

Memorandum of Understanding Farming for a Healthier Environment



Photograph: Arthur Ward

Ulster Farmers' Union &
Northern Ireland Environment Agency

7 April 2017



Ulster Farmers' Union & Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Memorandum of Understanding

Aim

Build a stronger, more effective working arrangement between the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) to deliver improved environmental outcomes in ways that reduce conflict and support improved farm sustainability.

Key Objectives

1. Establish a more productive working relationship between the Agency and the agricultural sector by providing a more customer-focused approach to regulation thereby increasing the agricultural sector's understanding of their environmental obligations and level of compliance.
2. Help the farming community unlock the commercial advantages that excellent environmental performance can generate in competitive global agricultural markets.
3. Improve environmental outcomes through a more effective partnership approach.

Key Outcomes

- A more sustainable agricultural sector in Northern Ireland which delivers improved environmental, economic and social outcomes.
- Development of a positive, interactive, cooperative relationship between the NIEA and the farming community.
- Higher levels of environmental compliance throughout the agricultural sector, resulting in a healthier environment and less need for enforcement activity.
- Continual improvements in the environment through increased numbers of waterbodies achieving "good status", improved conservation status of priority habitats & species and improved biodiversity in the wider countryside.
- Increased farm sustainability through innovative resource efficient practices.
- Increased awareness that good environmental practice can unlock commercial advantages to help meet the growing demands of competitive global agricultural markets.
- Interdisciplinary partnership approach and enhanced stakeholder engagement in decision-making processes and sustainable land use management.

Parties in the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)



Ulster Farmers' Union

Founded in 1918, the UFU is the **largest** democratic voluntary organisation representing farmers and growers in Northern Ireland. With over 11,500 farming family members, the UFU is a significant player in the agri-food industry in Northern Ireland.

The agri-food sector is a major player in the Northern Ireland economy and is contributing substantially to every area of NI. The total number of persons working on farms in 2012 in NI was almost 47,000¹ and there are 27,000 people whose main employment is in the food processing sector².

Northern Ireland has a land area of 13,542 km². Lowland landscapes amount to 37% and upland landscapes 33%³. 80% of the land area in Northern Ireland is used for agriculture or forestry therefore the agricultural sector has a significant impact on the local environment and the NI rural landscape reflects hundreds of years of local farming activity. The UFU is committed to working with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the NIEA to deliver a better environment while supporting growth within the agricultural sector.



Northern Ireland Environment Agency

NIEA is an Agency within DAERA, responsible for monitoring and protecting Northern Ireland's environment. NIEA works with its DAERA colleagues to raise awareness of environmental obligations and support farmers in delivering better environmental and economic outcomes, through increased compliance and sustainable farming practices.

The Strategic Objective of NIEA is to *create prosperity and well being through effective environment and natural heritage management and regulation.*

The Operating Principles are to:

1. Make it easy for people to do good business and difficult for people to do bad business.
2. Help create a resource efficient Northern Ireland.
3. Help people see our environment and heritage as an opportunity, not a barrier.
4. Be a customer-focused and people-centred organisation.

NIEA key outcomes:

- a) A full compliant regulated industry;
- b) Freshwater and marine environment at "good status";
- c) A compliant crime free waste sector;
- d) Good habitat and landscape quality with species abundance and diversity; and

¹ Statistical Review of Agriculture, DARD

² NI Agri-Food Sector Key Statistics June 2012, DARD

³ NI Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, DARD

- e) Promote environmentally sustainable development and infrastructure.

Background to the MoU

NIEA has a close working relationship with farmers throughout Northern Ireland on a range of environmental issues. NIEA investigates pollution incidents or other environmental issues, carries out routine monitoring of habitats and works with farmers to protect special sites and features. NIEA is also responsible for the regulation of the more intensive sectors through the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control legislation.

As sustainable agriculture is dependent upon a healthy environment, there needs to be an effective collaboration and engagement between NIEA and the farming community. This MoU between the NIEA and the UFU aims to improve the working relationship between the parties to support sustainable farming and compliance with environmental legislation.

Party stakeholders

For the purpose of this MoU, stakeholders include UFU employees and members, agricultural fora, eNGOs, community groups and representation from across DAERA as required.

Management of the MoU

The following framework for decision making and management of the agreement has been approved by the two signature parties. A joint MoU Working Group will be responsible for:

- Endorsing and directing implementation action;
- Reviewing implementation progress;
- Ensuring appropriate resourcing to support implementation of key commitments;
- Interacting with their respective organisations and party stakeholders; and
- Reporting and making recommendations on the progress of the agreement to both parties.

This MoU and progress reports will be made available to the public on the DAERA and UFU websites. Both parties are accountable and responsible for the commitments made in this MoU. This MoU is not legally binding and either party reserves the right to withdraw at any stage if they wish.

Review and reporting

The parties have agreed that this MoU will be formally reviewed after one year from the date of the agreement to assess its effectiveness. This review will also identify areas of focus for the following year and possible amendments to the MoU. The Working Group will meet on a quarterly basis for the first year to review progress on implementing commitments.

Contact details

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UFU Senior Policy Officer

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JOINT SIGNATURE OF AGREEMENT TO THIS MOU

Signed on behalf of NIEA

Signature.....

David Small

Chief Executive of NIEA

Date: 7 April 2017

Signed on behalf of the UFU

Signature.....

Wesley Aston

Chief Executive of UFU

Date: 7 April 2017

Key Commitments

Commitment	Action	Outcome(s)
TRAINING AND GUIDANCE		
1. Improved awareness of agricultural and environmental issues	1.1 UFU and NIEA staff will actively exchange knowledge on farming issues and pressures. Where appropriate this should involve CAFRE, other parts of DAERA and other organisations such as Rural Support.	(a) A greater knowledge and understanding between NIEA and UFU of current and future farming, environmental and regulatory issues and pressures.
	1.2 UFU and NIEA will liaise with CAFRE, DAERA and relevant internal staff to explore the possibility of delivering a series of workshops to train farmers on environmental issues, their obligations and the benefits of improving environmental practice.	(b) Farmers better informed of environmental issues and obligations. (c) Higher compliance levels across the agricultural sector. (d) Stronger working relationship between NIEA, UFU and CAFRE.
	1.3 UFU and NIEA will explore opportunities to contribute to CAFRE's teaching curriculum.	(e) Students and young farmers will gain a greater appreciation of environmental issues and obligations.
2. Improved guidance and communication between NIEA and the farming community	2.1 NIEA will attend agricultural meetings, where appropriate.	(a) Knowledge transfer, sharing of information and delivery of transparent regulation.
	2.2 UFU and NIEA will continue to meet on a regular basis to discuss issues arising e.g. PPC permits, waste issues, wildfires, designated sites, cross-compliance.	(b) Improved communication between NIEA and the farming community, creating a more productive working relationship between NIEA and farmers.
	2.3 UFU and NIEA will work together to publicise more information on environmental issues and obligations through revised/new guidance and increased number of media releases.	(a) Raise awareness of environmental issues and obligations amongst the farming community, resulting in higher levels of compliance and environmental improvement.
REGULATION, ADVICE & IMPROVED COMPLIANCE		
3. Support and develop innovative ways to achieve better environmental outcomes	3.1 UFU and NIEA will develop an innovative approach with the Farm Quality Assurance (FQA) Schemes. NIEA inspectors will share knowledge and guidance with FQAS inspectors on cross-compliance and environmental	(a) Higher levels of compliance in farms in a Quality Assurance Scheme. (b) Potential incentives for farmers within these schemes (c) Knowledge transfer between

	issues.	NIEA staff and FQA Inspectors, raising awareness of cross-compliance obligations. (d) Farmers receive consistent, accurate advice from a range of channels.
	3.2 UFU will promote derogation under the Nitrates Action Programme to suitable farmers. 3.3 NIEA will not retrospectively inspect records for new derogation applicants (initially for a period of one year). NIEA will write to farmers eligible for derogation.	(a) Farmers that are suitable for derogation are supported. (b) Support the 'Going for Growth' Strategy in ways that protect the environment. (c) Reassurance that only records of interest to NIEA are those from the date of the derogation application onwards.
	3.4 UFU and NIEA will support research and innovative technologies that increase farm profitability and which support the 'Going for Growth Strategy' in ways that benefit the environment.	(a) Farmers can meet the demands of a growing agri-food industry but in a more sustainable way, that reduces / minimises negative impacts on the environment. (b) New knowledge gain to help inform decision-making processes. (c) Seeking new opportunities to go 'beyond compliance', giving farmers a competitive edge in the market place.
	4. Review notice period for routine cross-compliance inspections	4.1 NIEA will give a minimum of 7 days notice for a routine cross-compliance inspection up to a maximum of 14 days notice provided it does not compromise the nature of the inspection. (a) Farmers receive adequate notice period prior to an inspection where possible, reducing stress associated with an inspection.
WORKING TOGETHER FOR AGRICULTURE & THE ENVIRONMENT		
5. Review Site Permissions	5.1 NIEA will normally attempt to obtain permission before entering a farmyard, provided it does not compromise the purpose of the visit. (However, NIEA staff do have legal powers to enter any premises to carry out their duties, with or without the permission of the owner).	(a) Improved relationship between NIEA staff and farmers / landowners, resulting in more proactive solutions to environmental issues.
6. Review Designated Sites Process and support	6.1. NIEA will review the designation process, including the levels of landowner engagement and provision of advice/guidance. 6.2. UFU will input into NIEA's	(a) Landowners are an integral part of the site designation process and habitat management. (b) Enhanced awareness of the reasons for site designations,

	<p>engagement with landowners and help to promote good environmental practice.</p> <p>6.3. NIEA and UFU will meet biannually, and when necessary, to discuss issues.</p> <p>6.4. NIEA will develop improved guidance to aid with consent process/requirements.</p>	<p>resulting in greater protection for special habitats, species and features.</p>
7. Encourage interactive catchment management	7.1 UFU will actively encourage farmers to become involved in catchment management meetings/projects to discuss and address local water quality issues with key stakeholders.	<p>(a) Greater rapport between NIEA staff and stakeholders, resulting in a more transparent relationship in which sharing of information is key.</p> <p>(b) NIEA will be better informed of issues in the catchment area.</p> <p>(c) Farmers and other stakeholders more likely to confide in officers and ask for advice.</p> <p>(d) Farmers develop a clear understanding of the pressure on water quality and other stakeholders' perspectives.</p>
8. Promote partnership approaches to resolving issues	<p>8.1. UFU and NIEA will continue with the Water Catchment Partnership approach with NIW/DAERA/CAFRE to highlight issues with pesticide detections within Drinking Water Catchments. Discuss widening it out to other catchments as required.</p> <p>8.2 UFU and NIEA will work with the Wildfires Group and Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to reduce the incidences of wildfires.</p>	<p>(a) Farmers develop a greater knowledge of the problems associated with pesticide use and how to prevent them.</p> <p>(b) Healthier watercourses and overall environment, with less risk to public health.</p> <p>(c) Contribute to the Programme for Government Water Framework Directive target.</p> <p>(d) Collaborative working to reduce the risk of wildfires and associated habitat damage.</p>
9. Work together to reduce the loss of farmland biodiversity	9.1 UFU will work closely with NIEA, other parts of DAERA, eNGOs and other key stakeholders to promote the importance of, and reduce pressures on, farmland biodiversity and its vital role in viable farming systems.	<p>(a) Increase awareness of the importance of biodiversity and the 'ecosystem services' it provides.</p> <p>(b) Reduce the loss of farmland biodiversity.</p> <p>(c) Contribute to the Programme for Government Biodiversity target.</p>
10. Work to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions from agriculture	10.1 UFU will continue to work with its members to reduce the carbon intensity of agricultural produce through enhanced awareness-raising, participation	<p>(a) Reduce greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture and the effects on the environment.</p> <p>(b) Reduce the effects of climate</p>

	in discussions and supporting innovative ways to improve efficiency and reduce GHG emissions.	change on agricultural productivity. (c) Contribute to the Programme for Government Greenhouse Gas Emission target.
11. Contribute to the Regulatory Transformation Programme	11.1 UFU and NIEA will continue with the Regulatory Transformation Programme to discuss strategic issues with key stakeholders. 11.2 UFU and NIEA will consider an anonymous customer-feedback survey specifically for farmers and landowners.	(a) Strategic issues and changes will be discussed with key stakeholders. (b) Identify and address key issues between the Agency and farmers/landowners to improve customer service.
12. Explore alternative approaches to addressing low severity farm incidents	12.1 NIEA will seek to reduce the number of pollution incidents through increased focus on the provision of advice and support. 12.2 NIEA will also explore new ways of dealing with low severity incidents and their impact on cross compliance and the Basic Payment Scheme, and will engage with the European Commission to seek approval to implement any new approach.	(a) Farmers can proactively carry out remedial action of the problem (b) Better environmental outcomes (c) Improvement in the working relations between NIEA inspectors and the farmers. (d) Improved levels of compliance (e) Farmers would receive initial support and advice from NIEA without the fear of a reduction in their Basic Payments following a low severity farm incident.