

## Environmental Priorities for the NI Assembly 2024

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) is the networking and forum body for non-statutory organisations concerned with the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland. Its 69 Full Members represent 190,000 individuals and 262 subsidiary groups who have a combined annual turnover of £70 million and responsibility for over 314,000 acres of land.

During the suspension of the Assembly, important environmental strategies and policies were delayed and some legal obligations were not met. NIEL welcomes the return of the NI Assembly and recommends it considers our collective view on the first steps guide to action on the following priorities.

### Our priorities for a new Assembly include:

- Establishing an independent **Environmental Protection Agency** properly resourced and accountable to the Executive as a whole and not to an individual Minister.
- Establishing an independent **Climate Commissioner's Office**.
- **Publication of overdue strategies.** Most urgent are the Environment Strategy/EIP (legal requirement to publish by 25th July 2023) and Nutrient Action Programme (legal requirement to publish by 11th October 2023). Other overdue strategies include: a Biodiversity Strategy (previous Strategy ended in 2020); a Waste Management Strategy (previous strategy ended in 2020); a Programme for Government (previous PfG ended in 2021); a Marine Plan (last consulted on in 2018); a Sustainable Development Strategy; a Land Use Strategy and a Food Strategy.
- Introduction of a new **Agriculture Act**, which prioritises public money for public goods and expedites the rollout and funding for the Farming with Nature scheme.
- Developing a new long-term strategy to tackle the **freshwater pollution** that blighted Lough Neagh and other freshwater bodies in summer 2023.
- Delivery of a **Nature Restoration Act**, which will establish targets in law for nature's restoration.

NIEL believes there is considerable advantage in **co-designing** strategies and policies that affect the environment and economy to ensure better outcomes. NIEL remains committed to playing our part in assisting the Assembly to act to protect nature and climate and enable economic growth for present and future generations. As part of this, the Assembly needs to work with all forms and levels of government to help **inform, educate and inspire people to change** their behaviour to reduce our impact on the planet.

If you would like to discuss this document further, we would be happy to do so and would welcome the opportunity to address you, your party colleagues and relevant committees at the earliest possible convenience.

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