

FINAL TERMS OF REFERENCE

DAERA NUTRIENTS ACTION PROGRAMME 2026-2029 STAKEHOLDER TASK AND FINISH GROUP (NAPSTFG)

The aim of the Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) is to improve water quality by reducing and preventing pollution caused or induced by nutrients from agricultural sources. Pollution caused by other sources is recognised and addressing it will be taken forward through other processes and are not within the scope of this Group.

This is the fourth review of the programme which was established in 2007 and is reviewed every four years. The initial consultation on proposed revised and new NAP measures for 2026-2029 completed on 24 July 2025. The DAERA Nutrients Action Programme 2026-2029 Stakeholder Task and Finish Group (NAPSTFG) (the Group) has been established by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and will meet under the Chairmanship of an external facilitator.

1. Purpose

The purpose of the Group is to produce a report for the Minister which sets out proposals to improve water quality for inclusion in the NAP 2026-2029 within the legal framework. In doing so, the Group will take into account the proposals already consulted upon, the consultation responses to date, and any other potential alternative solutions or information raised within the Group, that are supported by evidence and will meet the legal obligations to improve water quality.

The proposals set out in the Group's report shall be submitted to the DAERA Minister and shall be treated as a material consideration in the formulation of proposals for public consultation on the revised draft NAP 2026–2029. Should the Minister or DAERA propose to supplement the Group's report or introduce additional proposals, the Group shall be given the opportunity to review and comment on such additions in advance of public consultation. The Group's comments shall be given appropriate weight, and any such additions shall be clearly identified as separate from the Group's proposals within the consultation document.

2. Role of the Group

Key role of the Group is to:

- a. Work through an external facilitator, to produce a report to review actions to be presented to the Minister for inclusion in the further draft NAP 2026-29 which will be subject to further public consultation. These measures must:
 - Be evidence based,
 - Be workable and practical, economically viable and achievable at farm level within realistic timeframes,
 - set NI on a pathway so that measures must comply with/ enable compliance with all relevant legislative requirements by the end of the NAP period.

- enable the agri-food industry to continue to thrive whilst supporting environmental sustainability
- b. Agree the terms of reference for and commission the economic impact on any proposals to go forward for consultation.
- c. If required, work on a framework to support the agri-food sector to integrate any changes.
- d. Agree to the presentation of these proposals to the DAERA Minister for his consideration and final decision.

3. Interaction outside the Group

Where the remit of a specific measure, or topic for discussion, extends beyond the Group's membership, individual stakeholder members may seek external views and provide papers or input on specific topics. If any policy development falls under the remit of another Government Department, the relevant officials will be invited to contribute. DAERA will also engage at official levels with a wider range of stakeholder organisations outside of this arrangement as necessary and in line with the normal course of business.

A subgroup for science and research, will be established to support and inform the work of the Group and that will include AFBI and AgriSearch and other relevant independent organisations. The terms of reference of the Science sub-group will be signed off by the Group.

However, these processes must not prejudice the completion of the work in line with the stipulated timeframe. There is always potential to form other sub-groups if needed.

4. Areas which are not within the Scope of the Group

The following areas are not within the scope of this Group:

- Compilation of the departmental response to the consultation that closed on 24 July.
- Measures to address pollution caused by non-agricultural sources by different sectors.
- Removal of the requirements within the existing NAP regulations, although consideration will be given to amendments to existing NAP regulations that would strengthen environmental protection/improve water quality (however the report should recognise significant action from other sources is also key to delivering water quality improvement); and
- Policy areas outside the remit of DAERA (including planning policy, which is within the remit of DFI). Noting that while the development of planning policy lies outside the scope of the Group, it is within scope to identify and comment on aspects of existing policy that may present barriers to the implementation of NAP proposals.

5. External Facilitator

An external facilitator will be appointed by DAERA to chair the group.

6. Membership

Membership of the Group is by invitation of the Minister only. A suitable nominated Deputy will be permitted to attend when the Member is unable to attend but should be capable of fully representing the Member in the meeting.

The Group will keep membership under review, and the Facilitator will propose any additional members to the Minister as appropriate and in line with business needs.

DAERA and AFBI officials should not be official members of the Group, but will attend in a supporting role, and will be limited to one person in FFRAG and CSAO and three people from EMFG, with others attending to present items and make notes.

7. Consensus of the Group

It is preferred that the Group agrees the proposals to be included in the report to the Minister. Where a consensus cannot be reached within the Group, the report which is presented to the Minister must identify those proposals that have been agreed by the Group but can also include other proposals which have not been agreed, provided that in respect of such proposals, the potential options considered by the Group are identified, with related advice provided on each such option.

The Group will agree a set of actions based on consensus and present these for an economic impact assessment. On consideration of the economic impact assessment, a further review will take place before finalising the report which will be presented to the Minister. Should the Minister or DAERA propose to supplement the Group's report or introduce additional proposals, the Group shall be given the opportunity to review and comment on such additions in advance of public consultation. The Group's comments shall be given appropriate weight and any such additions shall be clearly identified as separate from the Group's proposals within the consultation document.

Following the consultation, the Group will have the opportunity to review the finalised draft NAP before it is presented to the Executive for approval.

8. Time frame

This Group's aim is to produce an interim report by Christmas 2025 and a final report by early 2026. The timing of the final report can be kept under review by the Minister, informed by the views of the facilitator.

9. Secretariat Role

Administrative support will be provided from within DAERA, to support and maintain the work of the Group.

10. Reporting

The Secretariat will circulate minutes of the meeting within 5 working days after every meeting which provides:

1. Summary of topics discussed.
2. Highlights, issues and actions; and
3. Decisions made
4. These should be reviewed for accuracy at the start of the following meeting, agreed by the Group and signed by the Facilitator,

The final report presented to the Minister will be made publicly available.

11. Meetings

The Facilitator will call meetings of the Group at a frequency that is appropriate to business needs. Meetings will be in person at a venue and date agreed in advance of each meeting.

The agenda for each meeting will be discussed between the Facilitator and members of the Group and finalised by the Facilitator in advance of each meeting. Agenda and papers will be issued at least 5 working days prior to each meeting.

12. Conflict of interest

Members should declare at the beginning of each meeting any conflict of interest.

13. Communication

Any publicity or public communications about the work of the Group shall be managed by the Group and be by agreement of the Group, with communications agreed at the end of each meeting. It is also recognised that the DAERA Minister may need to refer to the Group in addressing questions from MLAs and answering correspondence.

The Group will provide a respectful forum for open and frank discussion and communication. Therefore, it is essential that the stakeholder organisations that are part of this Group fully respect the confidentiality of the discussions and the sensitivity of the topics and papers that may be considered. Stakeholders may consult a wider Group of their members on a confidential basis.

Membership of the DAERA Nutrients Action Programme Task and Finish Stakeholder Group (NAPSTFG)

Dairy Council (NI)	DCNI
Nature Friendly Farming Network	NFFN
NI Agricultural Producers Association	NIAPA
NI Environment Link (4 members)	NIEL
NI Food and Drink Association	NIFDA
NI Grain Trade Association	NIGTA
NI Meat Exporters Association	NIMEA
NI Pork and Bacon Forum	NIPBF
NI Poultry Industry Federation	NIPIF
Ulster Farmers' Union (4 members)	UFU
DAERA officials:	
Food and Farming Rural Affairs Group (1 member)	FFRAG
Environment Marine and Fisheries Group (3 members)	EMFG
Chief Scientific Adviser's Office (1 member)	CSAO