

Northern Ireland Assembly News – April 2026

Assembly Business

Executive Committee Business

[Utility Regulator \(Support for Decarbonisation Preparation\) Bill: First Stage](#)

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

[RHI \(Closure of Non-Domestic Scheme\) Bill: Further Consideration Stage](#)

The Further Consideration Stage of the RHI (Closure of Non-Domestic Scheme) Bill concluded.

[Climate Change \(Just Transition Commission\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2026](#)

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft Climate Change (Just Transition Commission) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 be approved.

Ministerial Statements

[Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute and Associated Governance Matters](#)

The Minister of Agriculture, Environment, and Rural Affairs made a statement updating the members on the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute. He highlighted the key role AFBI plays in protecting animal health and public health, safeguarding our agri-food economy and providing diagnostic, scientific and emergency response capability, but noted recent inspection findings and allegations that require improvements in biosafety, governance, and farm practices. An action plan and increased oversight are being implemented to ensure higher standards, stronger accountability, and continued safe, effective delivery of services.

Opposition Business

None this month

Committee Business

None this month

Private Members' Business

[PEACEPLUS Funding](#)

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the positive impact that PEACE PLUS funding has had on the cross-border economy and grassroots community organisations; recognises the value of PEACE PLUS with £1 billion worth of funding allocated to 145 projects from the 2021-27 scheme so far; further notes the vital support from the European Union in securing the Good Friday Agreement; acknowledges the agreement in principle from the British Government, the Dublin Government and the EU that there will be a successor to PEACE PLUS; welcomes the agreement in the European Parliament Committee on Regional Development for a central allocation for PEACE PLUS funding to be secured as part of the EU's multi-annual budget following an amendment by Sinn Féin MEPs; further recognises that, while this will help restore the financial basis for PEACE PLUS beyond 2027, more clarity is needed on the overall funding amounts; and calls on the Executive, the British Government and the Dublin Government to engage with the European Union to ensure that the value of funding allocated is valued at the same rate or above that of the previous PEACE PLUS programme.

[Net Zero Policies: Cost-benefit Analysis](#)

Question Put:

That this Assembly expresses deep concern that aspirational climate targets are impeding the delivery of high-quality public services and infrastructure that ratepayers deserve; notes that the provisions of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 have been found by the courts to obstruct the progression of the A5 road upgrade, with far-reaching consequences for other major projects such as the A4 Enniskillen southern bypass; is alarmed, furthermore, that the current legal requirement for minimum spend on active travel perversely acts as a barrier to vital investment in roads maintenance and repairs; calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to withdraw the current draft climate action plan 2023-27, which contains a range of proposals that are not quantified and would place additional burdens on farmers and households during a cost-of-living crisis; and further calls on the Minister to task every Department and arm's-length body with conducting a cost-benefit analysis of all net zero-related climate policies and funding streams within their remit.

Question accordingly negated.

[Energy, Food, and Environmental Security: Biomethane](#)

Question put.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes that Northern Ireland produces significant volumes of slurry, poultry litter and food waste; recognises that Northern Ireland faces a defining moment in securing its energy future, strengthening its agri-food sector and addressing nutrient surplus and food waste in a way that protects both the environment and the Northern Ireland economy; further recognises that anaerobic digestion and, in particular, the production of biomethane for injection into the gas grid represents a reliable, dispatchable and indigenous renewable energy source capable of reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels and insulating households and businesses from global price volatility; acknowledges that biomethane production transforms a nutrient liability into a strategic asset, stabilising slurry, improving nutrient management and creating a circular system in which waste becomes energy and digestate supports sustainable food production, improving nutrient security and returning value back to the farmer; believes that a scaled and regionally balanced biomethane sector would cement Northern Ireland's food security by strengthening farm viability, delivering genuine energy security through the production of green gas and providing a credible pathway to long-term price stability for consumers; affirms that Northern Ireland must seize this opportunity to lead in green gas production, securing affordable energy, protecting the environment and ensuring that the economic value of decarbonisation is retained in rural communities rather than exported overseas; and calls on the Executive to bring forward, as a matter of urgency, a cross-departmental biomethane and anaerobic digestion strategy that includes a stable and inflation-proofed support mechanism, streamlined planning and grid connection processes and investment in nutrient-recovery technologies to directly tackle surplus phosphorus and ammonia challenges.

[Hunting with Dogs Bill: First Stage](#)

Hunting with Dogs Bill [NIA Bill 33/22-27], which is a Bill to prohibit hunting wild mammals with dogs; to prohibit trail hunting; to prohibit terrier work; and to set out exemptions from these prohibitions.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

[Bovine Tuberculosis](#)

Question, That the amendment be made, put and agreed to.

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises that high levels of animal disease, including bovine tuberculosis (bTB), undermine environmental sustainability by increasing resource use per unit of food produced and contributing to higher greenhouse gas emissions; notes figures from the Public Health Agency, as reported in the Irish Farmers Journal, indicating that 86 human TB cases were notified in 2024, an increase on previous years; further notes that three bTB cases were reported in Northern Ireland in 2024; acknowledges the implications of bTB for public health, farmers' mental health and well-being and animal welfare; further acknowledges that the financial cost of bTB is substantial, with estimates exceeding £60 million per year, placing pressure on the agriculture sector and public finances; notes the Andersons Centre's March 2026 assessment that farmers bear the largest share of the full economic cost of bTB; further notes the potential wider economic impacts on agri-food supply chains, rural employment, local livestock marts, domestic food security and the competitiveness of agri-food exports; acknowledges the publication of the TB Partnership Steering Group's blueprint to eradicate bTB; welcomes the allocation of additional funding to tackle bTB through the Shared Island initiative launched last year, while also recognising the concerns raised by the Ulster Farmers' Union that the pilot area is not representative of the Northern Ireland bTB picture as a whole; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to take immediate action to eradicate bTB, including the implementation of wildlife intervention, without further delay.

Adjournment Debate

None this Month

Member Statements

[Lá an Domhain / Earth Day](#)

Mr Gildernew made a statement on Earth Day, highlighting the ecological and climate crises we face, the need for investment in sustainable strategies. He also commended everyone who organised and took part in Earth Day events across the Island.

[Mourne Mountains: Fires](#)

Ms Forsythe made a statement on the Mourne fires, highlighting the great response from the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, the Mourne Mountain Rescue Team and the local PSNI. She also noted that the fires are a result of rural arson and has urged anyone with information to come forward and contact the police.

[Mourne Mountains: Fires](#)

Mr McMurray made a statement on the fires in the Mournes noting the word 'wildfires' is used each year although the fires are not spontaneous events but deliberate acts. He urged anyone with information that is of relevance to the investigations, to pass it on to the PSNI or Crimestoppers to allow the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, the PSNI and the NIEA to complete their investigations into the incidents.

Answers to Written Questions

Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

[Changes to the Fisheries and Water Environment Bill following the consultation on the Bill](#)

[Update on the delivery of the Lough Neagh Report and Action Plan](#)

[Update on Departmental Peatland Strategy](#)

[Amount spent on tree planting, in each of the last five years](#)

[Assessment of the environmental impact of long-term derelict properties, particularly in urban areas](#)

[Plans in relation to turning forest land to bog land](#)

[Review of climate change legislation in relation to the ability to meet 2030 targets](#)

[Enforcement of the Outer Belfast Lough Marine Conservation Zone](#)

[Enforcement of guidelines for roadside hedge cutting during the closed season](#)

Minister for Communities

[Support for households investing in renewable energy, such as solar, heat pumps, or electric car charging ports, for domestic purposes](#)

Minister for the Economy

[Update - efforts to develop citizen energy communities that contribute to renewable energy production](#)

Minister of Education

[How the Minister is working with DAERA to improve sustainability across the school estate; guidance, standards/frameworks provided to schools in relation to energy efficiency; renewable energy installations; broader climate action; and funding/ timelines allocated to support these measures.](#)

Minister of Finance

[Whether any funding provided for Coastal Adaptation Pilots in England will be given to Northern Ireland through Barnett consequentials.](#)

Minister of Health

Minister for Infrastructure

[Update on the Active Travel Delivery Plan](#)

[Assessment of Climate Change Act \(NI\) 2022 and Departmental ability to meet the targets by 2030](#)

The Executive Office

[Publication date - first Programme for Government Annual Report](#)

Oral Answers to Questions

Minister of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs

[Wildfires: Mourne Mountains](#)

[Coastal Erosion](#)

[Climate Action Plan 2023-27](#)

Minister for the Economy

[Renewable Electricity Price Guarantee Scheme](#)

[Housing: Low Carbon Heating](#)

Minister of Finance

Minister for Infrastructure

[Waste Water Infrastructure: Developer Contributions](#)

The Executive Office

[Infrastructure Commission](#)

COMMITTEE	DATE	AGENDA/ Highlights
AERA	16 April Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill • Dilapidation Bill - Bill Officials Briefing • Departmental Written Briefing - Update on the Plastic Pollution post consultation • Departmental Written Briefing - Briefing on the consultation report of the draft Climate Action Plan [2023-2027].
	21 April Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefing from NI Water - Lough Neagh Emerging Findings Report
	23 April Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dilapidation Bill - DAERA Bill Officials Briefing • Departmental Written Briefing - Consultation on the draft fisheries management plan for non-quota shellfish in Northern Ireland • Research and Information Service (RaISe) Briefing - Anaerobic Digestion development challenges and opportunities in Northern Ireland
	30 April Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Departmental Oral Evidence Session - Farming with Nature Transition Scheme • Dilapidation Bill - DAERA Bill Officials Briefing • Hunting with Dogs Bill - Initial briefing from Bill sponsor • SL1 Air Quality (Amendment) Regulations (NI) 2026 • Departmental Written Briefing - Animal Welfare Pathway Consultation
Communities	26 March Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charities (Amendment) Bill: Pre-introductory evidence from the Department for Communities
Economy	15 April Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Energy Northern Ireland oral and written evidence – current network and need for support • Department for the Economy and Great British Energy – Northern Ireland Action Plans and local community energy projects – oral and written evidence
	22 April Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Petroleum Exploration and Licensing (Repeal) Bill - Assembly Research • Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill - Departmental oral and written evidence
	29 April Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for the Economy – pre-consultation briefing on the draft aviation strategy • Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill - RaISe briefing
Education		
Infrastructure	15 April Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable Drainage Systems in New Housing Developments - Department for Infrastructure - Oral Evidence • Water, Sustainable Drainage and Flood Management Bill - Department for Infrastructure - Oral Evidence

	29 April Watch Again	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grant Scheme on the supervision and inspection requirements of the Reservoirs Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 - Public Consultation - Summary of Responses – Department for Infrastructure – Oral Evidence
Justice		

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