

Northern Ireland Assembly News – March 2026

Assembly Business

None this month

Executive Committee Business

[Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme \(Amendment\) \(Extension to Maritime Activities\) Order 2026](#)

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme (Amendment) (Extension to Maritime Activities) Order 2026 be approved.

[Renewables Obligation \(Amendment\) Order \(Northern Ireland\) 2026](#)

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2026 be approved.

Ministerial Statements

[British-Irish Council: Energy](#)

Dr Archibald gave a statement on the British-Irish Council (BIC) ministerial meeting in the energy work sector format. Ministers reviewed the progress on the 2022–2025 energy work plan, this covered decarbonisation, renewables, and new technologies. NI showcased key net-zero innovations, including the GeoEnergy geothermal project and hydrogen transport. Ministers discussed and agreed the themes of the next forward work plan, with NI leading on the public acceptance theme to support a fair and people-focused energy transition

[Waste Water Regulation and Enforcement](#)

Minister Muir gave a statement on the actions the Department for Agriculture, Environment, and Rural affairs are taking to strengthen regulation of and enforcement on wastewater pollution. Strengthening fines and penalties through the introduction of a fisheries and water environment bill was highlighted. A review of environmental offence sentences is also suggested, which will work in line with the DOJ planned sentencing review. Withdrawal of NI Water from SORPI was suggested as a means to end the licence to pollute.

Opposition Business

[All-island Economy](#)

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises that stronger North/South economic cooperation delivers practical benefits for workers, businesses and communities and makes economic sense irrespective of constitutional preference; regrets that effective cross-border economic cooperation has not been consistently prioritised by all Ministers; acknowledges that barriers to cross-border economic cooperation have had negative impacts across the island of Ireland; calls on all Executive Ministers to work with their ministerial counterparts on the island to prioritise enhanced cooperation on

strategic infrastructure, including rail, energy networks, digital connectivity, skills and labour market alignment, arts and creative industries and tackling academic underachievement; and further calls for the establishment of an all-island economic task force to drive delivery on agreed economic priorities.

Committee Business

None this month

Private Members' Business

[Cross-Border Education](#)

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the positive work between universities and Departments on the island of Ireland to facilitate closer equivalence in A-level and Leaving Certificate grades and the positive potential that this has for increasing student mobility; recognises that barriers to student mobility across the island remain and should be overcome; further notes the social, academic and economic impact of limiting student mobility; calls on the Irish Government to engage in dialogue with the Minister for the Economy and Minister of Education to align Central Applications Office (CAO) results and university admissions dates with the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) system to create a more streamlined university application process; and further calls on the Minister of Education to do more to ensure that A-level students are fully aware of the university course options that exist island-wide and that these are adequately promoted in our schools and students are supported in completing CAO forms.

[Independent Environmental Protection Agency](#)

Main Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly strongly condemns the blocking of the establishment of an independent environmental protection agency (IEPA) by the Democratic Unionist Party; further condemns the hypocrisy of those who express concern over the Lough Neagh crisis, the illegal dump at Mobuoy and wider environmental degradation but refuse to support plans to enhance environmental accountability and safeguards; notes that a commitment to an IEPA was contained in the New Decade, New Approach deal; agrees that it is undemocratic for an IEPA to be unilaterally vetoed by one party which represents a minority in the Assembly as a whole; and calls on the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to take meaningful steps to ensure that the commitment in 'New Decade, New Approach' is implemented.

[Areas with Natural Constraints \(Payments\) Bill: Second Stage](#)

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Second Stage of the Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill (NIA Bill 24/22-27) be agreed.

[Energy Security: Renewables](#)

Main Question, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses grave concern at the impact of energy price rises on families and businesses due to conflict in the Middle East; further expresses grave concern that Northern Ireland already had the highest fuel poverty rate in the UK and that this is likely to be compounded by the

sharp rise in prices; recognises that Northern Ireland's dependence on volatile global energy markets is a major risk to our energy security and will always leave local households exposed to internationally driven price spikes; agrees that greater renewable energy generation offers the clearest and lowest-cost pathway to enhance Northern Ireland's energy security and, as a result, stable and lower costs for consumers; further agrees that delivering this transition will require stronger North/South collaboration on energy infrastructure, grid connectivity and market integration; condemns those seeking to roll back on renewable energy targets and inhibiting delivery of the North/South interconnector; regrets that, according to the Northern Ireland Audit Office, there have been significant flaws in implementing the NI energy strategy; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to deliver a comprehensive plan to end Northern Ireland's dependence on planet-killing fossil fuels and deliver a green energy transition; and further calls on the Minister for Communities, as the Minister of the Department responsible for tackling fuel poverty and administering existing fuel support schemes to urgently bring forward a scheme to ensure that the £17 million allocated to the Executive to support households impacted by the increase in energy costs reaches those who need it.

Adjournment Debate

[Slieve Gullion Cairn](#)

Ms Finnegan raised the closure of the South Cairn on Slieve Gullion and requested clarity on the closure of the claim from the Department for Communities.

Member Statements

[Agri-food Sector: Northern Ireland Water Environmental Reporting](#)

Mr K Buchanan gave a statement on a statement made by NI water that 'that agriculture causes 70% of water pollution' when AFBI figures have stated '62% from agriculture'. Mr Buchanan requested the withdrawal of the statement made by NI Water and for the Minister for infrastructure to outline how she intends to restore confidence in the organisation, following that incident.

[Global Recycling Day](#)

Mr Blair gave a statement on 'Global Recycling Day' highlighting it as an opportunity to recognise recycling as essential for cutting emissions, conserving materials and supporting a resilient circular economy.

Answers to Written Questions

Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

[Number of environmental enforcement cases referred for prosecution](#)

[The Marine Protected Areas Strategy for NI Inshore Region 2025-2030 and support for the conservation of vital habitats and improve biodiversity](#)

[Adjustments to the closed period for slurry spreading in light of unprecedented levels of rain](#)

[Number of fines issued and total amount fined in relation to marine licensing](#)

[Balancing environmental obligations with operational needs faced by the agricultural sector](#)

[Addressing the threat of invasive species to biodiversity](#)

[Update - Third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme](#)

[Update - efforts to improve environmental governance in Northern Ireland](#)

Minister for Communities

[Update on the systems review regarding Tollymore National Outdoor Centre](#)

Minister for the Economy

[Update - Renewable Electricity Price Guarantee scheme legislation](#)

[Action to encourage renewable energy sources, such as solar, landfill gas, and hydro tidal generation](#)

[Number of jobs currently supported in the low-carbon and renewable energy sector](#)

Minister of Education

[Monitoring - number of schools taking part in activities linked to World Wildlife Day](#)

Minister of Finance

Minister of Health

Minister for Infrastructure

[Impact of water and wastewater infrastructure on housing waiting lists, construction and prices](#)

[Update - Departmental consideration of the NI Audit Office report, Active Travel in Northern Ireland](#)

[Publication of Moyola River feasibility study](#)

[Coastal Forum action to strengthen coastal defences, against inclement weather and coastal erosion](#)

[Updating of NI flooding maps](#)

[Update - Review of old mineral permissions](#)

The Executive Office

Oral Answers to Questions

Minister of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs

[UK-EU Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement](#)

[Carrier Bag Levy](#)

[Wildfires: Mournes](#)

[Animal Welfare](#)

[Recycling: Economic Benefits](#)

[Pollution: Belfast Lough](#)

[Mobyoy: Remediation Strategy](#)

[Environmental Protection Agency](#)

Minister for the Economy

Minister of Communities

[Tollymore National Outdoor Centre](#)

Minister for Infrastructure

[Belfast Rapid Transport Phase 2](#)

[Roads: Climate Change Act \(NI\) 2022](#)

[Road Network: Resilience](#)

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Assembly Committee Meetings March 2026

COMMITTEE	DATE	AGENDA/ Highlights
AERA	5 March Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministerial Evidence Session – Consideration of DAERA Corporate Plan 2025-27 and update on current issues • Dilapidation Bill – Briefing from DAERA Bill Officials
	12 March Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dilapidation Bill - Evidence session - DAERA Bill Officials • Departmental Oral Evidence Session - Departmental Response to the Independent Review of Environmental Governance in Northern Ireland – Final Report Public, • SL1 - The Climate Change (Just Transition Commission) Regulations (NI) 2026 - Departmental Evidence Session • Departmental Written Briefing - Synopsis of Responses and Departmental Response to the Consultation on Recreational Fishing for Crabs and Lobsters • Departmental Written Briefing - Mobuoy Remediation Project – Draft Summary Report - Responses to the Public Consultation on the Draft Remediation Strategy for the Mobuoy Site
	16 March Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill – Evidence session - Bill Sponsor Declan McAleer, MLA
	19 March Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dilapidation Bill - Evidence session - DAERA Bill Officials
	26 March Listen Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefing from Lough Neagh Fishermen’s Co-operative Society Ltd - Eel Regulation, DAERA Financial Support for 2025 Season and Concerns for 2026 Season
Communities	26 March Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charities (Amendment) Bill: Pre-introductory evidence from the Department for Communities
Economy	4 March Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Departmental oral and written evidence - Mid-Term Energy Strategy Review & updated Energy Action Plan
	25 March Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Departmental oral and written evidence – Onshore Petroleum Licensing Bill
Education		

Infrastructure	18 March Listen Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water, Sustainable Drainage and Flood Management Bill – Newcastle Concerned Residents Group – Oral Evidence • Proposed Changes to Regulations to support the uptake of Zero Emissions Goods Vehicles in N Ireland – Department for Infrastructure – Public Consultation
	25 March Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential Review of Planning-Related Issues - Draft Terms of Reference • Water, Sustainable Drainage and Flood Management Bill - Bill Clerk - Oral Briefing
Justice		

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