

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.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)

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.

Implementation of a revised Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) for Northern Ireland for 2027-2030

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

Developing a	Policy <input 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 checked="" 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.

The Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) Regulations (Northern Ireland)

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

There is a statutory obligation in the Nutrients Action Programme Regulations (NI) 2019, to carry out a review of the action programme. The primary aim of the Nutrients Action Programme is to improve water quality by protecting surface and ground waters from pollution by agricultural sources.

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 NAP applies to all farms in Northern Ireland. This assessment considers farmers, and their families as people in rural areas who will be most impacted by it. The NAP was first introduced in 2007 and has been reviewed and revised three times with the most recent Regulations made in 2019. Farmers will be familiar with the 2019 NAP, which has a range of measures mainly regarding management of organic and inorganic fertilisers. The measures aim to reduce the risks of nutrient pollution from agricultural sources and therefore protect and improve the quality of surface and ground waters in NI.

It is proposed that the revised NAP Regulations will carry forward all the measures from the 2019 NAP, some of which have been revised and there are also new measures. These are outlined in section 4A. Farmers and other relevant rural stakeholders could face administrative costs to comply with the new requirements. Farms will have to make informed decisions over the changes that are necessary to their farm enterprise and nutrient management. These changes may create new costs; however better nutrient management could potentially decrease farm input costs while maintaining or improving farm productivity. Actions taken on farm will reduce levels of nutrient pollution in river, lakes and other waterways.

This will lead to benefits for other people in rural areas, because our water environment is essential for everyday life. It supports a wide range of benefits including clean drinking water, agriculture and food production, wildlife and biodiversity and recreation, tourism and local economies.

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 NAP Regulations will impact people in rural areas differently in comparison to urban areas. This is because the Regulations relate to nutrient management practices that farmers and farm families will be required to implement. However, people from both rural and urban areas will benefit from improvements to water quality.

As outlined in 2B, farmers may have to make the necessary changes to their farming practices, and they could face administrative and other costs. However, there could potentially be decreased farm input costs while maintaining or improving farm productivity. People in rural areas who have businesses that support the agri-food supply chain (for example feed and fertiliser merchants or slurry spreading contractors) may also be impacted by the revised NAP measures. It is recognised that farmers and other people in rural areas will need time and support to understand what the requirements are. Support may include advisory services, training and potential financial assistance. The aim is to support farmers in adapting to changes while maintaining viable farm businesses

There is potential that additional costs in the supply chain could pass on costs to the consumer. However, as consumers are both from urban and rural areas, the impact is likely to be the same for both. The NAP Regulations aim to protect and improve water quality in rivers and lakes. The environmental benefits will be positive for society generally. However it is likely that rural communities, who generally live closer to rivers and lakes, and whose livelihoods may rely on good water quality, will benefit more than urban communities who are visitors to rural areas for leisure purposes.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rural Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Education or Training in Rural Areas	<input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/>
Deprivation in Rural Areas	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Crime or Community Safety	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Development	<input 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.

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 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 review of the Nutrients Action Programme Regulations (NI) 2019 was carried out and the outcome of this has been considered in developing the revised action programme.
- A NAP Stakeholder Task and Finish Group was established in October 2025 and met on 13 occasions. It comprised representatives from farming, agri-food, environment and the Department. The purpose of this group was to work collaboratively and propose measures and actions that would meet legislative requirements, that were evidence based and workable at farm level. Terms of reference can be found here [NAP Stakeholder Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference 22 10 25.pdf](#)
- Farmers and Families in Northern Ireland, Results of a Social Survey of Farmers and Farm Families conducted in 2001/02
- 2018 Farmer Equality Indicators Report
- 2021 Northern Ireland Census
- 2023 Northern Ireland Agricultural Census & Northern Ireland Integrated Farm Survey
- There will be a full public consultation on proposals for the revised action programme in 2026.
- A Strategic Environmental Assessment and a Habitats Regulation Assessment on the revised action programme have been carried out and will be consulted on in 2026.

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

- **Improved nutrient management efficiency** – advisory services and support for farm businesses to make informed decisions that will lead to sustainable farming practices, improved viability of farm businesses and reduced risk to the environment.
- **Improved water quality** – the action programme is an ongoing policy, and the proposed measures will help to improve water quality, which is needed to support farming, food production, biodiversity, the rural economy and a healthy environment for people living in rural areas.
- **Support for tourism** - Good water quality in rivers and lakes also has benefits by encouraging access to the countryside and increased tourism which will benefit people who live and work in rural areas.

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?

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.

Improved nutrient management efficiency

Revised measures will mean that some farming practices may change and may result in some additional costs for farmers initially. However, there could potentially be decreased farm input costs while maintaining or improving farm productivity.

The revised measures primarily carry over existing measures from the existing Nutrients Action Programme (2019). The following additional measures are proposed for the new Action Programme 2026:

- Further Mandatory use of LESSE introduced on a phased basis to 2030
- Further restrictions on use of Chemical Fertiliser containing phosphorus on grassland
- Additional Phosphorus controls, for more intensively stocked farms
- Prohibition on the use of granular Urea Fertiliser without a Urease Inhibitor between 1 April and 15 September
- Updated nitrogen and phosphorus excretion values for livestock and revised nutrient limits for grassland
- Requirement to pre-notification of new slurry storage facilities prior to construction
- Enhanced monitoring and reporting requirements for slurry, manure and digestate movements through improved digital systems
- Increased use of advisory support, voluntary measures and nutrient efficiency initiatives, including a Nutrient Efficiency Roadmap
- A focused, catchment-based approach to improving water quality in high-risk areas
- Introduce a Nutrient Stewardship Programme, to replace the current Derogation application process and requirements.

Improved Water Quality:

Measures will contribute towards improved water quality in rivers and lakes. This will lead to enhanced biodiversity, fish habitats, reduced cost for water treatment and improvement in the aesthetic standard of water bodies.

Support for Tourism

Improved water quality in rivers and lakes encourages use of the countryside, sustains the viability of rural businesses and as a result benefits rural communities as a whole

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 rural needs of individuals are taken into account within the revised action programme which applies to all farms across Northern Ireland.

The proposed revised action programme considers the different types of farms/farmers. The needs of the individual farmers in rural areas are being catered for by ensuring some of the measures are targeted in order to achieve the best outcome while minimising the number of farms impacted.

The overall aim is to regulate good nutrient management practices and to reduce the risk of agricultural pollution to water.

A NAP Stakeholder Task and Finish Group was established in October 2025 and met on 13 occasions. It comprised representatives from farming, agri-food, environment and the Department. The purpose of this group was to work collaboratively and propose measures and actions that would meet legislative requirements, that were evidence based and workable at farm level. Terms of reference can be found here [NAP Stakeholder Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference 22 10 25.pdf](#)

The Department will be carrying out a full public consultation on the revised action programme along with consultations on the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulatory Assessment and will fully consider all responses received as part of this process.

A detailed and rigorous Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) has been prepared to accompany the NAP consultation. This provides the costs and benefits of implementing the revised proposed measures. The benefits to the environment and water quality have also been considered in the RIA and views on this RIA will be requested as part of the consultation.

The programme will also be influenced by ongoing monitoring and assessment of the measures with a commitment to continue to revisit and review the action programme on a regular basis.



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.

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:	Leanne McGrath
Position/Grade:	DP
Division/Branch	Environmental Farming Branch
Signature:	
Date:	22/06/26
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Fiona Dickson
Position/Grade:	Deputy Director (Grade 6)
Division/Branch:	Natural Environment Policy Division
Signature:	
Date:	24 June 2026