

Thursday 30 July 2026, Ground Floor Conference Room, Clare House

AGENDA

	Agenda Item	Introduced by	Indicative Timings	Paper Reference
1	Welcome, apologies and declarations of interests	Chair	10.00 - 10.10	
2(a)	Note of previous board meeting	Chair	10.10 - 10.20	PAPER
2(b)	Matters arising from previous board meeting	Chair		PAPER
3	Strategic issues	Chair	10.20 - 10.30	VERBAL
ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION				
4	Update on EUDR	Fiona McCandless	10.30 – 10.50	VERBAL
5	Science System Update	Alistair Carson	10.50 - 11.20	PRESENTATION
6	Finance update	Declan McCarney	11.20 - 11.40	PAPER
7	DAERA 2026-27 Business Plan - latest position	Sharon McFlynn	11.40 - 12.00	VERBAL
8	NIEA Business Plan	Richard Crowe	12.00 - 12.20	PAPER
9	Forest Service 2026-27 Business Plan	John Joe O'Boyle	12.20 - 12.40	PAPER
COMFORT BREAK AND WORKING LUNCH (12.40 – 13.10)				
10	Corporate Governance matters: (a)Raising a concern (b)Annual Complaints	Alison Caldwell	13.10 - 13.30	PAPERS
11	ARAC update	Shane Lynch	13.30 - 13.40	PAPER

12	Capacity & Capability Committee update	Mark O'Donnell	13.40 - 13.50	PAPER
13	Finance & Major Projects Committee update	Mark O'Donnell	13.50 - 14.00	PAPER
PAPERS TO NOTE				
14	Progress update on Departmental Board Effectiveness Review - action plan	DB Secretariat	14.00 - 14.10	PAPER
15	DB papers issued via correspondence	DB Secretariat	14.10 - 14.15	PAPER
CLOSING ITEMS				
16	Any Other Business	Chair	14.15 - 14.20	VERBAL
17	Date of Next Meeting			CAFRE ENNISKILLEN - 23 September 2026

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MINUTES

Members present:	Katrina Godfrey (Chair)	Permanent Secretary
	Shane Lynch	Non-executive board member (NEBM)
	Scott King	Non-executive board member (NEBM)
	Mark O'Donnell	Executive board member (Head of Strategic Planning and Corporate Services Group)
	Fiona McCandless	Executive board member (Head of Estate Transformation and Windsor Framework Implementation Group)
	Julie Thompson	Executive board member (Head of Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group)
	Brian Doohar	Executive board member (Head of Veterinary Service Animal Health Group)
	Richard Crowe	Interim executive board member (Interim Chief Executive of Northern Ireland Environment Agency)
	Jane Corderoy (Agenda items 11 – 17)	Interim executive board member (Acting Head of Climate Change, Science and Innovation Group)
Apologies:	Martin McKendry Roger Downey Mike Johnston	
In attendance:	Alison Caldwell Paula Bratton Declan McCarney Alistair Carson Anne- Marie Bovill John Joe O'Boyle	Director of Corporate Governance Strategic Business Partner, NICS HR Deputy Finance Director Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) (Agenda item 5 only) Deputy Director Science System Delivery and CSA Governance (Agenda item 5 only) Chief Executive of Forest Service (Agenda item 9 only)
Secretariat	John Bateman Lauren McKeeever Dolores Kelly	Board secretary Minute taker Observer

Item	Description	Action
1	Welcome, apologies and declaration of interests	
	Katrina opened the meeting, welcomed attendees and noted apologies from Martin McKendry, Roger Downey and Mike Johnston. She also advised members that Jane Corderoy would join the meeting later. Members confirmed that they had no conflicts of interest to declare.	
2(a)	Note of previous board meeting	
	The note of the meeting held on 27 May 2026 was agreed and approved for publication, with no amendments required.	Secretariat
2 (b)	Matters arising from previous board meeting	
	Actions from the May meeting were reviewed and agreed as complete.	
3	Strategic issues	
	Katrina provided an overview of the strategic context within which the board was operating, including the wider political and fiscal position. She also highlighted continuing work to advance the blueprint for the eradication of bovine tuberculosis in Northern Ireland, including the recent launch of a consultation on wildlife interventions and the Shared Island research project. The board also discussed developments relating to the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), including governance arrangements, partnership working and the AFBI estate. Finally, Katrina, Mark and Brian provided a detailed update to board members on an ongoing industrial dispute involving a small number of staff within Veterinary Service Animal Health (VSAHG) and the actions now being taken by the department.	
	ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION	
4	EU Deforestation Regulation	
	Fiona updated the board on progress following the UK government's announcement on 23 June confirming that, under the Windsor Framework, the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) would apply in full to Northern Ireland. The board discussed the proposed designation of DAERA as a competent authority in Northern Ireland for five of the seven commodities covered by the regulation, and the indicative legislative	

	timetable, noting that this decision would confer a range of new responsibilities on the department. Fiona also outlined the process that was continuing in GB to determine the approach to be taken there, highlighting the helpful ongoing engagement with officials in both Defra and DAFM. Members discussed resourcing, IT and wider logistical requirements needed to ensure effective implementation and the associated risks and impacts for both DAERA and local import businesses. The board thanked Fiona and noted the update.	
5	Science System update	
	Alistair Carson and Anne-Marie Bovill delivered a presentation to the board which explored the importance of science in relation to DAERA's policy and operational activities. The board considered the strategic direction of the department's science system, including its research and development portfolio and planned activity to December 2027. Members discussed stakeholder engagement, the need for a joined-up approach to science across the department and resourcing issues. Katrina thanked Alistair and Anne-Marie for their presentation and paper and suggested that it might also be helpful to provide a similar presentation and opportunity for discussion at a future SCSG event.	
6	Finance update	
	Declan provided an overview of the main financial issues affecting the department, as set out in the finance paper. He briefed the board on the Annual Report and Accounts process, and on the completion and outcome of provisional outturn exercises. Declan also provided an update on the budget position, confirming that the Executive had still not reached agreement on budgets and that DAERA was therefore still working within the limits of the contingency planning envelope provided by the Department of Finance. Members discussed the implications and challenges of the uncertain budget position for all Accounting Officers and the particular risks and impacts for DAERA, recognising that difficult decisions were likely to be needed in the autumn and stressing the importance of the information that would flow from the second internal monitoring round in informing decisions. The important role played by the board's Finance & Major Projects Committee in assessing and challenging the financial position was also highlighted.	

	Board members also discussed the Integr8 transformation programme, expressing concern about the timescales for implementation and highlighting the need to ensure that DoF was providing appropriate assurances when it came to readiness for 'go live'. Finally, members reviewed the department's prompt payment performance, highlighting the importance of all groups and agencies meeting the new statutory requirements. The board thanked Declan for his report and noted the updates provided.	
7	DAERA 2026-27 business plan – latest position	
	Mark provided the board with an update on the interim business plan, advising members that it had now been published on the DAERA website and reminding them that it remained an interim plan in the absence of an agreed budget. He also confirmed that a six-month progress report would come to the board in the autumn for scrutiny. The board discussed the value of having a plan agreed, even an interim one, and the processes now in place to ensure that it could be adjusted if needed once there was greater certainty on the budget situation. Members also noted that work would begin early next year on a new corporate plan which would need to take account of the direction set by ministers in a new PfG for a new mandate. The board thanked Mark for the update.	
8	NIEA business plan	
	Richard provided an update for members on the NIEA business plan, reflecting on the progress made in achieving the targets set in the 2025-26 business plan and explaining the process that had led to the targets contained in the 2026-27 business plan. He also confirmed that the plan had now received approval from Minister Muir. Members discussed NIEA's key performance targets (KPTs) for 2026-27 and their links to the DAERA corporate plan, focusing particularly on the key performance targets set by the Minister and probing in a number of areas including resourcing, planning consultation performance and the agency's responsibilities in relation to the Mobuoy site. Following discussion, the board thanked Richard for his presentation and paper and confirmed that it was content to note the update provided.	

9	Forest Service 2026-27 business plan	
	The board welcomed John-Joe O'Boyle to present the Forest Service interim business plan for 2026-27 which had also received ministerial approval. John-Joe highlighted three key areas in addition to business-as-usual activity: afforestation; wind energy; and recruitment and retention, responding to questions from board members on these areas. Members discussed challenges and opportunities associated with identifying suitable sites and securing approvals for wind-energy projects; alignment of Forest Service work with climate obligations; succession planning arrangements; and how health and safety was covered within the organisation. Members also asked John Joe and his agency management board to consider the setting of a specific health & safety at work target in future plans. Following discussion, the board thanked John Joe for his presentation and confirmed that it was content to note the update provided.	
10	Corporate governance matters: (a) Raising a concern (b) Annual complaints	
	Alison Caldwell provided the board with an update on Raising a Concern and complaints received during the previous year. Alison briefed the board on the number and nature of concerns raised under the Raising a Concern policy. Members discussed the complexity of some cases raised and the need to ensure that each case was progressed via the correct process or processes. Alison also outlined the work underway to review and refresh the policy to reflect learning from the recent NIAO report. Alison then moved to provide an update on complaints recorded for 2025-26 and on key lessons drawn from her team's analysis of complaints. In that context, she also explained that NIPSO had recently issued new complaints handling guidance and that the department's complaints handling guidance would be reviewed in light of this. The board recognised the importance of having robust processes in place for dealing with both concerns and complaints and noted the updates provided in both papers.	
11	ARAC update	
	Shane provided members with an update on Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) activity since the last departmental board meeting in May, noting that this had been a particularly busy period for ARAC.	

	The board was also updated on ARAC's consideration of the group accounts including the accounting treatment of the Mobuoy site, and internal audit reports and activity; and the deep dive on the animal disease risk which had been led by the CVO. Shane also reported on his engagements with the chairs of other ARACs, providing an overview of meetings with AFBI, LMC and NIEA and confirming that meetings with Forest Service, Loughs Agency and NIFHA were in planning. The board thanked Shane for the paper and noted the updates provided.	
12	Capacity and Capability Committee update	
	Mark provided a verbal update on Mike's behalf outlining the latest developments from the committee since it last met on 22 June. Members were advised of discussions on withdrawn vacancies; the People Plan; the mental health forum; and mobility of staff within the department. Board members also welcomed ongoing work by DoF's People and Organisational Development team to review staff mobility policies and discussed the need for these to be inclusive of both general service and specialist or technical grades.	
13	Finance and Major Projects Committee update	
	Mark advised that the next meeting of the committee would take place on 10 September 2026 and would be chaired by Scott King. At this meeting the committee would consider the value and impact of science and technology, budget pressures, assets, and opportunities for savings and efficiencies.	
14	Progress update on Departmental Board Effectiveness Review – action plan	
	John presented the paper which set out the latest position on implementation of the 2025-26 board effectiveness review action plan. The board noted updates on each of the five actions, including that two of the five actions were already complete and work continued on the remaining three. The board also discussed the timing of the next external board effectiveness review. Katrina explained the requirement for an annual effectiveness review and the importance of being able either to demonstrate compliance or to explain the reasons for taking a different approach ('comply or explain').	

	In discussion, the board considered the balance between ensuring compliance and ensuring adequate time to embed actions from previous reviews and reached the view that it was more desirable, on balance, to give time to embed actions designed to build on the board's strengths and address areas for improvement identified in the last review. It was therefore agreed that the next board effectiveness review, which would be an externally led review, should take place in spring 2027. Arrangements would be taken forward on this basis by the board secretariat and an explanation would be provided in the next annual report.	Secretariat
15	Departmental Board papers issued via correspondence	
	The board noted the status of the papers circulated between 1 May 2026 and 30 June 2026.	
16	Any other business	
	No other business was raised.	
17	Date of next meeting	
	Members noted that the next board meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 23 September 2026 and would be held in CAFRE Enniskillen.	