



Introduction of fees for Marine Licensing  
Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)  
Screening and Scoping Opinions  
Consultation Paper  
June 2026

Attributed to Alain



Department of  
**Agriculture, Environment  
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

**Fairmin, Environment  
an' Kintra Matthers**

[www.daera-ni.gov.uk](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk)

This document is also available on the DAERA website at:

[Consultations | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

The document can be provided in other formats on request, such as:

- Paper Copy
- Large Print
- Braille
- Other Languages

To request an alternative format, please contact us at:

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Guidance is provided on the 'Confidentiality' of responses under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, on page 5 of this document for your reference.

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## 1. About this consultation

This consultation paper seeks views and comments on proposals to apply fixed fees for providing screening and scoping opinions for developments in the Northern Ireland marine area. Screening and scoping opinions are discretionary, pre-application services provided at the request of developers.

The power that enables DAERA to charge these fees is set out at [Regulation 3](#) of the Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)) Regulations 2007 as amended (the Marine Works Regulations).

The consultation is likely to be of interest to people who apply for a marine licence. This may include businesses, developers, operators, clubs/associations, individuals, conservation bodies, environmental groups, and other stakeholders with an interest in the marine environment.

A list of the questions that we would welcome your response to are set out at Annex A.

### 1.1. Purpose of this consultation

DAERA recognises the need to keep people informed and to give people the opportunity to comment on our policy proposals. There is also a requirement at regulation 3 of the Marine Works Regulations to consult with organisations which represent people who are likely to apply for a regulatory approval before introducing fees to cover relevant expenses.

[The Marine Works \(Environmental Impact Assessment\) Regulations 2007](#)

This consultation therefore invites people to answer a number of questions on proposals to apply fixed fees for screening and scoping opinions, in line with the requirements of Managing Public Money Northern Ireland, to support a more effective marine licensing system.

### 1.2. Timing and duration of this consultation

The consultation will commence on the 5 June 2026 and close on the 31 July 2026.

### 1.3. How to respond

You can respond to this consultation online by completing the Citizen Space response template which can be accessed using the link below:

<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/>

Please supplement your response with any relevant supporting evidence, analysis, or information that you consider important.

Written response should be sent to e-mail:

[MarineLicensingFeesConsultation@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:MarineLicensingFeesConsultation@daera-ni.gov.uk)

**Postal address:**

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When responding, please state whether you are doing so as an individual or representing the views of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please make it clear who the organisation represents, and where applicable, how the views of members or stakeholders were gathered and considered.

The consultation will be available in other formats upon request. You can email any queries to:

[MarineLicensingFeesConsultation@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:MarineLicensingFeesConsultation@daera-ni.gov.uk)

## 2. How we consult

### 2.1. Consultation principles

The consultation can be responded to in full or in part, guided by where your interest lies. You may find it helpful to answer questions as they arise at the end of each proposal. We know that not everyone will wish to or feel able to answer all the questions in this consultation. You are encouraged to answer the questions you would like to respond to, but you don't have to respond to all of them. There are some questions to be answered on the 'About you' page. Once these have been completed you may submit your response. Following the closing date, all responses will be analysed and considered along with other available evidence to inform how DAERA will proceed. It will then be up to the DAERA Minister to consider how to proceed with the application of the Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) Fees. The Minister will decide whether to proceed with the proposals, and the appropriate timing for introducing any fees.

### 2.2. Confidentiality

The Department will publish a synopsis of responses to the consultation. This will include a list of names of organisations that responded but not personal names, addresses or other contact details. Your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may be disclosed on request and/or made available on the DAERA website (redacted). The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of responses as this will give you guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this consultation.

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 give the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, in this case DAERA. The right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation.

The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this publication should be made public or treated as confidential.

The information provided in your response, excluding personal data, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. Any personal information you provide will be handled in accordance with the UK GDPR and will not be published.

If you want the non-personal information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please tell us why. However, please be aware that under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

For information regarding how your personal data will be handled, please refer to the DAERA Privacy Statement at: [DAERA Privacy Statement | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](#).

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioners Office. Its website can be found at [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk).

### 3. Introduction and Background

DAERA is the marine licensing authority for the Northern Ireland inshore region (0-12 nautical miles), as set out at section 113(6)(b) of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009. This function is discharged by the Marine Licensing Branch which sits within Marine and Fisheries Division, and forms part of the Department's Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group.

In discharging its marine licensing function, DAERA supports sustainable development and effective regulation in the Northern Ireland inshore region. In 2024, DAERA consulted on proposals to amend marine licensing fees. A copy of that consultation, the summary of responses and related documents is available at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-proposals-amend-marine-licensing-fees>

The 2024 consultation sought views on:

- A proposed increase to marine licensing fees,
- Proposals to amend the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 through the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill<sup>1</sup>, to enable DAERA to recover the cost of the resource expended in discharging its marine licensing functions, and
- The proposed introduction of hourly fees for certain EIA services, namely providing screening opinions, scoping opinions and assessment of certain monitoring requirements under regulations 3(1) and 10(4J) of the Marine Works Regulations.

DAERA received ten responses from stakeholders on the proposal to introduce fees for EIA services. Two responses were supportive (20%), and eight responses did not support the proposal (80%). DAERA accepted that stakeholder responses were predominantly negative. Concerns included that charging different hourly rates based on staff grade introduced

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<sup>1</sup> The Administrative and Financial Provision Bill is progressing through the Northern Ireland Assembly. Information on the Bill's passage can be found at

<https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/legislation/2022-2027-mandate/primary-legislation-bills-22-27-mandate/administrative-and-financial-provisions-bill/>

uncertainty into the overall cost of obtaining a marine licence. DAERA had proposed hourly rates to allow recovery of the full cost of providing the service, reflecting the level of staff input required.

As a result of the consultation, DAERA did not proceed with the introduction of hourly charges for providing EIA services.

### **4. Background to charging fixed fees for EIA services**

DAERA is conscious of the financial pressures faced by the Northern Ireland Executive and is cognisant of its responsibilities under Managing Public Money Northern Ireland, which states that fees for services should generally be charged at cost. Considering these responsibilities, DAERA reconsidered the cost of providing EIA services and has developed fixed fees for screening and scoping opinions. This approach aims to recover the cost of providing the service while responding to stakeholder concerns regarding uncertainty and variable charges.

DAERA considered introducing fees for assessing monitoring measures but has decided not to introduce monitoring fees at this stage. This is because the Department intends to undertake a fundamental review of marine licensing fees once additional powers become available through the Administrative and Financial Provisions Bill.

DAERA provides screening and scoping opinions under the Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2007 (as amended). While regulation 3 allows the Department to charge a reasonable fee for providing these services, DAERA does not intend to charge a fee for post-consent EIA services at this stage. This consultation seeks views on proposed fixed fees for screening and scoping opinions only.

#### **4.1. Screening and scoping opinion**

An applicant for a marine licence for which an Environmental Statement may be required can request a screening and/or scoping opinion. These are discretionary services provided by the Department.

A screening opinion is typically requested before a formal marine licence application is submitted and provides developers with an early indication of whether a project is subject to the Marine Works Regulations.

A scoping opinion is requested by a developer and provides information on the scope and level of detail required in an Environmental Statement. It identifies the specific environmental issues that should be considered and addressed in the Environmental Statement to inform the determination of a future marine licence application.

As set out at schedule 4, paragraph 3(1)(b) of the Marine Works Regulations, DAERA as the appropriate authority, can require an applicant to pay a reasonable fee in respect of any examinations or tests that are necessary to help inform the scoping opinion. DAERA proposes that these costs are paid directly by the applicant to the organisation or individual who has performed the examinations or tests.

### **4.2. Monitoring**

Monitoring requirements are set by the Department and are specified in an EIA consent decision. An EIA consent decision may include conditions requiring mitigation or monitoring, and the assessment of monitoring results.

The Department also has the power to apply monitoring conditions to EIA determinations made by another consenting authority, and to charge a fee for assessing the resulting monitoring data.

However, the Department is not proposing to introduce monitoring fees for the assessment of monitoring results at this stage.

### **4.3. Rationale for applying EIA fees**

Marine licensing is an important statutory function that supports sustainable development in the Northern Ireland inshore region. There is increasing interest in the use of the Northern Ireland marine area for strategic projects, such as renewable energy projects. These types of projects can create economic opportunities to tackle climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 places a statutory duty on DAERA to assist in the delivery of a target of net zero emissions by 2050. It also creates an ambitious target of 80% renewable electricity consumption in Northern Ireland by 2030 as reflected in the Northern Ireland Energy Strategy which is available from the Department for the Economy [website](#).

The Draft Offshore Renewable Energy Action Plan has been designed to accelerate progress towards these goals, setting the pathway towards deploying up to 1GW of offshore wind from 2030. This growing demand has implications for DAERA as the marine licensing authority for the inshore region.

DAERA is committed to taking a collaborative approach across Government to ensure that activities are progressed in a coordinated, informed, and transparent manner. A key objective is to support proportionate and efficient consenting processes.

The introduction of fixed fees for EIA services is an important part of ensuring that costs are recovered in a fair, transparent and sustainable way, in line with Managing Public Money Northern Ireland.

Introducing fixed fees also forms part of a wider programme to make the marine licensing system more efficient and equitable.

## 5. EIA Fees applicable in other licensing regimes

Please note that while the basic procedure within other UK and RoI marine licensing regimes are similar, charging provisions may differ. The summary below is for illustration purposes only. The Marine Works Regulations apply only to fees charged by the MMO and Natural Resources Wales.

### 5.1. England

The Marine Management Organisation (MMO) uses hourly rates rather than fixed fees. Screening and scoping opinions are charged at £122 per hour, with additional charges of £112.12 per hour for advice from Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas). Fees are invoiced monthly.

Fees for assessing monitoring information are £94 per hour, or £112.12 per hour when Cefas advice is required. In 2025, Defra consulted on proposals to increase hourly rates to £155 per hour.

Full details are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-licensing-fees/marine-licensing-fees>  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/marine-licences-changes-to-fees-exemptions-and-self-service-licences>

### 5.2. Wales

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) discharges marine licensing functions on behalf of Welsh Ministers.

It uses a combination of fixed fees and an hourly rate.

Screening opinion: £600 (fixed fee, payable on submission)

Scoping opinion: £120 per hour (with no maximum fee)

Full details are available at:

<https://naturalresources.wales/permits-and-permissions/marine-licensing/marine-licensing-fees-and-charges/?lang=en>

### 5.3. Scotland

The Marine Directorate Licensing Operations Team (MD-LOT) discharges marine licensing functions on behalf of Scottish Ministers in the Scottish inshore and offshore regions. MD-LOT does not currently apply the fee charging provisions of the Marine Works Regulations. Equivalent provision is made under the Marine Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017.

### 5.4. Republic of Ireland

Fees for EIA screening and scoping are charged by An Bord Pleanála (ABP) under section 144 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

Screening Opinion: Under section 77 of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, a person may apply to the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) for a declaration on whether a Maritime Area Consent (MAC) is required. The application fee is €1,000.

Scoping opinion: EIA scoping requests attract a fee of €5,000 and currently do not charge for monitoring.

### 5.5. Terrestrial planning EIA fees in Northern Ireland

Marine licensing operates alongside the terrestrial planning system, and many developments require both planning permission and a marine licence. For this reason, it is helpful to note how EIA-related fees apply within the Northern Ireland planning regime.

Under the Planning (Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015, an additional fixed charge of £12,924 is payable where an application for planning permission is for EIA development and requires an Environmental Statement (Regulation 11). This charge is applied in addition to the standard planning application fee, up to the maximum fee for the development category.

This comparison demonstrates that fixed charges for EIA-related activities are already established within the Northern Ireland planning system, and that the introduction of fixed fees in the marine licensing context is consistent with this wider regulatory approach.

## 6. Improvements to marine licensing system

DAERA intends to introduce a new Digital Marine Licensing Application System. The new System will enable applicants to:

- Navigate the application process intuitively, with step-by-step guidance throughout.
- Create and manage an individual or organisational account, allowing secure access to new and existing applications.
- Act either as an Agent or as an individual applicant, depending on the needs of the project.
- Submit applications for: Pre-Application Discussions (PADs, Screening Opinions, Scoping Opinions, Exemptions (as provided for under the Marine Licensing (Exempted Activities) Order (Northern Ireland) 2011) and marine licences.
- Upload digital documents, plans and supporting evidence directly to support their application.
- Create and submit interactive maps to support project location and activity details.

- Receive automatically generated licence fee calculations, with direct links to the payment process.
- Receive submission confirmations and status updates, including notifications where further action is required.
- Access Public Notice advertisement templates and upload proof of completed public notifications, helping applicants meet statutory public consultation duties.
- Access a new online Public Register, where all relevant application data will be uploaded to meet statutory requirements under section 101 of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 and to ensure full transparency across all applications.

Further information on the new system is available at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/daera-ni-marine-licensing-application-system-coming-2026>

## 7. How the fees were calculated

### 7.1. Screening Opinions

DAERA adopted a mixed approach to developing fees. Screening opinions require less staff time than scoping opinions, so the Department reviewed the fees charged by other UK and RoI regulators for equivalent services. The only directly comparable regulator is in Wales, which currently charges £600 for a screening opinion with other regulators charging an hourly rate.

DAERA proposes to charge a fixed fee of £600 for screening opinions.

### 7.2. Scoping Opinions

A casework review was carried out by DAERA which assessed the time spent by staff at different grades to prepare scoping opinions. The cost to the Department was then calculated for each sample case using 2025-2026 staff hourly rates, and the results were averaged. As renewable energy projects typically require significantly more staff time and a separate higher fee has been developed for those projects.

DAERA proposes that where additional third-party costs are incurred, such as the need to seek specialist advice or expertise, these costs will be passed directly to the applicant in addition to the fixed fee.

## 8. Proposed fees for the Northern Ireland inshore region (0 to 12 nautical miles)

DAERA proposes to charge the following fixed fees.

EIA Service	Project type	Fee
Screening Opinion	All	£600
Scoping Opinion	Renewable Energy projects	£35,259
	All other EIA projects	£16,472

## Annex A: LIST OF CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

**Question 1:** Do you agree with the proposed screening fee rate?

Please provide information to support your opinion.

**Question 2:** Do you agree with the proposed scoping fee for a renewable project?

Please provide information to support your opinion.

**Question 3:** Do you agree with the scoping fee for a non-renewable project?

Please provide information to support your opinion.

**Question 4:** Do you agree with the Department's proposal that costs for specialist advice such as examinations or tests not available within the department should be passed directly to the applicant for payment?

Please provide information to support your opinion.

**Question 5:** The Section 75 Equality Screening concludes that the application of the proposed EIA fees is unlikely to have any impacts on people in terms of their equality of opportunity, their rights as people with a disability or their human rights under the Human Rights Act 1998. Do you support this conclusion? If you have any views on the content of this document or any information you wish to share with the Department, please include in your response.

Please provide information to support your opinion.

**Question 6:** The Rural Needs Impact Assessment concludes that the application of the proposed EIA fees is unlikely to impact on people in rural areas. Do you support this conclusion? If you have any views on the content of this document or any information you wish to share with the Department, please include in your response.

Please provide information to support your opinion.

For further information:

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