

**Food, Farming and Rural Affairs
Group**
Agricultural Policy Division



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

Our reference: DAERA/26-337

██████████ via

Email: ██████████

Agricultural Policy Division
Clare House
303 Airport Road West
Belfast BT3 9EB

Tel: 0300 200 7850

Email: agriculturalpolicy@daera-ni.gov.uk

10 June 2026

Dear ██████████,

Complaint and Environmental Information Regulations 2004

Please find below the Department's response to your complaint and your request under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, received on 15 May 2026.

Complaint response

DAERA is committed to ensuring that all publicly funded schemes, including the Farming with Nature (FwN) Package, are administered with transparency, integrity, and in accordance with established governance and accountability frameworks.

The Department has considered the specific matters raised in your correspondence. Based on the information available, no evidence has been identified that participation in stakeholder engagement activity or involvement in Farming with Nature schemes has influenced eligibility decisions or resulted in preferential treatment.

Engagement with farmers and land managers is undertaken for communication and awareness purposes only and is separate from the assessment and approval of

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE
We invest in people Standard

scheme applications. Participation in such activity does not constitute endorsement of any personal, financial or commercial interests.

The Department operates within established governance, probity, and audit controls to safeguard public funds. These include defined eligibility criteria, application requirements, administrative checks, and inspection processes to ensure compliance with scheme rules.

The Department notes your concerns regarding potential conflicts of interest and public confidence and will continue to keep its processes under review.

Environmental Information Regulations 2004

I can advise that the Department has completed its search and can confirm that it holds some of the information you requested.

The information held which can be disclosed is below and attached at **Annex A**.

The Department has decided not to disclose some of the information you requested as it considers the following exceptions to be engaged:

- Regulation 12(4)(d) - Material in the course of completion, unfinished documents, and incomplete data.
- Regulation 12(4)(e) – Internal communications

In these instances, the Department is legislatively required to consider the public interest in disclosure. An associated Public Interest Test has been conducted and is attached for your information at **Annex B (i)**.

Some of the information held constitutes personal data of which you are not the data subject. In these instances, the Department is required to consider if disclosure would breach the first Data Protection Principle, which states that processing must be lawful, fair and transparent.

The Department has considered this element within the test attached at **Annex B(ii)** and has determined that no lawful basis for disclosure under FOI / EIR exists.

Please bear in mind that any disclosure must be considered in terms of disclosure to the “world at large” and not just to you, the requester. Consequently, third party personal data falling within the scope of this request has been withheld.

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

Background to Farming with Nature

The Farming with Nature Package is a key component of DAERA's Sustainable Agriculture Programme (SAP), which aims to transition Northern Ireland to a more sustainable farming sector. This includes delivering environmental and climate benefits while continuing to support a productive and economically viable agri-food industry.

The overarching aim of Farming with Nature is to scale up nature-friendly farming practices by rewarding farmers for the provision of environmental public goods alongside food production.

The package is being introduced on a phased basis and seeks to enhance the extent, quality, and connectivity of habitats across the farmed landscape, both within and beyond designated sites.

The first scheme, the Farming with Nature Transition Scheme, launched in June 2025.

Response to Questions

Please see responses below:

1. What safeguards are in place to prevent Farming with Nature funding being used in circumstances connected to habitat disturbance arising from commercial development projects?

A - The Department operates a range of controls to ensure compliance with scheme rules. These include defined eligibility criteria, application requirements, administrative checks, and inspection processes. These controls are designed to ensure that funding is used appropriately and in line with scheme objectives.

2. Are applicants required to declare financial interests or involvement in renewable energy developments, land option agreements, or associated infrastructure projects?

A – Applicants to Farming with Nature schemes are not required to declare financial interests in renewable energy developments, land option agreements, or related infrastructure projects.

3. Has DAERA undertaken any conflict of interest assessment regarding participation in Farming with Nature schemes by individuals connected to major development proposals in protected landscapes?

A – The Department has not undertaken conflict of interest assessments in relation to participation by individuals connected to development proposals.

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

Applications are assessed on a case-by-case basis against the published eligibility criteria.

4. Will DAERA publish clear eligibility criteria and exclusions relating to land subject to industrial development, peat excavation, road construction, grid infrastructure, or habitat compensation measures?

A –All land mapped on DAERA’s Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) is eligible for support under Farming with Nature, except for ineligible land features and land uses as outlined in DAERA’s Guide to Land Eligibility ([Guide to Land Eligibility 2026.pdf](#)). If any part of an agricultural holding has been made permanently ineligible, farm businesses are required to inform DAERA and the LPIS is updated to reflect the changes. LPIS (fields and features) are also updated to reflect any changes detected by, for example, continual monitoring and inspections

5. Has any equality, environmental governance, or public confidence assessment been undertaken regarding these issues?

A – Relevant impact assessments, including equality and environmental considerations, will be completed for future Farming with Nature schemes in line with statutory and policy requirements.

The Farming with Nature (FwN) Transition Scheme has now closed. The associated impact assessments can be accessed at the following links:

- *FwN Transition Scheme Rural Needs Impact Assessment:*

[FwN Transition Scheme Rural Needs Impact Assessment | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs,](#)

- FwN Transition Scheme Regulatory Impact Assessment:

[Regulatory Impact Screening - Farming with Nature \(FwN\) Transition Scheme | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

Additional Information

Information relating to the Sustainable Agriculture Programme, including environmental assessments, rural needs assessments, regulatory impact assessments, and equality considerations, is available at:

- <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/about-sustainable-agriculture-programme-sap>

This is the primary location where supporting documentation for Farming with Nature will be published as it becomes available.

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

Farming with Nature scheme details are available at:

- [Agricultural & Environmental Scheme Details | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

If you require any clarification, believe that any part of your request has been overlooked, misunderstood or misinterpreted, please contact me in the first instance to see if it is a matter that can be resolved.

If you are unhappy with the manner in which your request for information has been handled or the decision to release/withhold information, you have the right to request a formal review by the Department.

If you wish to do so, please contact the Internal Review Section either by e-mailing daera.informationmanager@daera-ni.gov.uk or by post at The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Data Protection & Information Management Branch, Floor 2, Jubilee House, 111 Ballykelly Road, Ballykelly, Limavady BT49 9HP, within two months from the date of this letter.

If after such an internal review you are still unhappy with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, CHESHIRE SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review of the Department's decision.

Yours sincerely,

██████████

██████████

Agricultural Policy Division

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE[®]
We invest in people Standard