

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 Package – Revision of the Farming with Nature Transition Scheme

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.

Sustainable Agriculture Programme (Farming with Nature Package) –Revision of the Farming with Nature Transition Scheme.

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

The Farming with Nature (FwN) Transition Scheme aims to secure the delivery of strategic environmental outcomes by encouraging the protection and enhancement of the natural environment on farmed land through incentivisation of environmental actions, behavioural change, and targeted education and awareness programmes. The Scheme aims to drive better environmental performance across the Northern Ireland agriculture industry.

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.

The FwN Transition Scheme aims to drive better environmental performance across the agriculture industry in Northern Ireland. Support will come from both DAERA Capital and Resource funding.

The Scheme aims to contribute to improvements in the environment by delivering additional habitats, protecting watercourses, providing green infrastructure for nature corridors and increasing carbon sequestration.

The Scheme will impact on farm businesses in rural areas in particular. The agriculture industry faces challenges in terms of its impact on the environment and to help to address this, farm businesses will be incentivised to create and protect habitats on farmed land. The Scheme may also contribute to behavioural change by encouraging farm businesses to manage their land in a more environmentally sustainable way. Environmental improvements as a result of this Scheme will benefit Northern Ireland as a whole.

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 Farming with Nature Transition Scheme will only affect those individuals registered as farm businesses. As the farming community is mainly located in rural areas, this Scheme will have more impact on these areas than urban 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 following information sources were used to identify the social and economic needs of people in rural areas:

- Stakeholder Engagement on the Northern Ireland Future Agricultural Policy Framework (1 August – 10 October 2018) [Northern Ireland Future Agricultural Policy Framework | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)
- Northern Ireland Future Agricultural Policy Framework Stakeholder Engagement – Summary of Responses (21 June 2019) [Northern Ireland Future Agricultural Policy Framework - summary of responses](#)
- Consultation on Future Agricultural Policy Proposals for Northern Ireland (21 December 2021 – 15 February 2022) [Future Agricultural Policy Proposals for Northern Ireland Consultation.pdf](#)
- Future Agricultural Policy Decisions for Northern Ireland (21 June 2022) [Future Agricultural Policy Decisions for Northern Ireland \(Final\) \(002\).pdf](#)
- Key Rural Issues, Northern Ireland 2025 [Key Rural Issues 2025](#)
- Statistical Review of Northern Ireland Agriculture 2023 [DAERA Statistical Review 2024](#)
- Equality Indicators for Northern Ireland Farmers (2018) [Equality Indicators Report](#)

Stakeholder discussions have been carried out through the Agricultural Policy Stakeholder Group and the Farming with Nature Working Group to ensure that stakeholder views are understood and properly considered during the development of the Farming with Nature Transition Scheme. Group representatives include Ulster Farmers Union, Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association, The Dairy Council (NI), the NI Food and Drink Association, RSPB, Ulster Wildlife, National Trust, Nature Friendly Farming Network, Lough Neagh Partnership, and Northern Ireland Environment Link.

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

Through the **Northern Ireland Future Agricultural Policy Framework (2018)** stakeholder engagement ([Stakeholder responses on the Northern Ireland Future Agricultural Policy Framework: Stakeholder Engagement | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)) and the Consultation on Future Agricultural Policy 2021 ([Consultation on Future Agricultural Policy Proposals for Northern Ireland | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)), DAERA identified the following social and economic needs of people in rural areas:

- There could be a disproportionate effect on people in rural areas if farmers are not viewed as equal partners in the supply chain.
- There is a need to be cognisant of different types of farms/farmers/landscape (e.g. hill farmers and lowland farmers; small farms and large farms), different communities (e.g. farmers in border communities and farmers in non-border communities) and different types of producers (e.g. horticulture and agriculture).
- People in rural areas have issues around rural poverty, mental and physical health and inequalities in health and social inclusion.

The Key Rural Issues Northern Ireland 2025 report ([Key Rural Issues 2025 Publication | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)) highlighted that agriculture, forestry, fishing and construction make up 56% of rural businesses, with urban businesses more widely spread across a variety of sectors. 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.

In 2018 ([Equality Indicators Report](#)), the average age of farmers in Northern Ireland was 59 years. Only 8% of farmers were aged under 40 years, and more than a third (36%) were aged 65 years or older (49% over sixty). Almost a third (30%) of farmers stated that they had a long-term illness or disability which limited their daily activities, with the incidence of disability inversely related to farm size.

In 2025, DAERA published the [Northern Ireland Agricultural Income figures for 2024](#). Total Income From Farming (TIFF) was provisionally estimated at £766 million, an increase of 62.5% compared to 2023. This included direct payments (Basic Payment Scheme and Young Farmers Payment.) Farm Business Income, measured across all farm types was expected to rise to £60,622.

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 social and economic needs of people in rural areas identified in the **Northern Ireland Future Agricultural Policy Framework** stakeholder engagement carried out in 2018 ([Stakeholder responses on the Northern Ireland Future Agricultural Policy Framework: Stakeholder Engagement | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)) have been considered. The Future Agricultural Policy Proposals should take into consideration the responses received; namely:

- i) the effect on people in rural areas if farmers are not viewed as equal partners in the supply chain;
- ii) different types of farms/farmers/landscape (e.g. hill farmers and lowland farmers; small farms and large farms), different communities (e.g. farmers in border communities and farmers in non-border communities) and different types of producers (e.g. horticulture and agriculture);
- iii) broadband quality and public transport and maintenance and road networks and
- iv) rural poverty, mental and physical health, inequalities in health and social inclusion.

Our economy, and hence our prosperity, health and wellbeing, depend on healthy, resilient ecosystems. These provide us with our food, clean water and air, the raw materials and energy for our industries, infrastructure and, with the right management, can deliver protection against hazards such as floods and extreme weather. They also support our health and quality of life, providing open spaces for exercise, social engagement, and mental well-being. Northern Ireland has experienced significant environmental challenges over recent decades. With over 70% of land in Northern Ireland under agricultural management there is a need to improve environmental sustainability on agricultural land to ensure agricultural viability and to provide the public goods required by the whole Northern Ireland population.

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 Farming with Nature Transition Scheme may contribute towards providing long-term improved well-being for all (through, for example, improved water quality, improved biodiversity, and maintaining sustainable food production) including the rural population.

As previously detailed, the Farming with Nature Transition Scheme and its objectives have been informed by a comprehensive consultation exercise involving a wide range of rural stakeholders and a series of reports. These indicated that the following issues should be considered:

- The effect on people in rural areas if farmers are not viewed as equal partners in the supply chain;
- Different types of farms/farmers/landscape (e.g. hill farmers and lowland farmers; small farms and large farms), different communities (e.g. farmers in border communities and farmers in non-border communities) and different types of producers (e.g. horticulture and agriculture);
- Broadband quality and public transport and maintenance and road networks; and
- Rural poverty, mental and physical health, inequalities in health and social inclusion.

The Farming with Nature Transition Scheme will be available to all eligible farmers who wish to participate. It is aimed at maintaining sustainable and environmentally-friendly farm businesses.

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:	Devina Park
Position/Grade:	Grade 7
Division/Branch	Agricultural Policy Division, Farm Nature Policy Branch
Signature:	
Date:	29 May 2026
Rural Needs Impact Assessment approved by:	
Position/Grade:	Grade 3
Division/Branch:	FFRAG
Signature:	
Date: 3 June 2026	