



INVITATION BRIEFING TEMPLATE

DAERA PRIVATE OFFICE

| | |
|--|--|
| INV Ref: | INV-1108-2024 |
| To: | Andrew Muir MLA Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs |
| CC: | Katrina Godfrey, G_DAERA Pressoffice.Group, Sharon McFlynn, Perm Sec mailbox (perm.sec@daera-ni.gov.uk), David Reid, Tracey Teague, Liz Loughran, Dave Foster, Owen Lyttle, Richard Crowe, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], |
| From (SO or above): | Liz Loughran |
| Branch: | Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group (EMFG) |
| Contact number (incl. mobile) | Ext. 69229 Mobile: [REDACTED] |
| Name & mobile number of official(s) attending the meeting/event in support of Minister: | Dave Foster - [REDACTED] |
| Press Officer attending meeting/event: | <input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No |
| Minute taker (Business area to provide) | [REDACTED] |
| Venue: | Meeting Room 0.5, Clare House |
| Date and time: | 1pm – 1:30pm Wednesday 21st February 2024 |
| Invitation from: | Nick Shaftesbury |
| Invitation type (click box to check): | <input type="checkbox"/> Event <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Meeting <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): |

| | | |
|--|--|---|
| INV Ref: | INV-1108-2024 | |
| Summary of event/meeting (further detail to be provided in the background section) | Invitation received from Nick Shaftesbury, the owner of the bed and soil of Lough Neagh, who wishes to meet with you to discuss the blue green algae (BGA) situation in the Lough and discuss how all stakeholders need to work in partnership to tackle the problem in the long-term. | |
| Publicity (please confirm with the organiser/host and provide details of any planned publicity including media invites, press releases or social media articles. Please mark N/A if no publicity is taking place) | <input type="checkbox"/> If publicity is planned, please tick to confirm that the event organiser has been advised to notify DAERA Media Team at pressoffice.group@daera-ni.gov.uk | |
| External meeting attendees (click box to check): | <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Not Known <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (please specify): Nick Shaftesbury | |
| Annexes: | Annex A: | Key issues – Background and Lines to Take |
| | Annex B: | Pen Pictures |
| | | |

KEY ISSUES, BACKGROUND AND LINES TO TAKE

KEY ISSUES: BLUE GREEN ALGAE BLOOMS IN LOUGH NEAGH

Background:

- 1 Nick Shaftesbury emailed you on 12th February 2024 to ask for a meeting to discuss the blue green algae blooms (BGA) on Lough Neagh and how all stakeholders need to work in partnership to tackle the problem and safeguard the long-term future of the Lough.
- 2 In the Assembly on the 13th February 2024 you confirmed during the private members motion on a Lough Neagh Rescue Plan that you are in favour of a cross-departmental body, including relevant non-governmental organisations to be set up to address the immediate issues facing Lough Neagh.
- 3 In May 2023, the board of the Lough Neagh Partnership hosted Nick Shaftesbury, at a meeting in Ballyronan to discuss the management of the Lough and ownership of the Lough's bed and soil.
- 4 Although the ownership of the bed and soil of the Lough is not within the scope of the current Lough Neagh BGA report under development, nor was the issue mentioned in the email invite request you received from Nick Shaftesbury, recent AQWs have asked for your comments on the ownership issue. The issue may also be raised during the meeting or in follow up queries.
- 5 You should note that a question on a public management structure for Lough Neagh was raised with the Permanent Secretary by Pasty McGlone in Oct 2023. The response stated that decisions on how that aspect should be addressed will require careful consideration by a future Executive.
- 6 Sand extraction from Lough Neagh, considered controversial by environmentalists, given the lough's importance for wildlife and biodiversity, has been the subject of judicial proceedings in recent years. The issue has come to the fore again, as a potential contributor to the Blue Green Algae (BGA) and ecological decline in the lough. Earl Shaftesbury receives royalty payments for every tonne of sand extracted from the lough bed.
- 7 Officials are not aware of any payments between Lough Fishermen's Co-operative and the Earl for fishing rights. However, there may be income to the Earl relating to fishermen's individual quays for renting the bed and soil in that area. Inland Fisheries has a lease from Shaftesbury Estates for a boat house and quay. This is £250 p/a.
- 8 Lough Neagh Partnership has recently been awarded £250,000 in lottery funding to research future management of Lough Neagh, including public ownership. This will be done via a new "heritage protection plan". Earl Shaftesbury sits on the Board of LNP, along with councillors and community representatives.

LINES TO TAKE:

Lough Neagh Blue Green Algae

- **It is clear, that over the past couple of decades, collectively we have not got the balance right between growing our economy and safeguarding our natural environment and as such my Executive colleagues and I have made Lough Neagh a key first year priority.**
- **This is a problem that has been decades in the making, and there are no quick fixes to the occurrence and probable recurrence of blue green algal blooms within Lough Neagh.**
- **A cross Departmental Water Quality Steering Group is already in the process of drafting a set of evidenced based recommendations to tackle Blue Green Algae in Lough Neagh and secure longer-term improvements in water quality. A report with recommendations for action is expected imminently.**
- **Lough Neagh cannot be seen in isolation from the natural environment more generally and we cannot tackle its problems in isolation either. A partnership approach across the Executive, government, the private sector and communities will be required.**

Ownership of Lough Neagh

- **The scope of the report currently being developed by officials is focussed on the blue green algae and water quality issues as a priority. It does not address issues surrounding the overall ownership of the Lough.**
- **Work undertaken with the lottery funding awarded to the Lough Neagh partnership will help inform any future ownership considerations.**

Sand Extraction

- **I am aware that sand extraction from the lough bed has been the subject of extensive legal and scientific considerations and that it is subject to specific restrictions. My officials will work to enhance the data and evidence around all activities in and around Lough Neagh in support of its restoration and management.**

PEN PICTURE



Nick Shaftesbury, The Earl of Shaftesbury –
Owner of the bed and soil of Lough Neagh

Nicholas Ashley-Cooper, 44, became the 12th Earl of Shaftesbury in 2005 aged 25.

The Earl owns the bed and soil of Lough Neagh and appears open to selling the ownership rights. He has previously stated that:

“The issues at the moment are to do with the water, and our ownership is the bed and soil so the current situation is not our responsibility.”

The Earl’s estate has granted five licences for sand dredging in one area of the lough.

He has also stated in the past that he would like to see a *“central management body for the lough that actually has teeth and can take action”* and that as owners, *“we are actually closely monitored and scrutinised, but I would always want to adhere to any amount of regulations or controls.”*