



Northern Ireland Environment Agency
Gníomhaireacht Comhshaoil Thuaisceart Éireann
Norlin Airlan Environment Agency

Business Plan 2024-25

Regulation,
Protection,
Enforcement,
Water Quality,
Nature Recovery



An Agency within the Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

Gníomhaireacht de chuid na Roinne
**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

An Agency wí'in the Department o
**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

***Sustainability at the heart of a
living, working, active landscape
valued by everyone.***



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Introduction

As Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA, the Agency), I am pleased to present the Agency's Business Plan for 2024-2025. NIEA is Northern Ireland's principal environmental regulator and environmental advisor, protecting and enhancing our natural environment whilst regulating activities that can adversely affect it.

This Business Plan sets out our ambition for the year ahead, informed by our statutory role and delivery of our Minister's priorities. Protecting and enhancing Northern Ireland's environment will continue to be our primary focus but, in the year ahead, we will also deliver a more enhanced enforcement remit to help tackle water quality issues in the Lough Neagh catchment. We will therefore seek to enhance protection of Lough Neagh, which is an internationally important ecosystem with a wide range of national and international, designations and protections.

This is particularly important as NIEA and its people are firmly at the front-line of many current high profile environmental issues, as well as working to address the ongoing threats to nature and water quality from a range of factors including, climate change, pollution of our freshwater environment, and the continued decline of our biodiversity.



David Reid
Chief Executive, NIEA

The challenges we face are complex and cannot be addressed in isolation by any one organisation. That is why I am absolutely committed to working with a wide range of voluntary, advocate groups and industries' representatives to address these challenges and ensure that the NIEA delivers for everyone who lives here.

Key Priorities

Our Key Priorities for the year ahead are:

- **Environmental Regulation, Protection and Enforcement;**
- **Water Quality; and**
- **Nature Recovery.**

To deliver our key priorities, we will measure our performance against the 20 targets contained in this business plan, 6 of which are priorities that have been set and agreed by the DAERA Minister.

Ministerial Priorities

The Minister's 6 priorities reflect many of the challenges facing the environment and go to the heart of the Agency's primary purpose which is to protect and enhance Northern Ireland's environment, and in doing so, deliver health and well-being benefits and support economic growth:

- Lough Neagh - deliver the recommendations identified in the Lough Neagh Report, for which NIEA has responsibility to deliver regulation, enforcement and nature recovery;
- Mobuoy - Safeguard Water Quality and the environment;
- Planning - respond to at least 75% of statutory planning consultation requests within 21 days or otherwise agreed timeframes;
- Protect public health by providing effective and efficient regulation and enforcement of drinking water supplies;
- Manage at least 36 projects (totalling over £7million in Resource and Capital funding) delivering environmental priorities, through the Environment Fund which contribute to the Environmental Impact Priority Areas; and
- To build capacity and support the restoration of our peatlands.

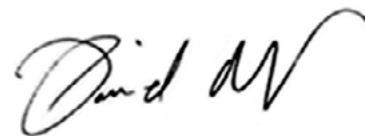
As well as supporting the delivery of significant elements of wider departmental programmes, regulation and enforcement will be key to the delivery of our work in 2024-2025 whereby we aim to support economic operators while safeguarding nature.

In 2024-2025 NIEA will receive a budget of £37.466m resource and £5.040m capital to fulfil its statutory duties and deliver the range of priorities outlined in this Business Plan.

In achieving our targets and making a positive impact on the issues facing the environment, it is crucial that we place the right level of focus on the areas where our expertise and resource is most needed so that we can continue to move ahead in a strong position with clear goals as we progress through the next year.

As an Executive Agency, we are committed to delivering a high-quality service that meets the needs of those we serve. We will therefore ensure openness and transparency, a robust governance framework supported by clear communications to empower our people to deliver the best for our natural environment.

I very much look forward to leading the Agency in the year ahead and working collaboratively with our partners and stakeholders to protect and enhance our environment.



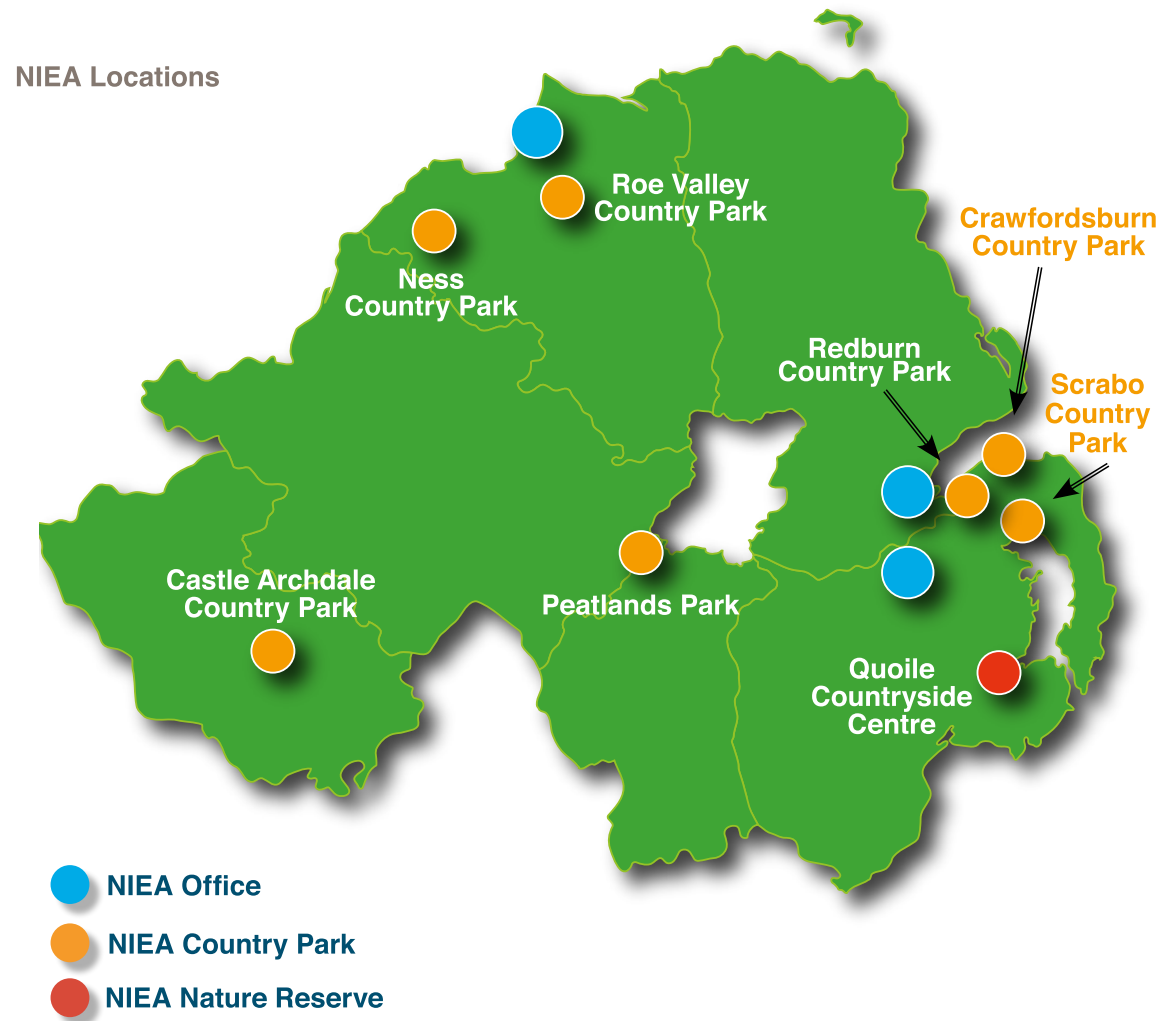
David Reid, Chief Executive, NIEA

1. Who We Are

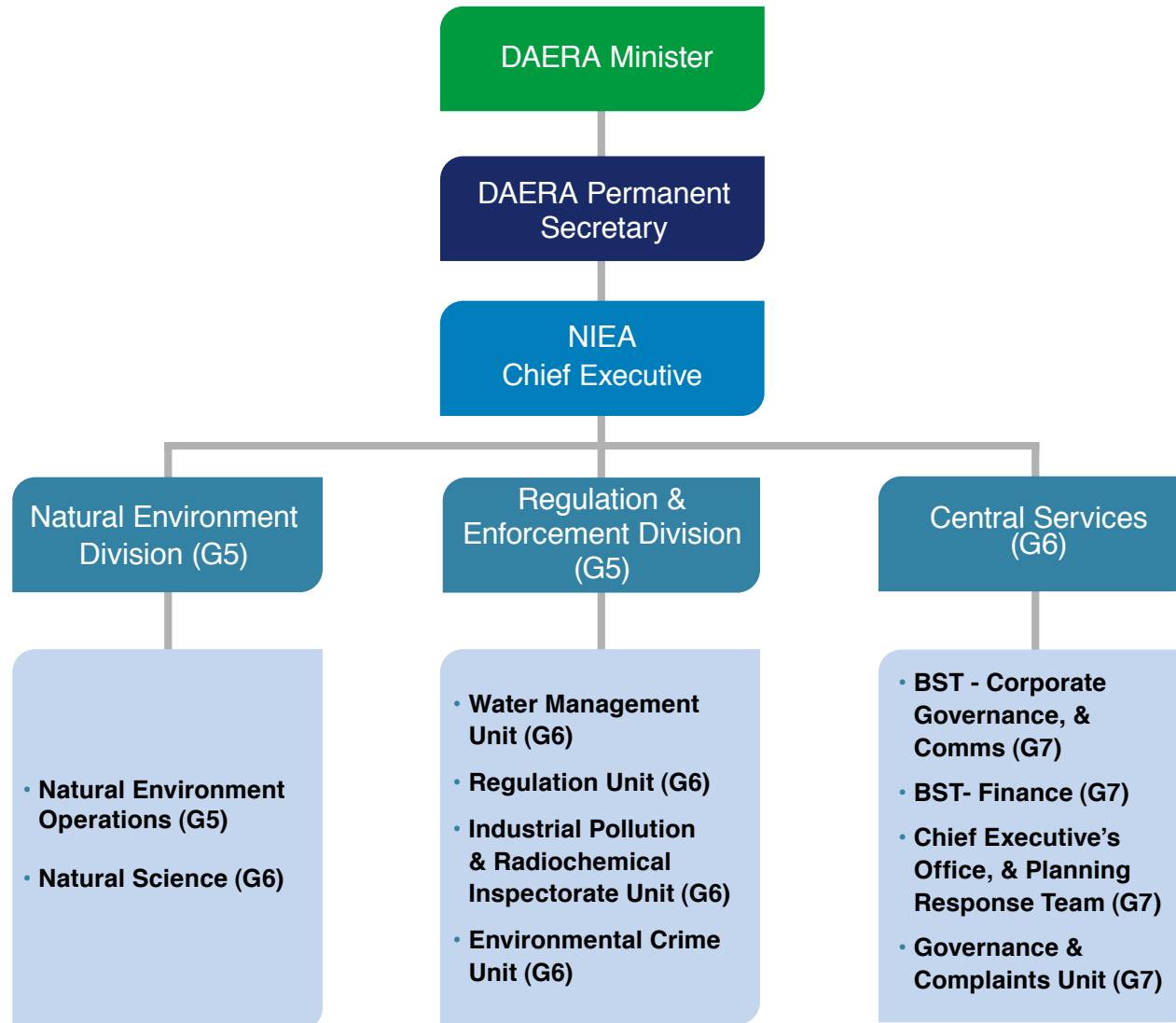
1.1 Our responsibilities

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is an Executive Agency of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). It operates within the context of the Department’s overall vision, strategic objectives and policies. The Agency’s primary purpose is to protect and enhance Northern Ireland’s environment, and in doing so, deliver health and well-being benefits and support economic growth.

We have approximately 600 people located across Northern Ireland. There are two major office sites in Lisburn and Belfast. We also have a team in Jubilee House, Ballykelly. NIEA manages seven country parks and 65 nature reserve site across Northern Ireland.



1.2 Organisation Structure






2. What We Will Deliver

In preparing this business plan, we have carefully considered our budget allocation for 2024-2025, and how best to align our resources to deliver the best outcomes within the funding envelope that is available. This is reflected in our Key Priorities, and Key Performance Targets for 2024-2025.

2.1 NIEA Key Priorities 2024-2025

Our primary purpose is to protect and enhance Northern Ireland’s environment, and in doing so, to deliver health and well-being benefits and support economic growth. As an Executive Agency within DAERA, NIEA is a key contributor to DAERA’s vision of **‘Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone’**. In line with NIEA’s overall purpose, the Agency has established its three Key Priorities detailed below.

NIEA Key Priorities 2024-2025

	<p>NIEA Key Priority 1: Environmental Regulation, Protection and Enforcement.</p>
	<p>NIEA Key Priority 2: Water Quality</p>
	<p>NIEA Key Priority 3: Nature Recovery</p>

2.2 NIEA Key Performance Targets (KPTs) 2024-2025

Key Performance Targets (KPTs)

All of the NIEA Business Plan targets 2024-2025 outlined in the table below align with the NIEA Key Priorities. However, in line with HM Treasury guidance ('Setting Key Targets for Executive Agencies; A Guide'), 6 of the targets have been designated as Key Performance Targets (KPTs).

2.3 NIEA Business Plan Targets 2024-2025

NIEA Business Plan targets 2024-2025			
NIEA Target Number	How We Will Achieve it	Target Date	SRO and Business Area
<p>1</p> <p>DAERA Level Target</p> <p>Ministerial Priority</p> <p>KPT 1</p>	<p>Lough Neagh</p> <p>Deliver the recommendations identified in the Lough Neagh Report, for which NIEA has responsibility to deliver regulation, enforcement and nature recovery by:</p> <p>Regulation, Compliance and Enforcement:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a supplementary River Basin Management Plan for Lough Neagh to identify a Programme of Measures to improve water quality and support the co-ordination of the implementation on behalf of DAERA EMFG; • Undertaking a programme of risk based cross compliance inspections on farms in identified priority sub catchments of Lough Neagh, taking appropriate enforcement action as required; 	31 st March 2025	NIEA Chief Executive & Directors, RED & NED

NIEA Business Plan targets 2024-2025			
NIEA Target Number	How We Will Achieve it	Target Date	SRO and Business Area
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing additional staffing resource to support catchment investigations, and complete an additional 100 waterway inspections in identified priority sub catchments of Lough Neagh; and • Procuring and installing permanent monitoring stations at each river in-flow entering Lough Neagh, and at an outlet of the Lough to the Lower Bann, to enable the provision of almost real time data on the nutrient contributions and identify priority areas for action when commissioned. <p>Nature Recovery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scoping the development of a Conservation Management Plan for Lough Neagh ASSI/SPA/Ramsar and evidence programme on trophic links, and conservation measures needed to restore resilience and favourable conservation status. 		
<p>2</p> <p>DAERA</p> <p>Level Target</p> <p>Ministerial Priority</p> <p>KPT 2</p>	<p>Mobuoy</p> <p>Safeguard water quality and the environment by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completing the consultation process on a long term, proportionate, affordable and sustainable remediation solution; • Delivering the Environmental Monitoring Programme; and • Publishing quarterly water quality reports. 	31 st March 2025	NIEA Chief Executive & Director, RED

NIEA Business Plan targets 2024-2025			
NIEA Target Number	How We Will Achieve it	Target Date	SRO and Business Area
<p>3</p> <p>DAERA Level Target</p> <p>Ministerial Priority</p> <p>KPT 3</p>	<p>Planning</p> <p>Respond to at least 75% of statutory planning consultation requests within 21 days or otherwise agreed timeframes.</p> <p>Increase the capacity to deal with consultations relating to renewable energy within NIEA, in line with the target for 80% renewables by 2030 in the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging with other jurisdictions to explore how we could refine our processes and procedures regarding how we respond to planning consultations related to renewable energy leading to a measurable reduction in time taken to respond to renewable consultations; and • Securing and training additional staffing resource to increase the output of renewable applications processed. 	31 st March 2025	NIEA Chief Executive & Branch Head, BST
<p>4</p> <p>Ministerial Priority</p> <p>KPT 4</p>	<p>Protect public health by providing effective and efficient regulation and enforcement of drinking water supplies by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% compliance with statutory duty to deliver annual monitoring programme for private drinking water supplies; • Categorising 90% of drinking water quality events notified by NI Water within 5 days; and • Publishing an independent annual report on drinking water quality in Northern Ireland. 	31 st March 2025	Director, RED

NIEA Business Plan targets 2024-2025			
NIEA Target Number	How We Will Achieve it	Target Date	SRO and Business Area
<p>5</p> <p>Ministerial Priority</p> <p>KPT 5</p>	<p>Manage at least 36 projects (totalling over £7million in Resource and Capital funding), delivering environmental priorities, through the Environment Fund which contribute to the Environmental Impact Priority Areas listed below, whilst ensuring this is consistent with the wider Departmental priorities .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature and Climate Recovery: Building Ecological and Climate Resilience; • Connecting People with Nature; and • Water Quality 	31 st March 2025	Director, NED
<p>6</p> <p>Ministerial Priority</p> <p>KPT 6</p>	<p>Peatlands Restoration by:</p> <p>Developing and launching an Environmental Challenge Fund for Peatlands through support from the Shared Island Initiative, that will contribute to the protection and restoration of our (NI) Peatlands to become healthy functioning ecosystems by 2040, acting as a natural carbon sink to reduce emissions in line with the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 and (draft) Climate Action Plan 2023-2027.</p> <p>This will be an important step to achieving the overall peatland targets within the draft CAP, draft EIP and draft Peatlands Strategy.</p>	30 th June 2024	Director, NED
<p>7</p>	<p>Develop and launch an Environmental Challenge Competition for Nature Recovery and Connecting People to Nature.</p>	31 st December 2024	Director, NED

NIEA Business Plan targets 2024-2025			
NIEA Target Number	How We Will Achieve it	Target Date	SRO and Business Area
8	Take forward action in relation to wildfire management by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishing ‘Wildfires in Northern Ireland: A Strategic Way Forward’; • Developing a draft Action Plan for Strategic Way Forward, for addressing the risk of wildfires in Northern Ireland; and • Appointing wildfire experts and commence development of wildfire management plans for the Mournes, Antrim Hills and Carn Glenshane. 	31 st March 2025	Director, NED
9	Support sustainable access to our great outdoors and provide opportunities for naturally inspired outdoor recreation throughout the year by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a ‘Changing Places Action Plan’ for a regional network of inclusive outdoor recreation locations to increase the accessibility of outdoor recreation for people with special needs or disabilities; and • Reviewing the Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for NI. 	31 st March 2025	Director, NED
10	Maintain service standards in relation to natural heritage licencing and consenting by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issuing decisions for 95% of Wildlife Order licences within 15 working days; and • Issuing decisions for 95% of Environment Order notifiable operations consent applications within 3 months. 	31 st March 2025	Director, NED

NIEA Business Plan targets 2024-2025			
NIEA Target Number	How We Will Achieve it	Target Date	SRO and Business Area
11	<p>Safeguarding our protected sites, priority habitats and species to support Nature Recovery by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreeing and delivering the 2024-25 ASSI statutory monitoring programme (in-field condition assessments of ASSI species, habitats and/or earth science features), in line with our statutory obligations and to inform our statutory advice; • Producing the first Living Map of Northern Ireland by March 2025 (habitat/land cover classification); • Reviewing and publishing the Northern Ireland Priority Species List, those species of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity (WANE Act 2011); and • Developing revised advice (operational protocol) on assessment of nitrogenous air pollution impacts from proposed developments on the natural environment. 	31 st March 2025	Director, NED
12	Assess and determine 90% of receipted ('duly made') applications for authorisations within the required statutory timeframes.	31 st March 2025	Director, RED

NIEA Business Plan targets 2024-2025			
NIEA Target Number	How We Will Achieve it	Target Date	SRO and Business Area
13	<p>NIEA Regulatory Roadmap and Digital Transformation of Regulatory Systems by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreeing a NIEA Regulatory Roadmap; • Scoping a project in relation to a review of regulatory fees & charges; and • Scoping critical regulatory IT systems, to ultimately replace the *systems no longer supported from 2026. <p>*Regulation Unit: Discharge Consent Application Processing (DICAP), Compliance, Monitoring & Invoicing of Industrial Consents (CIMIC), Management of Invoicing and Debt Accounting System (MIDAS) databases, and online application and compliance services for both Trade Consents and Abstraction & Impoundment Licensing.</p> <p>*IPRI: Central Database Application (CDA) database for Pollution, Prevention and Control (PPC) regulations, and Pollution Inventory (PIV) database for PRTR Reporting.</p>	31 st March 2025	Director, RED
14	Carry out 90% of planned inspections using a risk-based programme to monitor regulatory compliance, ensuring environmental protection.	31 st March 2025	Director, RED
15	<p>Implement relevant regulatory regimes as required under the Windsor Framework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) (including polychlorinated biphenyls); • Mercury; • REACH (Restriction, Evaluation and Authorisation of Restricted Chemicals); 	31 st March 2025	Director, RED

NIEA Business Plan targets 2024-2025			
NIEA Target Number	How We Will Achieve it	Target Date	SRO and Business Area
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluorinated Greenhouse Gases (F-gases) (at part A permitted installations) • Waste persistent organic pollutants (POPs); • Waste mercury; • Batteries and accumulators; • Shipments of waste; • Ship recycling; and • Packaging and packaging waste • EU Emissions Trading Scheme 		
16	Deliver the 2024 Cross Compliance programme for the protection of water resources and the conservation of wild birds, flora and fauna to include at least 1% of farms and 5% of those operating under a derogation.	31 st March 2025	Director, RED
17	Meet target response times for 90% of high, medium and low severity pollution incidents - 2 hours (working day) / 4 hours (out of hours) for high and medium severity reports; 14 days for low severity.	31 st March 2025	Director, RED
18	On behalf of EMFG, complete a mid-cycle review of the current River Basin Management Plan subject to resource availability to report on the implementation of the Programme of Measures to include an interim update on water quality status of the freshwater environment in Northern Ireland.	31 st March 2025	Director, RED

NIEA Business Plan targets 2024-2025			
NIEA Target Number	How We Will Achieve it	Target Date	SRO and Business Area
19	<p>Develop our ability to tackle Serious and Organised Crime’s involvement in environmental crime by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing our capacity and capability to receive, assess, develop and disseminate intelligence; • Developing our understanding of OCGs and crime types to ensure we deploy our resources where we will have the highest impact; and • Developing partnership working to deliver disruption and enforcement interventions. 	31 st March 2025	Director, RED
20	<p>People</p> <p>Establish a NIEA People Engagement Group to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope Continual Professional Development (CPD) and review training and development needs for relevant disciplines; • Increase Employee Engagement Index by 5%; • Develop quarterly people engagement events (2 online/2 in-person); and • Engage and align with the ‘NICS People Plan 2024-2025’. <p>NIEA Structure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope and undertake a benchmark review of NIEA organisational structures against other similar regulatory organisations to improve the operational delivery of NIEA’s regulatory functions. 	<p>31st December 2024</p> <p>31st March 2025</p>	Branch Head, BST



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To find out more about NIEA's work visit:

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