


INVITATION BRIEFING TEMPLATE

DAERA PRIVATE OFFICE

INV Ref:	INV-1891-2024 Visit to Lough Erne to see Blue/Green Algae impacts
To:	Andrew Muir MLA Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
CC:	██████████, G_DAERA Pressoffice.Group, ██████████ ██████████ Perm Sec mailbox (██████████), WMU Ministerial Inbox (██████████); ██ ██ ██ ██
From (SO or above):	██████████
Branch:	Water Management Unit
Contact number (incl. mobile)	NIEA Regional Operations - ██████████ NIEA Water Management Unit – ██████████ ██████████
Name & mobile number of official(s) attending the meeting/event in support of Minister:	Officials from Water Management Unit; ██████████ ██████████ (Senior Water Quality Inspector) Officials from Regional Operations; ██████████ ██████████ (site Warden).
Press Officer attending meeting/event:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes – ██████████ <input type="checkbox"/> No
Minute taker (Business area to provide)	██████████
Windsor Framework Implementation consideration	n/a
Venue:	Castle Archdale Country Park, Irvinestown BT94 1PP
Date and time:	12 th September, 14:30-15:00
Invitation from:	NIEA Water Management Unit & NIEA Regional Operations
Invitation type (click box to check):	<input type="checkbox"/> Event <input type="checkbox"/> Meeting <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify): Site Visit and Walk

INV Ref:	INV-1891-2024 Visit to Lough Erne to see Blue/Green Algae impacts	
Summary of event/meeting (further detail to be provided in the background section)	Visit to Lough Erne to see Blue/Green Algae impacts, guided walk and meet with staff that manage Castle Archdale Country Park. Deborah Erskine MLA will also be in attendance.	
Publicity (please confirm with the organiser/host and provide details of any planned publicity including media invites, press releases video content 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 	
External meeting attendees (click box to check):	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Not Known <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes (please specify): Deborah Erskine MLA	
Annexes:	Annex A:	Programme
	Annex B:	Key issues – Background and Lines to Take

PROGRAMME

The Minister is to visit Castle Archdale Country Park on the afternoon of 12 September 2024 following an earlier engagement in the area.

NIEA Water Management Unit staff will be in attendance to facilitate a visit to Lough Erne for the Minister to see the impacts of Blue Green Algae as Castle Archdale Country Park sits on the shores of Lough Erne.

The Minister will also have the opportunity to meet the staff that manage Castle Archdale Country Park (NIEA Regional Operations) and go on a guided walk with the site Warden and other staff and see the small site Museum should he wish to do so.

Deborah Erskine MLA will also join for the visit.

It is envisaged that the two elements will be combined into the one walk around the site.

KEY ISSUES, BACKGROUND AND LINES TO TAKE

KEY ISSUE: CASTLE ARCHDALE COUNTRY PARK, LOUGH ERNE AND BLUE GREEN ALGAE

Lines to Take: Lough Erne and Blue Green Algae

- **The difficulties experienced through blue-green algal blooms demonstrate to us our reliance on and connection to the aquatic environment. Improvements in water quality will require us all to limit the pressures we place on the aquatic environment.**
- **Since my appointment, I have been clear that significant action needs to be taken to address poor water quality in Northern Ireland. My Department has launched Phase one of the Blue-Green Algae Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI) which is being developed to explore potential solutions to treat and reduce Blue-Green Algal blooms without impacting the natural environment of Lough Neagh and associated Northern Ireland water ways. The outcome of this initiative will help inform mitigation measures that may be transferable to other waterways across Northern Ireland such as Lough Erne. More fundamental-type research, complementing the SBRI, is currently being commissioned by DAERA from the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), including a project with a focus on in-lake nutrient recovery management options.**
- **Improving water quality across all rivers and lakes in Northern Ireland will help us combat the risk of future harmful algal blooms. Everyone can play their part in achieving this. DAERA will continue to support and collaborate with all stakeholders on initiatives to reduce nutrient impacts on receiving waterbodies.**

Background:

In respect of NIEA Regional Operations

1. **Castle Archdale Country Park (c108 Ha) has pleasant woodland and lakeshore walks and cycle tracks, situated in the former estate of the 18th-century Archdale Manor and the adjacent forest park (DAERA Forest Service), which also contains the ruins of 17th-century Archdale Castle. The island-filled bay was used in WWII as a base for Catalina flying boats, a history explained in the small museum in the country park visitor centre, there is also a marina and caravan park on site, both of which are managed privately under lease agreement. The park generally sees in the region of some 300,000 visits a year from the visiting public**

In respect of NIEA Water Management Unit

2. There have been a number of recent press articles on water quality in Lough Erne, in particular by the Impartial Reporter. Additionally, NIEA has a number of Environmental Information Requests in progress from the Impartial Reporter requesting information on blue green algae specifically correspondence between Minister Muir and his officials.
3. The thrust of press articles would suggest that water quality in Lough Erne is being neglected with an increase in blue green blooms occurring. In one article Deborah Erskine, MLA has told Impartial Reporter that the underlying crisis is twofold with lack of investment associated with Wastewater Treatment Works and failure to enforce regulations.
4. In 2024 there have been 22 confirmed reports of blue green algae on Lower Lough Erne and 3 confirmed reports from Upper Lough Erne (correct as of 9th September 2024).
5. Lower Lough Erne is comprised of two waterbodies for Water Framework Directive reporting purposes: Lower Lough Erne (Devenish) and Lower Lough Erne (Kesh). In 2021 both these waterbodies, together with Upper Lough Erne were assessed as being at less than good status due to excessive nutrients and the biological quality elements that respond to them.
6. For the period from 2019-2023 there has been total of 636 incidents investigated on the Lough Erne System with 249 classified as “no pollution found”. The confirmed incidents (387) have been classified as follows; 357 as “Low” severity, 28 as “Medium” severity and 2 as “High” severity
7. Of the confirmed incidents in Lough Erne system the principal cause of pollution is attributed to Agriculture (44%) followed by Industry (16%) then Northern Ireland Water (12%) sources. Since 2019 there have been 21 confirmed pollution reports associated with NI Water assets with all classified as low severity. Sources from Agriculture have attributed to 63% of all medium and high severity incidents reported in the Lough Erne catchment.
8. Since 2019 there have been 21 confirmed pollution reports associated with NI Water assets in the Enniskillen area. All incidents have been reported as low severity.
9. Under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999, it is an offence to cause pollution of a waterway or groundwater. Where the source of pollution can be traced, it is the policy of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), where appropriate, to take action.
10. In accordance with enforcement procedures NIEA does not take formal enforcement action under the Water (NI) Order 1999 for ‘Low Severity’ incidents. For each High or Medium Severity water pollution incident, where an ‘alleged polluter’ is identified, there will be a ‘Case Study’ carried out to assess the available evidence and make a decision on the appropriate enforcement action under the Water (NI) Order 1999.
11. Of the 30 medium and high severity incidents 6 had no polluter identified. There was sufficient evidence to take prosecution for 8 of the 30 cases classified as medium or

high severity within Lough Erne. This resulted in successful prosecution with fines totalling £8500. The remaining cases were dealt by way of Warning Letters with cost recovery, cross compliance or working with business to bring into compliance.

12. Fines for convictions under the Water (NI) Order 1999 is a matter for the judiciary.

KEY ISSUE: ENNISKILLEN AND CASTLE ARCHDALE WASTEWATER TREATMENT WORKS (WWTWS)

Lines to Take:

- **NIEA regulate discharges from Northern Ireland Water Ltd (NI Water) under the Water Order 1999 as amended. NIEA implement an extensive regulatory regime setting consent standards and conditions that contributes to achieving Good Water Quality Status in Northern Ireland Rivers, and to achieve compliance with the treatment requirements set down in the Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive.**
- **NIEA conduct an annual inspection programme of wastewater treatment works and associated infrastructure to assess compliance with Water Order Consents. Site inspection reports are prepared documenting the findings which are shared with NI Water for action where issues are identified. Bimonthly Compliance meetings are held between NI Water and NIEA to deal with issues highlighted and agree solutions.**
- **NIEA and NI Water also hold quarterly Pollution Incidents Liaison Group Meetings. The agenda of this Group's meetings include; (i) water pollution incidents and issues, (ii) incident causes and ways to minimise the risk of incident recurrence, (iii) communications ensuring that an optimal response is provided to reported water pollution incidents and (iv) ensure that NI Water staff are aware of, and updated in respect of the requirements of the Water (NI) Order 1999.**

Background:

Enniskillen and Castle Archdale Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTWs)

1. The Department regulates two WWTWs that discharge directly into Lough Erne serving Enniskillen and Castle Archdale Wastewater.
2. Enniskillen WWTW, the largest of these works, discharges to Lough Erne. Since the upgrade of this works in 2010, NIEA has reported that this works has been compliant with its Water Order Consent and the EU Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive.
3. Castle Archdale WWTW is a new Integrated Constructed Wetland and the discharge was only relocated to the Lough in 2019. NIEA has informed me that this treatment works has been complaint with its Water Order Consent since the new integrated constructed wetland was established.

Enniskillen Collection System

4. NIEA regulate Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) and Emergency Overflows (EOs) under Water Order Discharge Consents.

5. It is a regulatory requirement of these consents that overflows are designed to operate in heavy rainfall conditions, when the wastewater in sewer networks is significantly diluted with stormwater to prevent out of sewer flooding in properties.
6. The Department assesses spill frequency data from NI Water in relation to intermittent discharges within networks. As a result, increased storage at network assets, the provision of screening or closure may be necessary. These assessments are in the form of a Statement of Need and are compiled when spill frequency data is received from NI Water. A statement of Need for the Enniskillen network was completed and returned to NI Water in June 2021.
7. NIEA will continue to work closely with NI Water on the identification of unsatisfactory discharges and prioritisation for its wastewater capital investment programme to reduce its unsatisfactory discharges.