report, and its compliance with the relevant requirements of Section 427 of the Companies Act 2006 and the regulations made thereunder. We also read the other information contained in the summary financial statement and consider the implications for our report if we become aware of any apparent misstatements or material inconsistencies with the summary financial statement.

**Basis of opinion**

My examination was carried out in accordance with the general Directions given by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland. An examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the charity and a comparison of the accounts presented with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts, and seeking explanations from you as trustees concerning any such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence that would be required in an audit and consequently no opinion is given as to whether the accounts present a 'true and fair view' and the report is limited to those matters set out in the statement below.

**Opinion**

In my opinion the summary financial statement is consistent with the full annual accounts and directors' report of Northern Ireland Environment Link for the year ended 31st March 2020 and complies with the applicable requirements of Section 427 of the Companies Act 2006, and the regulations made thereunder.

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**Nigel V Skillen FCA**  
**Diamond & Skillen**  
Chartered Accountants and Registered Auditor  
Sinclair House  
89/101 Royal Avenue  
Belfast  
BT1 1FE

3rd December, 2020

Northern Ireland Environment Link

Statement of Financial Activities  
for the year ended 31st March 2020

	General Funds <i>(unrestricted)</i> £	Restricted funds £	Totals 2020 £	Totals 2019 £
<b>Income</b>				
<i>from donations and legacies</i>				
• Donations	-	-	<b>0</b>	-
• Subscriptions	9,067	-	<b>9,067</b>	6,805
• Grants	311,000	34,808	<b>345,808</b>	298,719
<i>from charitable activities</i>				
• Event and project income	64,988	-	<b>64,988</b>	71,748
• Members servicing and accommodation	8,185	-	<b>8,185</b>	6,890
<i>from other activities</i>				
• Sundry income	39	-	<b>39</b>	-
• Other servicing and accommodation	87,348	-	<b>87,348</b>	81,589
<i>from investments</i>				
• Investment income	510	-	<b>510</b>	515
<b>Total income</b>	<b>481,137</b>	<b>34,808</b>	<b>515,945</b>	<b>466,266</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>				
<i>on raising funds</i>				
• Advertising / PR costs	-	-	<b>0</b>	2,738
<i>on charitable activities</i>				
• Employee costs and expenses	336,513	1,541	<b>338,054</b>	334,292
• Premises costs	26,226	591	<b>26,817</b>	23,908
• Travel & training costs	13,572	5,377	<b>18,949</b>	20,411
• Administration costs	14,814	635	<b>15,449</b>	15,178
• Programme / event costs	111,527	602	<b>112,129</b>	16,419
<i>on other items</i>				
• Legal and professional fees	3,191	-	<b>3,191</b>	43,643
• Other expenses	1,572	-	<b>1,572</b>	13,013
• Depreciation of assets	-	-	<b>0</b>	-
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>507,415</b>	<b>8,746</b>	<b>516,161</b>	<b>469,602</b>
<b>Net (deficit) / income for the year</b>	<b>(26,278)</b>	<b>26,062</b>	<b>(216)</b>	<b>(3,336)</b>
<i>Transfers</i>				
• Gross transfers between funds	-	-	<b>0</b>	-
<b>Net movement in funds for the year</b>	<b>(26,278)</b>	<b>26,062</b>	<b>(216)</b>	<b>(3,336)</b>
<i>Reconciliation of funds</i>				
• Fund balances b/fwd at 1st April	312,347	11,997	<b>324,344</b>	327,680
<b>Fund balances c/fwd at 31st March</b>	<b>286,069</b>	<b>38,059</b>	<b>324,128</b>	<b>324,344</b>

All of the above results are derived from continuing activities.  
All gains and losses in the year are included above.

Northern Ireland Environment Link

Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet)  
as at 31st March 2020

	2020 £	2019 £
<b>Non Current Assets</b>		
• Tangible assets	-	-
<b>Current Assets</b>		
• Receivables	220,937	140,551
• Cash and cash equivalents	142,480	192,963
	<b>363,417</b>	333,514
<b>Payables: amounts falling due within one year</b>	<b>(39,289)</b>	(9,170)
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>324,128</b>	324,344
<b>Accumulated funds</b>		
<i>Unrestricted income funds:</i>		
• General funds	286,069	312,347
• Other funds	-	-
	<b>286,069</b>	312,347
<i>Restricted income funds:</i>		
• HLF Catalyst Fund	13,296	13,296
• Open Government Network Pioneer Fund	24,016	24,016
• Interreg Fund	4,097	(25,325)
• TalX Fund	(3,360)	-
• Other projects	10	10
<b>Total funds</b>	<b>324,128</b>	324,344

The summary financial statement was approved by the Board of Directors on 3rd December, 2020 and signed on their behalf by:

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**Stephen Aston**  
Chairman of Directors

-----  
**Terry Waugh**  
Director, Hon Treasurer

Northern Ireland Environment Link is funded by



Northern Ireland  
**Environment**  
Agency



An Agency within the Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)



Department for  
**Communities**

[www.communities-ni.gov.uk](http://www.communities-ni.gov.uk)



LOTTERY FUNDED



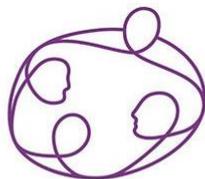
**BUILDING  
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TRUST**



**LOTTERY FUNDED**



**Esmée  
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NORTHERN IRELAND



**Northern Periphery and  
Arctic Programme**

2014–2020



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