

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, Northern Ireland

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.

Amendment of the Hemp (Third Country Import) Regulations 2002.

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 Hemp Third Country Import (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 (TBC)

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

The EU has updated rules for hemp third country, raising the maximum acceptable tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) content level of eligibility for direct payments from 0.2% to 0.3%, which in turn have raised the maximum acceptable THC content for hemp products imported from third countries to 0.3%. The UK's domestic regulations, The Hemp (Third Country Imports) Regulations 2002, stipulate that no person shall import hemp products from a third country where the THC content is greater than 0.2%. As EU hemp imports regulations are directly applicable in Northern Ireland under Annex 2 of the Windsor Framework, the domestic legislation is out of date and will need to be updated on a NI basis. The Hemp (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 will raise the maximum acceptable THC content for hemp products from 0.2% to 0.3% and will make technical amendments which update legislative references.

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.

N/A

Rationale for using alternative definition of 'rural'.

N/A

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

N/A

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.

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.

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 type="checkbox"/>
Rural Tourism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	<input 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 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 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.

The Hemp Third Country Import (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 (TBC) will be used to increase the maximum THC level for imports of hemp and hemp seeds from 0.2% to 0.3% and will also make technical amendments which will update legislative references. The new rules set out in Article 189 of Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013 have raised maximum THC content to 0.3% for hemp and or hemp seeds imported from third countries. Article 189 is covered in Chapter IV or Part III of Regulation (EU) No 1308/2013, which falls under Annex 2 of the Windsor Framework making this change directly applicable in Northern Ireland.

The SR will maintain the status quo as far as possible. The relaxation to maximum acceptable THC will allow for a greater selection of hemp and hemp seeds available, but it is not expected to make any significant impact on how policy currently operates. Colleagues in Forest Service have confirmed that there have been no hemp movements into Northern Ireland from GB, the EU or third countries into Northern Ireland since EU exit, outside of the Northern Ireland Retail Movement Scheme (NIRMS). Forest services are unaware of any movements through NIRMS, but have confirmed their engagement with retailers who may sell hemp seeds as a health product (e.g. Holland and Barrett) is relatively limited. As such, it is expected that the Hemp Amendment Regulations will have no impact on industry and no specific impact on 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 type="checkbox"/>	Published Statistics	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consultation with Other Organisations	<input 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.

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

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?

The Hemp Third Country Import (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 (TBC) will be used to increase the maximum THC level for imports of hemp and hemp seeds from 0.2% to 0.3% and will also make technical amendments which will update legislative references.

The relaxation to maximum acceptable THC will allow for a greater selection of hemp and hemp seeds available, but it is not expected to make any significant impact on industry or how policy currently operates. The SR will maintain the status quo as far as possible. As such no impact is envisaged as a result of the Amendment Regulation on people in rural areas or otherwise.

The Department is satisfied that the amendment SR will bring minor changes but are likely to have no meaningful impact. Therefore, it has not been necessary to identify the social and economic need of people in rural areas as a result of this policy.

Colleagues in Forest Service have confirmed that there have been no hemp movements into Northern Ireland from GB, the EU or third countries into Northern Ireland since EU exit, outside of the Northern Ireland Retail Movement Scheme (NIRMS). Forest services are unaware of any movements through NIRMS, but have confirmed their engagement with retailers who may sell hemp seeds as a health product (e.g. Holland and Barrett) is relatively limited.

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 Hemp Third Country Import (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 (TBC) will be used to increase the maximum THC level for imports of hemp and hemp seeds from 0.2% to 0.3% and will also make technical amendments which will update legislative references.

The general impact of the legislation has been considered. However, the EU's relaxation to allow for hemp and hemp seeds with a maximum of 0.3% THC content to be imported from third countries is not expected to have any significant impact on how policy currently operates.

Colleagues in Forest Service have confirmed that there have been no hemp movements into Northern Ireland from GB, the EU or third countries into Northern Ireland since EU exit, outside of the Northern Ireland Retail Movement Scheme (NIRMS). Forest services are unaware of any movements through NIRMS, but have confirmed their engagement with retailers who may sell hemp seeds as a health product (e.g. Holland and Barrett) is relatively limited.

With this being the case, the Department is satisfied that the Hemp Third Country Import (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 (TBC) will have a limited impact and concluded that they will have no impact on the social and economic needs of people in rural areas.

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.

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.

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs is responsible for updating the domestic regulations, the 2002 Hemp (Third Country Import) Regulations 2002 on behalf of Northern Ireland as under the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement the new EU rules will apply in Northern Ireland.

The UK Government have also committed to amending the 2002 Hemp (Third Country Import) Regulations 2002. However, Defra have confirmed that UKG's amendment regulations will be made under powers from the SPS agreement, which only have scope over GB.

The 2026 Amendment Regulations are necessary to update the domestic legislation to ensure the domestic statute book is up to date and so that hemp stakeholders will have access to the variety of hemp plant that they're entitled to in line with EU regulations. However, the amendments are not expected to make any significant impact on industry or how policy currently operates and the SR will maintain the status quo as far as possible. As such, the revised policy has not been influenced by rural needs identified.

Colleagues in Forest Service have confirmed that there have been no hemp movements into Northern Ireland from GB, the EU or third countries into Northern Ireland since EU exit, outside of the Northern Ireland Retail Movement Scheme (NIRMS). Forest services are unaware of any movements through NIRMS, but have confirmed their engagement with retailers who may sell hemp seeds as a health product (e.g. Holland and Barrett) is relatively limited.

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:	Kevin Comber
Position/Grade:	Deputy Principal
Division/Branch	Strategic Agri-Food Development Division - Poultrymeat, Eggs, Dairy, Wines and Spirits, Hops and Hemp branch
Signature:	KC
Date:	19/05/2026
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	Samantha Swann
Position/Grade:	Grade 7
Division/Branch:	Strategic Agri-Food Development Division - Poultrymeat, Eggs, Dairy, Wines and Spirits, Hops and Hemp branch
Signature:	SS
Date:	