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NORTHERN IRELAND FRESHWATER TASK FORCE WELCOMES ACTION PLAN FOR LOUGH NEAGH

The Northern Ireland Freshwater Task Force (FWTF) has welcomed the announcement by AERA Minister Andrew Muir of his proposed Lough Neagh action plan designed to protect the lough and improve the water quality within it and the rivers that flow in to it. The FWTF understands that of the 37 actions in the plan, only those 20 actions which fall under the responsibility of DAERA were announced by Minister Muir. The remaining actions are cross cutting and so remain to be signed off by the NI Executive.

Urgent action was demanded last year when blue-green algae blooms clogged Lough Neagh and other lakes and rivers around Northern Ireland. These blooms were due to a combination of factors. Excess nutrient input from runoff and wastewater pollution were the main factors, along with higher water temperatures and the impact of invasive zebra mussels. There have been signs of blue-green algal blooms returning this year.

“The Northern Ireland Freshwater Task Force supports the steps outlined thus far. However, the success of this plan hinges on effective delivery, adequate resourcing and sustained investment from the NI Executive.” said Joanna Braniff, Chair of the FWTF.

“We commend the Minister for taking a proactive approach to progressing these 20 actions for which DAERA is responsible and which are based on the themes of education, investment, regulation and enforcement. The proposed initiatives will build on existing water and nature-friendly farming schemes. In March this year, our First Minister and Deputy First Minister visited Lough Neagh and said that protecting the lough was a collective priority of the Executive. We would like to see those words being backed up by appropriate action and we would urge the Executive to sign off the full action plan as soon as possible. As well as cross departmental co-ordination, DAERA must ensure there is ongoing co-operation with the environment sector to take this action plan forward to help ensure we have a clean, healthy, safe freshwater environment.”

Joanna concluded: “We urge all stakeholders to support these initiatives and help to co-design and deliver policies and regulations that protect our natural resources. We need to work together to find the right balance, to turn the tide for the health of Lough Neagh and the rest of our lakes and rivers, improve and protect our natural environment, and support a flourishing local economy or both will suffer.”

Editors Notes

As a working group of Northern Ireland Environment Link, the Freshwater Taskforce represents a coalition of organisations collaborating to improve and protect Northern Ireland's diverse freshwater ecosystems. FWTF Members include

- Friends of the Earth NI
- National Trust
- Northern Ireland Marine Task Force
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
- The Rivers Trust
- SWAN Ireland
- Surfers Against Sewage
- Ulster Angling Federation
- Ulster Wildlife
- Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust
- Woodland Trust Northern Ireland

For more information contact:

Malachy Campbell Senior Policy Officer Northern Ireland Environment Link
e: malachy@nienvironmentlink.org

Joanna Braniff, Chair, Freshwater Task Force (FWTF) Mob: 07399239813