

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.

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

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.

The development of policy options on wildlife / badger intervention as an integral element of the TB Partnership Steering Group's Blueprint for eradication of bovine TB in NI. The department is also proposing to extend to Northern Ireland legislation currently restricted to Great Britain which would allow the licensing of trained lay vaccinators to vaccinate badgers against bTB.

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

Developing a	Policy <input checked="" 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 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.

A Blueprint for Eradication of bovine Tuberculosis in Northern Ireland.

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

The long-term aim is to strengthen the NI bovine TB programme by establishing an intervention that addresses the spread and maintenance of bovine tuberculosis from wildlife and enables the deployment of lay vaccinators.

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.

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

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

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.

The policy will have an impact on farm businesses, and beef and dairy farmers in particular, as it will pave the way for actions on wildlife / badger intervention. The eradication of bTB will be a long-term commitment. The eradication of this disease will bring substantial financial savings for taxpayers and the farming community, compared to the status quo situation possibly remaining for the next decades. While there may be increased bTB Programme costs in the short to medium-term, they are anticipated to lead to reduced disease incidence with associated reductions in compensation and testing activity over the medium to longer-term. The policy proposals focus on the eradication of a disease. Given the nature and spread of the disease, all rural parts of Northern Ireland are, and can be, affected. The policy will be applied equally across all rural/farming areas where the disease occurs and will involve all those stakeholders who have an interest in eradicating this disease. It is considered that there is no potential for partial or imbalance in the proposed actions and approaches which would impact on the rural community given that the focus is on the disease itself and addressing its spread and maintenance. The deployment of trained lay vaccinators is aimed at reducing the high costs associated with using veterinary surgeons for this purpose, making vaccination a more viable, cost-effective, and scalable alternative or complement to culling.

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 policies will have an impact on people in rural areas, as it relates to wildlife / badger intervention, and vaccination, on farms in rural areas.

The policies being consulted on will affect farming businesses and the agri-industry in general. Bovine TB is a chronic disease affecting cattle and a range of other bovine animals. It has affected cattle in countries across the world. The disease is contagious and involves complex interactions between animals, other like-species and the environment. DAERA pays compensation to farmers for infected animals which are destroyed and the cost of the NI bTB programme is expected to have exceeded £70m pounds in the 2025/26 financial year with £54m of this amount paid in compensation. This has been largely driven by the increasing market prices for cattle. The current bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) herd incidence rate stands at 9.66% for the twelve months to the end of February 2026. Disease rates have fallen in recent months but remain historically high.

It is also a very stressful disease for farmers and the animals themselves. It has and will have an adverse impact on animal exports. Other countries in the world have engaged in programmes to eradicate the disease. Scotland is bTB free and eradication programmes are in operation in the RoI, England and Wales.

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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input checked="" 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.

N/A

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with Other Organisations	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Research Papers	<input checked="" 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 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.

A bTB eradication programme for cattle is required under EU legislation, with Regulation (EU) 2016/429 (Animal Health Law) and its subordinate Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 689/2020 setting out the particular requirements in relation to bovine tuberculosis (bTB). In NI, this is supported by domestic legislation - the Tuberculosis Control Order (Northern Ireland) 1999 (as amended) and the Tuberculosis (Examination and Testing) Scheme Order (Northern Ireland) 1999 (as amended), and is focused around detection and removal of infected animals through routine annual testing; abattoir surveillance; the application of movement restrictions on infected herds and epidemiological investigation and supplementary testing for herds and individual animals considered at risk to bTB herd breakdowns. Despite these efforts, the trends portray a worrying picture and highlighted the importance of a critical review of the current approach to bTB in NI.

At the request of the DAERA Minister the NI Chief Veterinary Officer undertook a review of issues related to bTB programme and policy, including the actions contained in the Bovine TB Eradication Strategy. This culminated in the CVO review of bovine TB in NI which was published in November 2024.

Acting immediately on one of the recommendations within the CVO review the DAERA Minister instructed officials to establish a TB Partnership Steering Group to consider the proposals contained within the CVO review and to engage in a process of defined co-design of policies to input to and help progress a delivery plan along the three broad thematic areas of People, Cattle and Wildlife. An inaugural meeting of the TBPSG was held on 29 January 2025 and since then it has met frequently under the chairmanship of the CVO.

TBPSG members have considered the CVO proposals in detailed discussions and identified key priorities for action within short, medium and long term timescales and these have been incorporated with a new "Blueprint for eradication" and associated delivery plan. This has been endorsed by the DAERA Minister who recognised that the document was the culmination of extensive work by the TBPSG, and that the work now required represents a new, bold step forward for industry-government co-operation in the fight against bTB maintenance and spread. The Blueprint sets out the key priorities and actions to be further developed to tackle bTB and clearly identifies those measures where progress must be made in the immediate future across the three pillars of people, cattle and wildlife.

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

DAERA has recognised that bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) has a devastating impact upon the farming industry, not least in terms of the considerable financial cost of the TB Programme to farmers and taxpayers - overall cost of the TB programme now in excess of £70 million; indirect cost to farmers, assessed by a UFU commissioned report at £96 million.

DAERA also recognises that a breakdown in a herd can cause immense stress and hardship to our farmers, and continuing high levels of bTB may be a future barrier to trade. Our current programme underpins the ability of NI's livestock sectors to trade with the EU and internationally with trade in bovines and their products valued at approaching £3billion (£1,697million beef/sheep and £1,277million milk products).

However, since Brexit, as the UK seeks to strike new international trade deals, we are only too aware that sustained levels of bTB in Northern Ireland may be a trade barrier, curtailing our agri-food industry's access to new markets.

The costs of bTB are not confined to the direct financial costs to government but also involve a significant financial burden on farmers and farming families. Not only is there a loss of income with the early removal of reactors from farms, but indirect costs are also substantial with loss of genetics and productivity, and the additional labour involved in facilitating bTB testing. Furthermore, restrictions applied to bTB infected herds, and the removal of reactor animals, causes significant emotional and psychological distress to farming families across NI.

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?

N/A

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.

The DAERA Minister has made the eradication of bTB a priority. The achievement of the eradication of bTB from the Northern Ireland cattle herd is vital for our cattle health, human health and trade exports and in underpinning DAERA's vision of "delivering a net zero nature positive future, supporting sustainable agriculture and thriving rural communities". The Blueprint strategy for bTB eradication will be implemented over a long period (a 30+ year period) and will involve significant financial commitment by government.

The UK leaving the EU had major implications for NI's farming community, and high levels of bTB may be a future barrier to trade. Our current programme underpins the ability of NI's livestock sectors to trade with the EU and internationally.

It is essential to ensure the bTB programme remains affordable and continues to be able to support the NI cattle industry. The bTB eradication programme underpins trade in bovines and their products, valued at approaching £3billion (£1,697million beef/sheep and £1,277million milk products).

In addition, the policy aims to re-balance the cost of the disease between the public and private sectors, so encouraging a change of culture and attitude, and a shared commitment to the control and eradication of bTB; and to identify new sustainable arrangements which would allow Government to maximise and better deploy resources.

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 aim of the proposed policies is to address the economic and social impacts that bovine TB has on the rural economy, farm businesses and on farmers and rural communities. DAERA is committed to making farm businesses sustainable and working with industry to increase trade and reduce the stress that a TB breakdown causes.

To achieve this, DAERA is seeking to work better with farmers, vets, conservationists, land owners and other key stakeholders to improve and enhance the current regime of testing and disease prevention, and to stop the disease entering the farm in the first place.

The majority of costs associated with the eradication of bTB are met by public finances. There are increasing pressures on public finances, and it is unlikely that this position will be sustainable in the longer-term, particularly as the UK seeks to strike new international trade deals, DAERA is only too aware that sustained levels of bTB can be a disincentive for further reopening of our agri-food industry to new markets.

In a recent report commissioned by the Ulster Farmers' Union farmers have described the strain of living under prolonged restriction, the uncertainty, the repeated testing and the effect on their immediate family. Farmers experiences show that stress and anxiety often peak during testing and breakdown periods but do not simply disappear afterwards. The report found that 14% of calls to Rural Support relate specifically to the impact of bovine TB.

The TB Partnership Steering Group's Blueprint for eradication of bTB recognises the need for shared responsibility for eradicating bTB from cattle in Northern Ireland, and the need to encourage the cultural change required to progress the eradication of bTB from Northern Ireland. Savings accrued would provide the Department with the opportunity to seek additional resources to support other measures proposed within the Blueprint for Eradication document and delivery plan that are necessary to achieve the goal of eradication of bTB from Northern Ireland.

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.

N/A

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.



Rural Needs Impact Assessment undertaken by:	Damian McKeivitt
Position/Grade:	Deputy Principal
Division/Branch	Animal Health and Welfare Policy Division / TB Policy Branch
Signature:	
Date:	05 May 2026
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Martin Walsh
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Date:	05 May 2026