

## **Annex A**

### **Public Interest Test – EIR**

Reference Number – DAERA/26-78

Requested Information -

*Under the Environmental Information Regulations (NI) 1993, kindly provide evidence that DAERA complied with its obligations under Section 26(2) of the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 in relation to international river basin districts in the current 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle River Basin Management Plan for Northern Ireland.*

#### **Exemption / Exception under consideration**

Regulation 12(4)(d): the request relates to material which is still in the course of completion, to unfinished documents or to incomplete data; or

#### **Reasons for disclosure:**

- The right of the public to have access to information. Transparency and accountability.
- Greater public awareness and understanding of the Departments continued coordination and collaboration with colleagues in Ireland in relation to international river basin districts in the current 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle River Basin Management Plan for Northern Ireland.

#### **Reasons against disclosure:**

- The release of these documents could influence the decision-making process on development of the Shared Waters report in relation to international river basin districts in the current 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle River Basin Management Plan for Northern Ireland, without any compensating benefit to the public.
- Minister Muir has not yet been sufficiently sighted on the Shared Waters report which details work with colleagues in Ireland in relation to the third cycle River Basin Management Plan and is still under development.

#### **Conclusion**

Following consideration of the Public Interest Test in relation to the use of exceptions in Regulation 12(4)(d), the Department has decided not to disclose information as requested in relation to international river basin districts in the current 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle River Basin Management Plan for Northern Ireland. The Shared Waters report is still in development.

# Public Interest Test –EIR

Reference Number – DAERA/26-78

## Requested Information

*To provide evidence that DAERA complied with its obligations under Section 26(2) of the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017 in relation to international river basin districts in the current 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle River Basin Management Plan for Northern Ireland.*

## Exemption / Exception under consideration

Exemption: 12(4)(d)

## Reasons why the public interest would favour disclosure:

- Disclosure supports the principles of openness and transparency as set in the DAERA FOI Policy statement. The Department wants to create a climate of openness and dialogue with all. Improved access to information about DAERA will facilitate the development of such an environment.
- Access to official information can improve public confidence and trust.
- Public interest in understanding the process by which a decision was reached and having access to information on which decisions were made to enhance accountability
- DAERA is dedicated to improving public awareness and comprehension of environmental issues.

## Reasons why the public interest would favour withholding:

- Release of raw, unchecked or inaccurate data could lead to reputational damage.
- The Department requires safe space for officials and technical teams to complete verification work without external pressure that could compromise accuracy.
- Documents relate to the drafting process of PeacePlus call documents. Final versions are available online or identified for release.
- Documents refer to the processing steps of data and reports ahead of any future publication of Shared Waters report which details work with colleagues in Ireland in relation to the third cycle River Basin Management Plan and is still under development.
- Disclosure of information (unfinished documents and incomplete data) has the possibility to inhibit the future development of any programmes similar to PeacePlus.

## **Conclusion**

Following consideration of the Public Interest Test the Department has decided that on balance, the public interest in maintaining these exemptions outweigh the public interest in disclosing the available information.

Following consideration of the Public Interest Test the Department has decided not to release a number of records relating to the ongoing development and future publication of Shared Waters report. Documents relating to the development and drafting of PeacePlus Investment Area 5.3 have been withheld as final version are available online.

  
**Integrated Catchment Planning**

## North South Rivers and Lakes ‘Group’ –Terms of Reference May 2025

Name of Group	<b>WFD North South Rivers and Lakes Technical Advisory Group</b>
Chair	Jointly chaired by EPA and NIEA
Members	EPA: IFI: NIEA: Loughs Agency: AFBI: Waterways Ireland:
Aim	To ensure appropriate collaboration and consistency for Water Framework Directive classification for Ecoregion 17.  To promote cross-border co-operation and liaison on freshwater quality issues and research.
Method of Working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bilateral meetings (Twice a year, alternating between North and South),</li> <li>• E-mail correspondence</li> <li>• Topic meetings as required</li> </ul>
Relationship to other groups	<p><i>Advice and updates provided:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UKTAG and relevant Task Teams (Freshwater, Chemistry and related subgroups)</li> <li>• National Technical Implementation Group</li> <li>• Northern Ireland Fish Monitoring Group</li> <li>• National Aquatic Environmental Chemistry Group</li> </ul>
Outputs and Drivers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To agree appropriate classification schemes which are unique to Ecoregion 17</li> <li>2. To ensure compatibility of reporting classification in cross-border waterbodies/catchments</li> <li>3. To be aware of catchment improvement project monitoring and investigation</li> <li>4. To coordinate cross border investigations as required</li> <li>5. To consider monitoring and classification requirements of Characterisation and WISE reporting for RBMPs cycles</li> <li>6. To consider needs for further R&amp;D and evidence aimed at improving tools, monitoring and reporting</li> </ol>
Standing items	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To share updates from EU meetings (Intercalibration, ECOSTAT, CEN)</li> <li>2. To share updates on other classification tools not covered above.</li> <li>3. To provide a forum to informally peer review relevant research projects</li> <li>4. Data sharing for classification</li> <li>5. Issues arising from other Directives, such as Habitats, Drinking Water and Alien Species</li> </ol>

	6. Cross-border liaison on practical issues such as monitoring and training
Timescales	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Three year classification updates for cross border water bodies by end of June in relevant year</li><li>2. Monitoring and classification requirements for Characterisation and WISE as per reporting timeframes</li></ol>

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