Northern Ireland Assembly News – February 2024

Assembly Business
None This Month

Executive Committee Business
Climate Change (No. 2) Bill: Royal Assent

The Speaker stated that: The Climate change (No. 2) Bill received Royal Assent on 6 June 2022 and became the Climate Change Act. It is Chapter 31.

Ministerial Statements
Economic Vision – The Minister for the Economy set out his approach to the economy. He stated that in order to use our limited resources and powers effectively, strategic focus is critical and set out four key objectives as part of a new economic mission: increase the proportion of working-age people in good jobs; promote regional balance; raise productivity; & reduce carbon emissions. To this end he has appointed a number of independent advisers including Professor David Rooney from the Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy on net zero.

Committee Business
None This Month

Private Members' Business
Planning System: Fundamental Appraisal - The Assembly debated and resolved a motion tabled by Deborah Erskine MLA that: *this Assembly acknowledges the importance of the planning process towards growing the Northern Ireland economy and creating places that people want to work, live and invest in; expresses alarm at lengthy delays in determining major applications as well as the often disjointed and ineffective approach to taking forward major projects that have been approved; highlights the need to support thriving rural communities by opposing policies that further constrain development in the countryside; believes the planning process must have the needs of our ageing population and those living with disabilities embedded as first principles; notes that planning and design processes must enable delivery of key Programme for Government outcomes as well as promote green solutions; and calls on the Minister for Infrastructure to commission an urgent and fundamental appraisal of the planning system, including a review of the Strategic Investment Board and its functions.*

Lough Neagh Rescue Plan – The Assembly debated and resolved a motion by Philip McGuigan MLA which incorporated an amendment proposed by John Blair MLA that: *This Assembly recognises the vital importance of Lough Neagh to our environment, ecology and drinking water supply; further recognises its importance to tourism, fishing and leisure activities in local communities surrounding the lough; notes with grave concern the ecological damage caused by the blue-green algae bloom last summer that choked the lough and spread throughout our waterways and beaches; calls for a cross-departmental body, to include relevant non-governmental organisations, to be set up to address the immediate issues facing Lough Neagh; and further calls on the Executive to put in place a new management structure and plan to include input from communities and organisations with an interest in the welfare of the lough, so that it can be managed, protected and promoted in the interest of all.*

All-island Rail Network

The Assembly debated a motion by Mark Durkan MLA that: *This Assembly recognises the transformative impact that expansion of an all-island rail network will have on communities across Ireland; welcomes the commitment to the all-island strategic rail review from the Executive and the Irish Government; acknowledges that the delivery of accessible, sustainable and modern rail infrastructure is a key driver of economic growth, enhances our tourism industry and will drive regionally balanced investment in left-behind communities; further acknowledges that investing in high-quality rail is critical to reaching net zero carbon emissions targets by 2050; calls on the Minister for Infrastructure to provide an immediate update on the phase 3 Derry to Coleraine feasibility study;*

and further calls on the Minister to work with the Irish Government to produce a costed implementation plan this year, to deliver rail options to every county in Ireland.

Adjournment Debate
None this Month

Answers to Written Questions

Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
[Operational protocol for assessing ammonia impacts from planning applications](#)
[Cost of implementing the Climate Change Act](#)
[Plans to address the ecological crisis in Lough Neagh](#)
[Timeframe to bring a Climate Action Plan to the Assembly](#)
[Consultation - new draft seabird conservation strategy](#)

Minister for Communities
[Update - fuel poverty strategy](#)

Minister for the Economy
[Update - Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland](#)
[Support for low-carbon air source heat pumps](#)

Minister of Health
[Impact of poor air quality on mortality](#)

Minister for Infrastructure
[All-Island Strategic Rail Review](#)
[Hightown Incinerator](#)
[Landfill site at Maghery Road, Armagh](#)
[North Belfast to South Belfast Glider route](#)

Oral Answers to Questions

Minister of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs
[Mobuoy Remediation Project](#)
[Independent Environmental Protection Agency](#)
[Ammonia Standing Advice](#)

Minister for the Economy
[Energy Strategy: Path to Net Zero Energy](#)
[Legislation to ban Onshore Petroleum Exploration and Production?](#)

Assembly Committee Meetings February 2024

COMMITTEE	DATE	AGENDA/ Highlights
AERA	22 February [Watch Again](#)	• Briefing from The Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs - First Day Brief - Overview of the Department and its Finances
	29 February [Watch Again](#)	• Briefing from DAERA - Food, Farming and Rural Affairs – Overview • NIA EU Affairs Manager - Introductory briefing
Economy	14 February [Watch Again](#)	• Among other business the committee received a briefing from departmental officials
	21 February [Watch Again](#)	• Briefing from NIA EU Affairs Manager and also received a briefing from the Department on the First Day Brief
Executive Office	14 February [Watch Again](#)	• The committee discussed the Programme for Government, draft strategic framework for Europe and

		the legislative programme for the Executive Office
Infrastructure	21 February Watch Again	• Among other business the committee received held an evidence session with Northern Ireland Water.