

## Appendix I - Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) Template

### SECTION 1 - Defining the activity subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016

#### 1A. Name of Public Authority.

DAERA

#### 1B. Please provide a short title which describes the activity being undertaken by the Public Authority that is subject to Section 1(1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

Revision of the Operational Protocol for assessing ammonia and air pollution impacts on the natural environment.

#### 1C. Please indicate which category the activity specified in Section 1B above relates to.

Developing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Adopting a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Implementing a	Policy <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Revising a	Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Strategy <input type="checkbox"/>	Plan <input type="checkbox"/>
Designing a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Delivering a Public Service	<input type="checkbox"/>		

#### 1D. Please provide the official title (if any) of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service document or initiative relating to the category indicated in Section 1C above.

Revised Operational Protocol for assessing ammonia and air pollution impacts on the natural environment.

#### 1E. Please provide details of the aims and/or objectives of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service.

The Protocol is used to assess the impact of air pollution on the natural environment and is necessary to deliver compliance with the EU Habitats Directive. The current procedure (known as the Operational Protocol (OP) used by DAERA was developed in 2012 and since then the body of scientific evidence on the impacts of air pollution on habitats has greatly increased. In 2023, the Department was investigated by the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) regarding its compliance with the requirements of the Habitats Directive. A commitment to revise the previous OP was a factor in the OEP's decision to not issue legal proceedings against the Department at this time.

**1F. What definition of 'rural' is the Public Authority using in respect of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?**

Population Settlements of less than 5,000 (Default definition).

Other Definition (Provide details and the rationale below).

A definition of 'rural' is not applicable.

*Details of alternative definition of 'rural' used.*

N/A

*Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.*

N/A

*Reasons why a definition of 'rural' is not applicable.*

N/A

## SECTION 2 - Understanding the impact of the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

### 2A. Is the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service likely to impact on people in rural areas?

Yes  No  If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **2E**.

### 2B. Please explain how the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas.

While used on all development types air the predominant use of the OP has been in the assessment of air pollution from agricultural facilities and activities. The Revised Operational Protocol is likely to have implications for the number of new or replacement agricultural installations in the vicinity of protected sites that are granted planning permission and/or permits. These are predominantly situated in rural areas. This could impede expansion in the agri sector and therefore have implications for employment opportunities.

There could be more financial burden associated with planning applications and review of existing permitted operations, as mitigation measures may be required. There could also be possible delays in planning applications, due to more complex assessment procedures.

In the longer term, the Revised Operational Protocol is likely to deliver potential benefits to people living and working in rural areas through an improvement in air quality and encouraging sustainable agricultural development.

The Revised Operational Protocol needs to be considered in the context of DAERA's wider ambition to reduce ammonia emissions from agricultural activities, which are set out in the Department's forthcoming Proposed Ammonia Strategy. This Revised Operational Protocol is being considered for Equality Impacts, to fully assess the possible impacts on any of the Section 75 groups.

Economic impacts are assessed separately in a Regulatory Impact Assessment.

### 2C. If the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently from people in urban areas, please explain how it is likely to impact on people in rural areas differently.

The Revised Operational Protocol will be applicable to a number of sectors including: transport, power generation and agriculture. However, agriculture is the predominant source of atmospheric nitrogen pollution and as it is a rural industry, rural areas will feel impacts to a much greater extent than urban areas. This will predominantly be in terms of employment and investment in agri business in rural areas and any associated future employment opportunities associated with expansion of agri business located in rural areas, and also at designated sites which are located in rural areas. Greater benefits for protected habitats and conservation actions for habitat restoration will occur in rural areas.

**2D. Please indicate which of the following rural policy areas the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is likely to primarily impact on.**

Rural Businesses	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Tourism	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Education or Training in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poverty in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Crime or Community Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Agri-Environment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other (Please state)	<input type="text"/>

**If the response to Section 2A was YES GO TO Section 3A.**

**2E. Please explain why the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service is NOT likely to impact on people in rural areas.**

## SECTION 3 - Identifying the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas

**3A. Has the Public Authority taken steps to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas that are relevant to the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service?**

Yes  No  If the response is **NO** GO TO Section **3E**.

**3B. Please indicate which of the following methods or information sources were used by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.**

Consultation with Rural Stakeholders	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Published Statistics	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with Other Organisations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Research Papers	<input type="checkbox"/>
Surveys or Questionnaires	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other Publications	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**3C. Please provide details of the methods and information sources used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas including relevant dates, names of organisations, titles of publications, website references, details of surveys or consultations undertaken etc.**

The “DAERA Plan to 2050 - Sustainability for the Future” identifies social and economic needs of people in rural areas. Public health needs were identified from the Clean Air Strategy Discussion Document (A Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland – Public Discussion Document | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (daera-ni.gov.uk))

DAERA held a Call for Evidence from July to October 2023 where stakeholders were invited to provide input into the development of the Revised OP by supplying any additional evidence and feedback for consideration. DAERA has reviewed all available scientific evidence and legal advice on this matter.

The following sources were used to screen the revised assessment procedure for Equality Impacts:

- 2021 Census of Northern Ireland. [Census 2021 main statistics religion tables | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/census-2021-main-statistics-religion-tables)
- 2018 DAERA Equality Indicators Report. [Equality indicators Report | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/equality-indicators-report)
- Northern Ireland: In Profile. Key Statistics on Northern Ireland. NISRA, March 2021. [NI: IN PROFILE Key statistics on Northern Ireland \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/ni-in-profile-key-statistics-on-northern-ireland)
- (NISRA Labour Force Survey Annual Report 2019 [Annual Report Tables 2019 | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(nisra.gov.uk\)](https://www.nisra.gov.uk/annual-report-tables-2019))

These data are set out in the Equality Impact Assessment screening for the proposed Revised OP.

A Regulatory Impact Assessment is being undertaken on the Revised OP and will identify economic impacts of the revised procedure.

**3D. Please provide details of the social and economic needs of people in rural areas which have been identified by the Public Authority?**

The DAERA Plan to 2050 - Sustainability for the Future notes the following strategic priorities:

- To enhance our food, forestry, fishery and farming sectors using efficient and environmentally sustainable models which support economic growth;
- To protect and enhance our natural environment now and for future generations whilst advocating its value to and wellbeing for all.

Reductions in ammonia will meet economic needs of people in rural areas through a sustainable agri-food sector, increased opportunities for rural tourism and deliver improvements in air quality.

The Revised Operational Protocol will primarily have effects in terms of expansion of the NI agricultural industry. There are also possible impacts relating to the review of existing permits for agricultural activities – permits are limited to specific sectors: intensive pig and poultry as well as anaerobic digestion facilities. Smaller farm businesses (those below PPC thresholds of 2,000 pigs / 750 sows, and poultry farms below 40,000 places) as well as cattle, do not come under the industrial permitting regime.

The Revised OP is more stringent and more prescriptive in terms of decision making. It incorporates a stepwise, decision-making framework which will allow more detailed, specific circumstances to be considered. It also incorporates a degree of flexibility which may allow for agri-development in areas where there is not currently high development pressure.

**If the response to Section 3A was YES GO TO Section 4A.**

**3E. Please explain why no steps were taken by the Public Authority to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?**

## **SECTION 4 - Considering the Social and Economic Needs of Persons in Rural Areas**

### **4A. Please provide details of the issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.**

Issues considered in relation to the social and economic needs of people in rural areas:

- The need for clean air;
- The need to protect and enhance our natural environment now and for future generations whilst advocating its value to and wellbeing for all;
- The need to enhance our food, forestry, fishery and farming sectors using efficient and environmentally sustainable models which support economic growth;
- The need for a sustainable agri-food sector.

The Revised OP is necessary for the Department to meet its legal obligations in reducing air pollution impacts on the natural environment and in protecting sensitive designated sites.

## SECTION 5 - Influencing the Policy, Strategy, Plan or Public Service

**5A. Has the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, been influenced by the rural needs identified?**

Yes  No  If the response is **NO GO TO Section 5C.**

**5B. Please explain how the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or delivery of the Public Service, has been influenced by the rural needs identified.**

The overriding need in the development of the Revised OP is improved compliance with the EU Habitats Directive. This is vital to protect the Department from legal challenge and judicial review of the current OP, and to mitigate the threat of judicial review of Departmental policies from the Office of Environmental Protection, as well as reputational damage to the Department.

The Revised OP has been developed as far as possible in a way that delivers the Department's legal obligations with respect to the protection of species and habitats while considering the needs of rural areas and the agri-food industry. Consequently it incorporates a degree of flexibility that takes into account the existing air pollution pressures on designated sites and may allow for development in areas where these pressures are low.

Socioeconomic rural needs are considered in the revised assessment procedure in that the process is designed to encourage sustainable agricultural development through the use of Best Available Techniques and mitigation measures.

Development of the Revised OP has been underpinned at all stages by the rural needs noted above.

- The need for clean air;
- The need to protect and enhance our natural environment now and for future generations whilst advocating its value to and wellbeing for all;
- The need to enhance our food, forestry, fishery and farming sectors using efficient and environmentally sustainable models which support economic growth;
- The need for a sustainable agri-food sector.

How development of the Revised OP has been influenced

- Reducing air pollution impacts on the natural environment is required to enable the Department to meet its legal obligations and to ensure a sustainable agri-food sector;
- The revised OP incorporates a degree of flexibility which may allow for agri-development in areas where there is not currently high development pressure.

If the response to Section **5A** was **YES GO TO Section 6A.**





**5C. Please explain why the development, adoption, implementation or revising of the Policy, Strategy or Plan, or the design or the delivery of the Public Service, has NOT been influenced by the rural needs identified.**

## SECTION 6 - Documenting and Recording

**6A. Please tick below to confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained by the Public Authority and relevant information on the Section 1 activity compiled in accordance with paragraph 6.7 of the guidance.**

I confirm that the RNIA Template will be retained and relevant information compiled.

<b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:</b>	Debbie Brown
<b>Position/Grade:</b>	SSO
<b>Division/Branch</b>	Air quality and Biodiversity Unit, Natural Environment Division
<b>Signature:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	28/11/2024
<b>Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:</b>	Keith Finegan
<b>Position/Grade:</b>	PSO
<b>Division/Branch:</b>	Air quality and Biodiversity Unit, Natural Environment Division
<b>Signature:</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	02/12/2024