

DAERA/25-282: Public Interest Test (PIT)

Assessment of EIR request from requester

Subject of public interest test

A request for information relating to a Lough Neagh Partnership proposal concerning a potential “*Lough Neagh fishing diversification economic resilience grant 2026/27*”, including the source of that information and any input from the Lough Neagh Fishermen’s Co-operative Society (LNFCS).

Exceptions being considered

- **Regulation 12(4)(e)** – Internal communications

Reasons for Disclosure:

- i. Disclosure would promote transparency and accountability in relation to how potential funding proposals affecting the Lough Neagh fishing sector are received and considered by the Department.
- ii. There is a public interest in understanding the context and content of proposals relating to environmental, fisheries and economic resilience issues affecting Lough Neagh.
- iii. Disclosure would assist stakeholders and the wider public in understanding how such proposals may inform future policy considerations.

Reasons against Disclosure:

- i. The draft proposal forms part of internal communications relating to the ongoing consideration and development of policy. Disclosure at this stage would be likely to inhibit the free and frank exchange of views between officials when assessing proposals and developing policy options.
- ii. The proposal is unfinalised and subject to further assessment. Premature disclosure is likely to lead to misinterpretation of the Department’s position and could undermine the integrity of the decision-making process.
- iii. There is a strong public interest in ensuring that the Department can properly consider, test and refine policy proposals in a safe space before any position is finalised.

Conclusion:

Having considered the public interest factors both in favour of disclosure and withholding, the Department has concluded that, while there is a clear public interest

in transparency, this is outweighed in this case by the need to protect the integrity of internal communications and the effective development of policy.

The Department has therefore determined that the public interest is best served by withholding the draft proposal document under Regulation 12(4)(e).


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