

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.

Farming with Nature (FwN) Higher aims to provide an interim scheme in the time period before launch of a new scheme for designated sites and priority habitats, through provision of the Remedial Management Options (RMOs) to Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) Higher agreement holders previously in Tranches 4-8, on a phased basis. It is not anticipated that all years of the scheme will be required.

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

Developing a	Policy ☒	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Adopting a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Implementing a	Policy ☒	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Revising a	Policy ☐	Strategy ☐	Plan ☐
Designing a Public Service	☐		
Delivering a Public Service	☐		

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.

Farming with Nature (FwN) Higher Scheme

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

- Objective 1 - Ensure continuity of favourable management, through provision of a scheme which provides specific and area-based management actions to promote 'favourable' conditions.
- Objective 2 - Reduced administrative complexity; EFS Higher was historically regarded as a administratively complex scheme. Adoption of RMOs without associated capital items is anticipated to reduce complications around the inspections process, and use of the FwN IT system should provide increased capability leading to reductions in administrative IT input.
- Objective 3 - Continued guidance for agreement holders, through provision of agreements on how to best manage land with environmental consideration, and through DAERA advice and expertise on agri-environmental issues and local landscapes. Familiar working relationships have been developed between agreement holders and DAERA.

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.

This scheme is intended to impact upon people in rural areas and those farming designated sites and/or priority habitats through provision of guidance in terms of an agreement with stipulations in the form of actions on how to manage land with environmental consideration. Legislation provides minimum requirements for the protection of designated sites and priority habitats; this scheme delivers additional environmental management and contributes to the prevention of land degradation and negative environmental outcomes.

The scheme also provides financial incentives for completion of such actions; this provides an important source of income for farmers, who are primarily rural dwellers. There is a market failure to price positive impacts of conservation work, and there are therefore underprovided for in society. The scheme may also contribute to behaviour change amongst agreement holders with respect to farming in an environmentally sustainable way.

Environmental improvements will benefit all rural dwellers and the entire NI population.

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.

FwN Higher will only impact those farm business owners in land which was previously or currently under EFS Higher Tranches 4-8, which is generally in a rural area, in a manner which would not differ dependent upon those living in urban or rural areas.

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	☒
Rural Tourism	☐
Rural Housing	☐
Jobs or Employment in Rural Areas	☒
Education or Training in Rural Areas	☒
Broadband or Mobile Communications in Rural Areas	☐
Transport Services or Infrastructure in Rural Areas	☐
Health or Social Care Services in Rural Areas	☐
Poverty in Rural Areas	☐
Deprivation in Rural Areas	☐
Rural Crime or Community Safety	☐
Rural Development	☐
Agri-Environment	☒
Other (Please state)	

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	☒	Published Statistics	☒
Consultation with Other Organisations	☒	Research Papers	☒
Surveys or Questionnaires	☐	Other Publications	☐
Other Methods or Information Sources (include details in Question 3C below).			☐

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.

The 'Key Rural Issues Publication' published by DAERA compares urban vs rural living across domains like employment, income, education, transport, health, and connectivity. It highlights rural-urban disparities with respect to educational attainment, employment, income, transport and poverty (DAERA, 2024).

The 'Statistical Review of Northern Ireland Agriculture', last published in 2024, outlines information associated such as income, outputs, inputs, productivity, subsidies, livestock numbers, animal welfare and the environment.

The 'Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report' published by DAERA in 2025 provides a comprehensive overview of the state of the environment in Northern Ireland, bringing together the latest available data on key environmental indicators.

The 'Equality Indicators Report' published by DAERA in 2018 outlined a review of Section 75 characteristics amongst farmers.

The 'Habitats Regulations Overview Report for the Reporting Period 2019–2024 Northern Ireland' reported on the condition of terrestrial/marine habitats, non-bird species and their conservation categories.

Key Rural Issues Publication (DAERA / NI Executive)

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) (2024) Key Rural Issues 2024. Belfast: DAERA.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) (2025) Statistical Review of Northern Ireland Agriculture 2024. Available at: https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-11/25.26.108%20Stats%20Review%202024_1.pdf (Accessed: 9 June 2026).

Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report released 29/05/25. Available at: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/news/northern-ireland-environmental-statistics-report-released-290525> (Accessed: 9 June 2026)

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) (2018) Equality indicators report. Available at: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/equality-indicators-report> (Accessed: 9 June 2026).

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) (2026) Habitats Regulations Overview Report for the Reporting Period 2019–2024 Northern Ireland: The Conservation Status of Terrestrial and Marine Habitats and non-bird Species. Belfast: DAERA.

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

The 'Key Rural Issues Publication' found that those from a rural population are more likely to be in full-time employment (62%) compared to their urban dwelling peers, but that average public sector earnings in urban areas (£35,620) exceed those in rural areas (£32,901) which was also found for private sector employment. More than half of NI business are located in rural areas (58%) and were most likely to be associated with agriculture, forestry, fishing and construction. In 2022-23, poverty levels in households in rural areas which are more than an hour's journey from Belfast were higher than those of rural areas closer to the city. Absolute poverty of those with over an hour's commute from Belfast was 13%, compared to 10% under an hour, and relative poverty of those with over an hour's commute from Belfast was 17%, compared to 16% under an hour.

The 'Statistical Review of Northern Ireland Agriculture' reported that the agricultural income of Northern Ireland farmers increased in 2024 alongside total factor productivity. The total agricultural labour force decreased by 2.8% between 2023 and 2024. Related to the environment, agriculture was estimated to contribute 31% of all greenhouse gas emissions in Northern Ireland, an increase of 8% from 1990.

The 'Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report' found that 48% of NI households had accessible natural space within 400metres. Around 73% of the Northern Irish public reported being 'very or fairly concerned' about environment issues.

The 'Equality Indicators Report' reported findings related to the demography of the Northern Irish farming population; only 9% of main farmers were female. Female farmers were more likely to farm in 'Less Favoured Areas' and 'Severely Disadvantaged Areas'. The average age of farmers was 59 years, with younger farmers marginally more likely to farm in 'Severely Disadvantaged Areas'. Farming in such disadvantaged areas was found to be more likely amongst catholic and Irish identity. Many of Northern Ireland's designated sites are located directly on lands historically classified as 'Severely Disadvantaged Areas'.

The 'Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report' published by DAERA in 2025 reported that 54% of features within Marine and Terrestrial protected sites were in favourable condition, with 38% in unfavourable condition, which impacts upon natural environments, water sources, agricultural production, climate change resilience and loss of ecosystem services, increasing costs and reducing quality of life.

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 issues identified in the publications identified in Section 3D and considered in the policy development of FwN Higher include:

- i. Rural poverty, incomes and employment
- ii. Land management to promote environmental sustainability
- iii. Climate change
- iv. Agriculture in 'Severely Disadvantaged Areas' and designated sites

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 FwN Higher scheme may contribute towards addressing rural poverty through the market failure to price the positive environmental impacts of conservation work, and the delivery of positive externalities. Those participant in scheme will receive payments in the form of costs incurred and income forgone. Without provision of valuing environmental improvements in the market, degradation of the natural environment including biodiversity, air quality, water quality and soil may occur. This is of particular importance for designated sites and priority habitats which are of significance for nature conservation; a sizeable proportion of these sites are in unfavourable condition. There are multiple national, European and wider international obligations on government / public bodies to conserve biodiversity and improve the natural environment in NI, particularly for designated sites and priority habitats. This scheme provides a mechanism for agreement holders to manage their land with respect to achieving best environmental outcomes. The scheme may further contribute towards climate change resilience; the majority of scheme management relates to grazing which has been reported to have significant impacts on upland biodiversity, and provides other benefits in terms of water quality and carbon sequestration. Climate change resilience may also be improved e.g. improved water storage in soil may reduce flood risk.

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:	Siobhán Sheppard
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Signature:	<i>Siobhán Sheppard</i>
Date:	23/06/2026
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Position/Grade:	Grade 3
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Signature:	<i>M McKendry</i>
Date:	29/06/2026