

**ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS (ENRA)**

*NIEL's monthly roundup of the latest international research information  
and policy analysis relevant to Northern Ireland.*



**Agriculture**



**Air Quality**



**Biodiversity**



**Circular Economy**



**Climate Action**



**Economic Growth**



**Energy**



**Environmental Justice**



**Food**



**Freshwater**



**Marine**



**Planning**



**Sustainable  
Development**



**Transport**



**Woodland/Forestry**

## ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS (ENRA)



### Agriculture

#### [Climate-resilient agriculture may benefit farmers' incomes](#)

Climate-resilient agriculture can help maintain productivity and stabilise farm incomes—while safeguarding food security and the ecosystem in Europe. Strategic investment and stronger governance are needed to support farms' transition, shows an EEA briefing. European agricultural production is under great pressure from climate change, soil degradation and rising costs of external inputs, such as fertilisers, pesticides, irrigation, imported feed and energy. The EEA briefing "Building climate-resilient agriculture in Europe: an economic perspective", analyses 51 European farm-level case studies, showing that climate-resilient agriculture practices may support income stability for farmers, not only food security and the ecosystems.

#### [Regenerative Agriculture Sows Success in Kenya](#)

A grassroots regenerative agriculture initiative is helping Kenyan smallholders cut crop failure, reduce chemical reliance and dramatically improve yields. Kenyan smallholders are celebrating healthier soils and soaring harvests following a regenerative agriculture drive led by Farm Africa. The charity's STRAK project – Strengthening Regenerative Agriculture in Kenya – aims to boost rural livelihoods and improve climate resilience and has supported 60,000 farmers since 2017. The initiative upskills local farmers in regenerative techniques. They are then tasked with sharing their newfound knowledge within their communities.

#### [50 years of IEEP: Travelling the long road to greener European agricultural policies](#)

It was in the early 1980s that getting to grips with the far-reaching environmental footprint of agriculture and rural land use in Europe became a priority for IEEP. It made us pioneers in the crucial, but sometimes tortuous, journey towards greener agricultural policies, working especially at the EU level. Here, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), scrutinised and "reformed" every seven years, has been a central focus and concern.

#### [Complaint to the EU watchdog: eNGOs question EU Commission's handling of the CAP Reform](#)

18 March 2026, Brussels – The European Environmental Bureau (EEB) – Europe's largest network of environmental NGOs – has lodged a formal complaint with the European Ombudswoman regarding the European Commission's handling of the proposals for the National and Regional Partnership (NRP) and the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) for the period 2028 to 2034.

## ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS (ENRA)



### *Air Quality*

#### [Breathe Better: How Leading Cities Have Rapidly Cut Air Pollution](#)

Air pollution remains the largest environmental health risk worldwide, with cities often experiencing some of the worst impacts. But they are also uniquely positioned to drive rapid improvements in air quality. Breathe Cities' new research analyses air quality trends in 19 cities across 9 countries that reduced toxic air pollution by at least 20%, demonstrating that improvements in air quality are not only possible, but achievable at scale.



### *Biodiversity*

#### [Why medicinal plants matter on World Wildlife Day](#)

Medicinal plants and their varied uses span from ancient medicine to modern cosmetics and pharmaceuticals amid a surging demand for more. Ahead of World Wildlife Day, we're delving into why medicinal plants matter. Plants are critical for ecosystems to economies, said Danna J. Leaman, the outgoing co-chair of the Medicinal Plant Specialist Group of the Species Survival Commission at the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This year's focus on medicinal and aromatic plants, she added, reflects a growing recognition of the critical role plants play in both ecosystems and economies, said Ms. Leaman, who is also a conservation biologist and ethnobotanist.

#### [Businesses must take responsibility for biodiversity loss – for their sake as much as ours](#)

Scientists believe we're seeing the largest loss of life since the dinosaurs – and it's a risk to the global economy. Governments and companies need to work together on solutions. Another week, another warning about the seriousness of the biodiversity crisis. This time it was the financial sector's turn, as a major report, approved by more than 150 governments, said that many companies face collapse unless they better protect nature.



### *Circular Economy*

#### [EU housing vision falls short on affordability and sustainability once again, NGO warns](#)

As the European Parliament voted on its housing report, the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) warns that the EU solutions for housing are far from the bold leadership needed to address Europe's deepening housing, energy and climate crises. The Parliament's report contains some positive elements such as calling for renovation funds, as well as measures to monitor building use and

## ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS (ENRA)

incentives for the reduction of vacancies – acknowledging that we can build without taking up new lands. But ultimately, the text fails to deliver the paradigm shift that EU Commission’s housing advisory board has called for in November 2025. Instead, similar to the Commission’s Affordable Housing Plan, the report prioritises more and faster construction with a “Housing Simplification Package”, which risks weakening health and nature laws despite buildings being the EU sector with the largest environmental footprint.

### [The Circular Economy Act needs a cap on residual waste, not another disposal debate](#)

As negotiations on the Circular Economy Act approach, Brussels faces a familiar temptation: adjust recycling targets, fine-tune landfill restrictions, recalibrate reporting rules, and declare progress, writes Janek Vähk.



## Climate Action

### [European plants respond unevenly to climate warming](#)

Scientists from the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH) are among the contributors to a major international study showing how climate change is reshaping plant communities across Europe. This is the most comprehensive analysis to date for Europe that directly compares responses across different ecosystems.

### [Updated plan aims to boost NI's resilience to climate change](#)

An updated plan to boost Northern Ireland's resilience to climate change has been approved by the executive. The Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP3) contains 280 actions across nature, food, infrastructure, communities and business, from 2024-2029. Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Daera) Minister Andrew Muir said the plan was created through "positive collaboration" across all government departments.



## Economy

### [Archibald calls for urgent support for those hardest hit by rising energy prices](#)

Following discussions on rising energy prices with the British Government, Economy Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald said it was essential that any planned intervention was “meaningful, targeted, and delivered without delay.”

### [Electricity Consumption and Renewable Generation in Northern Ireland: Year Ending December 2025](#)

The ‘Electricity Consumption and Renewable Generation in Northern Ireland: Year ending December 2025’ report details the contribution of electricity generated from renewable sources. The report aids reporting on performance against the commitments in the Energy Strategy ‘Path to Net Zero

## ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS (ENRA)

Energy’ and the Climate Change Act target which is to “ensure that at least 80% of electricity consumption is from renewable sources by 2030.”



### *Energy*

#### [War-driven energy price spikes highlight value of renewables: UN climate chief](#)

The disruption of global energy supplies is being felt worldwide, the UN’s top climate change official warned on Monday, as conflict in the Middle East drives oil and gas prices sharply higher – echoing the market turmoil triggered by the war in Ukraine.

#### [Industrial Accelerator Act lacks binding safeguards to end fossil dependence, NGOs warn](#)

The European Commission unveiled its long-awaited Industrial Accelerator Act (IAA), a flagship proposal to fast-track Europe’s clean industrial transition. NGOs welcome the direction, but warn that Europe’s industrial shift away from fossil fuels will require greater clarity and firmer rules, and shouldn’t come at the expense of nature. The Act introduces industrial acceleration areas, and public procurement quotas, including a 25% requirement for low-carbon steel and aluminium, and 5% for concrete and mortar. While these measures aim to stimulate demand for cleaner manufacturing, they are not yet matched with robust definitions, binding decarbonisation timelines or firm constraints on polluting technologies.

#### [Industrial transformation key to cutting emissions and pollution further in Europe’s energy-intensive industries](#)

Emissions from energy-intensive industries in Europe have fallen sharply over the past two decades, but progress has stalled and the health-related costs of pollution remain high, according to a new European Environment Agency (EEA) briefing. Further reductions will require deeper industrial transformation, alongside full implementation of existing EU environmental legislation.



### *Environmental Justice*

#### [Over a billion fear losing land and homes within five years](#)

Despite global progress in strengthening land tenure and governance, more than a billion people worldwide – nearly one in four adults – fear they could lose the rights to some or all of their land and housing within the next five years. The finding comes in a UN-backed report that underscores the need for stronger political commitment and inclusive policies around land rights amid growing focus on climate change, biodiversity protection, gender equality and rural transformation. Over the past two decades, governments have adopted national and international frameworks on issues such as

## ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS (ENRA)

land policy in Africa and responsible regulation of land, fisheries and forests – resulting in more than 70 countries undertaking efforts towards land reform.

### [Putting gender equality at the heart of environmental action – on International Women’s Day and every day](#)

On International Women’s Day, the UN Environment Programme delivered a forceful call to put gender equality at the centre of global environmental action, warning that women, who are key stewards of resources like water, energy and biodiversity, still lack many of the fundamental rights held by men. Speaking at the event, the speaker underscored that gender cuts across every Sustainable Development Goal and argued that a sustainable future cannot be achieved while half the world’s population faces systemic barriers to land ownership, personal agency and legal justice.

### [Eight years in, the global Restoration Initiative is seeing communities move from scarcity to resilience](#)

For Elizabeth Inkiniwa, the elephants drawn to the restored forest and rangelands near her home in Northern Kenya are a mixed blessing. The animals are a star attraction for her community’s ecotourism business. But they are also a threat to her farm and even her life. Inkiniwa lives near the Mukogodo Forest, a green lung amid the semi-arid rangelands stretching north from the foothills of Mount Kenya toward the borders of Ethiopia and Somalia. The area’s rich wildlife and pastoralist communities are benefitting from The Restoration Initiative, a long-running effort to revive degraded landscapes across Africa and Asia.

### [Resistance is a river](#)

Corruption, illegal mining, and lack of action threaten Peru’s mountain communities as glaciers disappear.



## Food

### [Cocoa boom, water bust](#)

Cocoa-growing communities in Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa, forced to drink water from unsafe ditches and streams.

### [The Institute of Sustainable Food presents global nutrition research at the House of Commons](#)

Professor Bhavani Shankar and Professor Tony Ryan displayed research from the ISF at a House of Commons parliamentary event in March, joining other leading institutions to showcase the UK's global strength in nutrition research.

### [Can the UK feed itself in the face of ecosystem collapse? New security report gives stark warnings](#)

Can the UK feed itself in the face of ecosystem collapse? Our Head of Policy & Campaigns, Megan Perry, takes a closer look at the UK Government’s recently published security report – following a Freedom of Information Request by the Green Alliance – highlighting how the government’s ‘just in time’ approach to food supply jeopardises the UK’s food security, and the transformation in food and farming production that is needed to address this.

## ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS (ENRA)



### *Freshwater*

#### [NI Water could face stronger pollution fines under water quality reforms](#)

For almost 20 years, the firm that oversees Northern Ireland's water network has been protected from the level of pollution fines dealt out to other water companies in the rest of the UK – but that could be about to change. Northern Ireland Water has operated under special arrangements since its formation in 2007, due to an acknowledgement that the antiquated wastewater infrastructure has been underfunded. However, Environment Minister Andrew Muir has signalled new reforms that could see NI Water face punishment for issues in the waterways.



### *Marine*

#### [Ocean health in focus as nominations open for UNEP's 2026 Champions of the Earth Award](#)

The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) has opened nominations for the 2026 Champions of the Earth award – the UN's highest environmental honour – this year focusing on leaders at the forefront of caring for the ocean, an ecosystem essential to life on Earth that is increasingly under strain.

#### [Five ways often-unheralded seagrasses boost biodiversity](#)

Seagrasses are one of the most widespread marine ecosystems on Earth, covering around 300,000 square kilometres of seabed in 159 countries. Monochromatic seagrass meadows may not be as colourful as coral reefs or as mysterious as mangrove forests. But they are havens for fish, protect coasts from storms and are key stores of carbon, making them some of the world's most valuable natural spaces. Despite their importance, these ecosystems are in danger. A football field worth of seagrass disappears every 30 minutes and an estimated 7 per cent of meadows are being lost worldwide per year. Ocean acidification, coastal development and rising ocean temperatures due to climate change are the prime drivers of seagrass loss.



### *Planning*

#### [Social fairness key to success of the EU's new ETS2 cap and trade system](#)

The introduction of the EU's second 'cap and trade' emissions trading system (ETS2) for the road transport and buildings sectors will help spur Europe's decarbonisation ambitions, accelerating the shift to cleaner fuels and technologies. Providing early financial support to vulnerable households

## ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS (ENRA)

and businesses, policy coherency, strong public backing, transparency and clear communication will be key to its success, according to two European Environment Agency (EEA) briefings.

### [Kimmins: Voluntary contribution scheme will help address capacity concerns](#)

The introduction of a voluntary contributions scheme for wastewater infrastructure will help unlock more residential and commercial development opportunities, Infrastructure Minister Liz Kimmins has said.



## *Sustainable Development*

### [Developing innovative low-emission fertilisers](#)

The UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology is collaborating on new research to convert farm waste into high-performance, low-emission fertilisers, which will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and farmers' costs. The two new projects are supporting the transition towards sustainable nutrient solutions in UK agriculture and are among 15 innovative trials funded through the Farming Innovation Programme, delivered by Defra in partnership with Innovate UK.



## *Transport*

### [High gas prices are fuelling demand for electric vehicles as drivers seek to save money](#)

"Clean power and electrification combined is what provides the most security," says Ember analyst Euan Graham. Drivers of gas-powered vehicles are much more vulnerable to fluctuating prices that result from global conflict than those who charge their cars. Experts say prolonged high gas prices may drive some EV interest and sales, especially if drivers assume their electricity prices won't be affected by the crises.



## *Woodland/Forestry*

### [Divergence or Cooperation: Tackling Deforestation from an EU and UK Perspective](#)

The UK's proposed Forest Risk Commodity (FRC) regulation and the EU's Regulation on Deforestation-free Products (EUDR) are frameworks for tackling global deforestation. With the UK's regulation still under development, and the EUDR subject to repeated delays and simplification, the chance remains for alignment – or for divergence. This blog takes stock of the ongoing political developments on both sides of the channel, giving an outlook on the challenging times ahead.

## ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS, RESEARCH & ANALYSIS (ENRA)

### [In the wake of fire, how South Korea is climate-proofing its forests and communities](#)

Armed with clipboards and cameras, the scientists from the Baekdudaegan National Arboretum climbed slowly up a steep hillside in Uljin, a county in the mountainous east of the Republic of Korea, inspecting and assessing small green trees that stood out amid a landscape charred by fire.

### [Where livelihoods meet the canopy: Communities restoring forests through enterprise](#)

In the highlands of Xiengkhouang Province, in the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Alounxay Naphayvong lifts the lid of a beehive and smiles. For him, the low hum of the rising swarm is the sound of prosperity – it's the sound of communities working in harmony with the forest.

### [Linking Amazon deforestation to reduced rainfall](#)

There are many reasons to understand the implications of Amazon deforestation, including, for instance, its impact on biodiversity. However, in this recently published work, our emphasis is on how deforestation is feeding back to change rainfall levels. In particular, we were interested in the impact of Amazon land use change on rainfall levels in locations substantially downstream. Can deliberate changes to the rainforest alter rainfall levels over locations many hundreds of kilometres away, and could this affect the towns where this happens?