



Northern Ireland Environment Agency Business Plan 2023-24



Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.



An Agency within the Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®
We invest in people Standard

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Introduction

I am pleased to present the Agency's Business Plan for 2023-2024 which sets out the key priorities and activities for the year ahead, until such times as Ministers return and set any new priorities for NIEA and DAERA. This plan follows the direction set by our previous Minister and has been expanded to include 17 targets (6 more than last year) to help give a greater insight into the current work of NIEA. I consider this greater accountability to be more important than ever as, in the absence of Ministers, we seek to ensure that we continue to make best use of the limited resources we have to help protect our Environment in Northern Ireland.

Protecting the environment and delivering health and well-being benefits while supporting our stakeholders and those we regulate, continues to be our focus as we move forward.

The 2023-2024 NIEA budget settlement provides challenges and opportunities for NIEA. Although the available budget allocation isn't what we would like it to be - Resource budget of £29.7m is £1.5m less than 2022-2023 (Capital is £3.7m higher than the £0.5m in 2022-2023), it does provide us with opportunities to make progress in 2023-2024. In order to live within the resource budget allocated to us, we cannot afford to fill the many vacant posts that exist across the NIEA. Staff resources make up a significant portion of NIEA's budget and we will allocate work on a priority basis to the staff we have. To that end a prioritisation exercise will continue



Paul Donnelly
Chief Executive, NIEA

throughout 2023-2024 to review work and identify how we can best use the resources we have to greatest effect. This may include pausing work, stopping work, incorporating technological solutions and doing things differently. Without carrying out this work, and in the context of limited additional funding, our ability to deal with new challenges and safeguarding the quality of the environment through effective regulation will be curtailed. I know that we can't stand still and we need to support our staff by giving them the direction and resources to deliver and support the best environmental outcomes. This won't be easy and we need to do more to build our capacity and capability, along with that of key stakeholders.

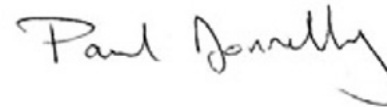
Our two strategic priorities in 2023-2024 will be:

- 1. To regulate activities potentially harmful to our land, air and water quality remains our top priority.**
- 2. To support the protection of and investment in nature conservation and the environment.**

Five key priorities and a range of activities will facilitate progress against these strategic priorities which are set out in more detail below but include:

- Delivering the 2023 Cross Compliance programme for the protection of water resources and the conservation of wild birds, flora and fauna to include at least 1% of farms and 5% of those operating under a derogation.
- Delivering 90% of regulatory inspections and monitoring programme for all regulated activities.
- By providing effective and efficient regulation and enforcement of Drinking Water supplies - 95% compliance with microbiological parameters at private drinking water supplies and 90% of events notified by NI.
- Delivering a new Environment Fund Strategic Strand supporting at least 40 environmental projects in 2023/24 (totalling over £7m).
- Launching CEDaR 2023-2033 programme (Centre for Environmental Data and Recording)
- Publishing a Strategic Way Forward addressing the risk of wildfires in NI.
- Complete field condition (assessment) monitoring of 150 species, habitat and/or earth science ASSI features.
- Publish Conservation Management Plans (CMPs) for 45 of our Special Areas of Conservation, as a framework for delivery of the necessary conservation measures to achieve favourable conservation status.
- Complete review and publish an updated Priority Habitats list.

There is no doubt that we face many challenges in protecting and enhancing our environment from current and new threats. It is vital that we continue to support our staff to deal with these challenges and avail of the opportunities. Key to this will be collaborating and working with stakeholders, making best use of science and learning from others. This Business Plan sets out the key actions that NIEA will deliver in 2023-2024, and is a living document that can be adjusted to respond to new needs and priorities.



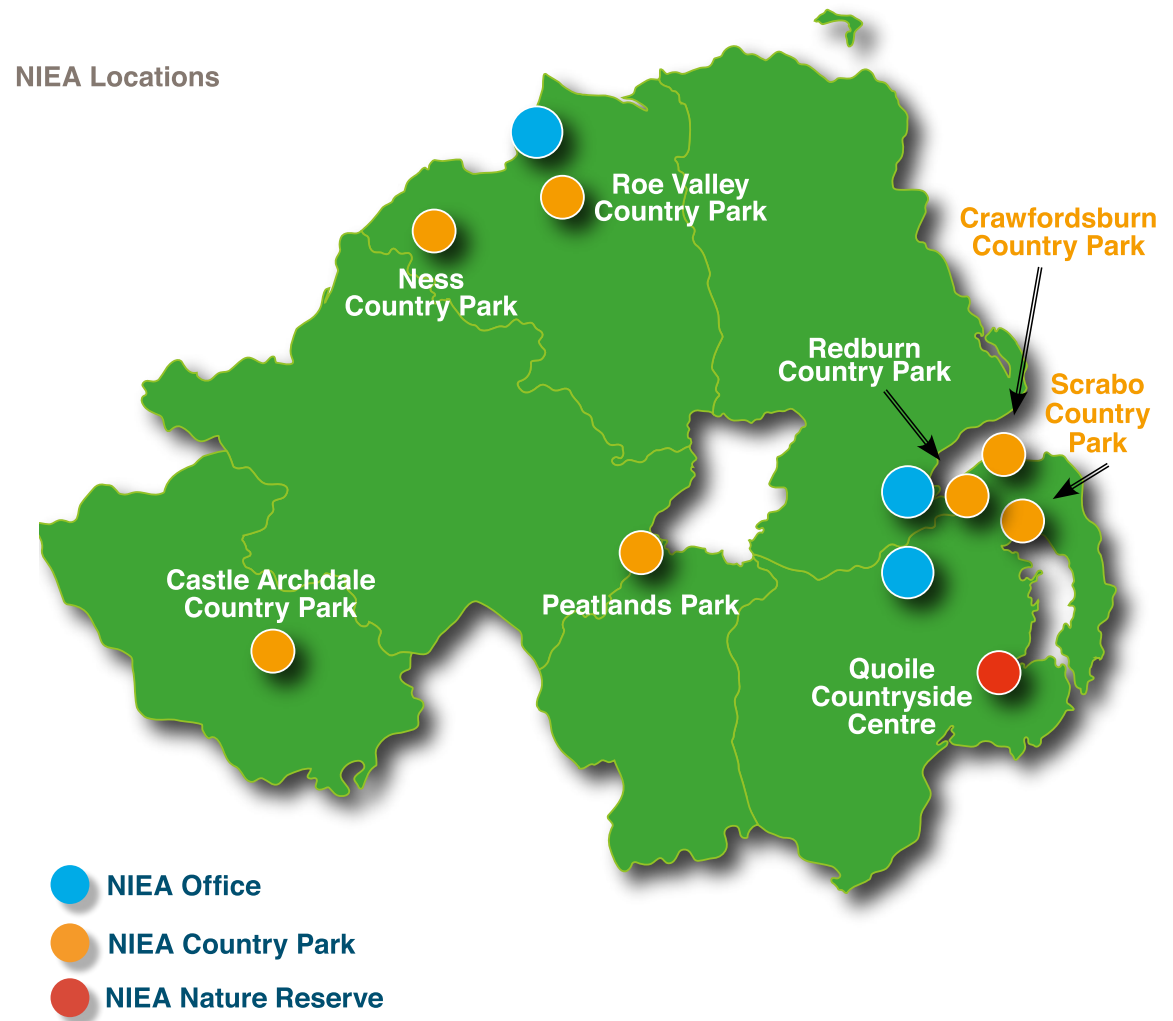
Paul Donnelly
Chief Executive, NIEA

1. Who We Are

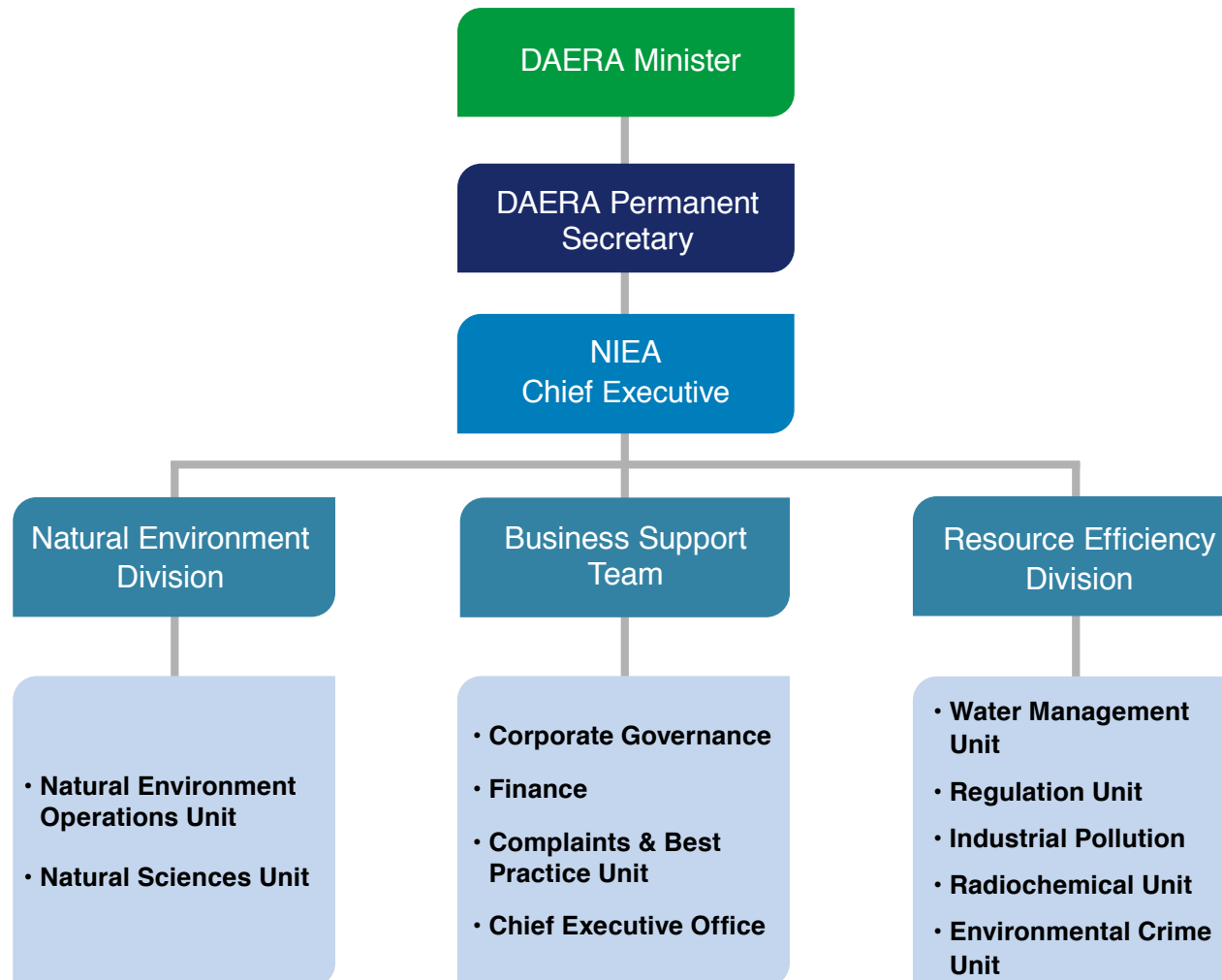
1.1 Our responsibilities

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is an Executive Agency within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) operating within the context of the Department’s overall vision, strategic objectives and policies. The Agency’s primary purpose is to protect and enhance Northern Ireland’s environment, and in doing so, deliver health and well-being benefits and support economic growth.

We have some 585 staff who are located across Northern Ireland. There are two major office sites; with the Agency’s headquarters located in the Klondyke Building in Belfast and our Water Management Unit based in Lisburn. Some Agency staff are also located in Jubilee House, Ballykelly. NIEA manages seven country parks and some 65 nature reserve sites across NI.



1.2 Organisation Structure



2. What We Will Deliver






NIEA has given careful consideration to its budget allocation for 2023-2024, and what the reduced budget will mean for the work of the Agency. These considerations have resulted in NIEA Key Priorities, and NIEA Key Performance Targets for 2023-2024.

2.1 NIEA Key Priorities 2023-2024

NIEA's primary purpose is to protect and enhance Northern Ireland's environment, and in doing so, to deliver health and well-being benefits and support economic growth.

As an Executive Agency within DAERA, NIEA is a key contributor to DAERA's vision of **'Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone'**. In line with NIEA's overall purpose, the Agency has established its own five Key Priorities detailed to the right.

NIEA Key Priorities 2023-2024

| | |
|---|---|
|  | <p>NIEA Key Priority 1 Working towards a fully compliant regulated industry.</p> |
|  | <p>NIEA Key Priority 2 Delivering freshwater environment at 'good status'.</p> |
|  | <p>NIEA Key Priority 3 Tackling waste sector crime.</p> |
|  | <p>NIEA Key Priority 4 Supporting good habitat, earth science and landscape quality and enhancing species abundance and diversity.</p> |
|  | <p>NIEA Key Priority 5 Promotion of environmentally sustainable development, infrastructure and access to quality green and blue spaces.</p> |

2.2 NIEA Key Performance Targets (KPTs) 2023-2024

Key Performance Targets (KPTs)

All of the NIEA Business Plan targets 2023-2024 outlined in the table below align with the NIEA Key Priorities. However, in line with HM Treasury guidance ('Setting Key Targets for Executive Agencies; A Guide'), 6 of the targets have been designated as Key Performance Targets (KPTs).

2.3 NIEA Business Plan Targets 2023-2024

| NIEA Business Plan targets 2023-2024 | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| NIEA Target Number | How We Will Achieve it | Target Date | SRO and Business Area |
| <p>1</p> <p>KPT</p> | <p>Support the delivery of strategic natural and freshwater environmental priorities through funding to not-for-profit partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commence and manage a new Environment Fund (EF) Strategic Strand and issue associated multi-year Letters of Offer to support at least 35 projects in 2023-2024 totalling over £7m. • Assess and award Water Quality and Improvement Grant Scheme funding. Manage implementation of scheme and drawdown of funds by successful applicants. • Launch Centre for Environmental Data & Recording 2023-2033. • Issue full payment on 90% of all claims submitted by 15 March 2024. | 31 st March 2024 | Director, NED |

| NIEA Business Plan targets 2023-2024 | | | |
|---|--|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| NIEA Target Number | How We Will Achieve it | Target Date | SRO and Business Area |
| 2 | <p>Support improvements in statutory planning responses to enhance delivery of our overall product to the Planning Authority and ultimately the citizen.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous collaboration and engagement via the NIEA Client Liaison Role for Councils, undertaking at least one formal meeting a year with each participating Council. • Engaging externally, delivering knowledge exchange with at least 2 key sectors. • Review all NIEA standing advice. • Respond to 100% of statutory planning consultation requests within 21 days or otherwise agreed timeframes. | 31 st March 2024 | Director, NED |
| 3 | <p>Take forward action in relation to wildfire management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue a tender to develop wildfire management plans for the Mourne, Antrim Hills and Carn Glenshane. • Finalise a Strategic Way Forward for addressing the risk of wildfires in Northern Ireland and draft an associated Action Plan. | 31 st March 2024 | Director, NED |
| 4 | <p>Support sustainable access to our great outdoors and provide opportunities for naturally inspired outdoor recreation throughout the year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch a Green and Blue Space Map for Northern Ireland. • Manage and care for our 7 Country Parks throughout the year to ensure safe public access. | 31 st March 2024 | Director, NED |

| NIEA Business Plan targets 2023-2024 | | | |
|---|---|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| NIEA Target Number | How We Will Achieve it | Target Date | SRO and Business Area |
| 5 | <p>Gathering and evaluating evidence: including preparing for monitoring, surveillance and reporting requirements associated with new and emerging environmental strategies and legislative and international commitments.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify terrestrial biodiversity monitoring and evidence needs and devise a comprehensive monitoring and evidence programme to support conservation action and biodiversity reporting. • Delivery of 4 Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) Monitoring and Evaluation (MEF) work packages related to biological monitoring to assist in overall delivery of EFS. | 31 st March 2024 | Director, NED |
| 6 KPT | <p>Continue statutory monitoring of the favourable condition of our Areas of Special Scientific Interest.</p> <p>Complete field condition (assessment) monitoring of 150 species, habitat and/or earth science Area Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) features.</p> | 31 st March 2024 | Director, NED |
| 7 KPT | <p>Maintain service standards in relation to natural heritage licencing and consenting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue decisions for 95% of Wildlife Order licences within 15 working days. • Issue decisions for 90% of Environment Order notifiable operations consent applications within 3 months. | 31 st March 2024 | Director, NED |

| NIEA Business Plan targets 2023-2024 | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| NIEA Target Number | How We Will Achieve it | Target Date | SRO and Business Area |
| 8 | <p>Support sustainable management of our habitats and species</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish 40 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) habitat maps. • Publish 40 Conservation Management Plan (CMPs) to support the delivery of conservation actions through existing nature recovery programmes. | 31 st March 2024 | Director, NED |
| 9 | <p>Continue to deliver, as appropriate, the operational changes resulting from transition from the EU Exit, supporting customers and stakeholders *to ensure implementation of the Windsor Framework requirements.</p> <p>a) Continue to work collaboratively with DAERA policy colleagues to operationalise legislative and policy changes as a consequence of ongoing negotiations between UK Government and the EU on the Northern Ireland Protocol/Windsor Framework, for the suite of Chemicals Regulations - Registration Evaluation Authorisation and Restriction on Chemicals (REACH), Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), mercury, Fluorinated-gas and Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) and Market Surveillance.</p> <p>b) Continue to work collaboratively with key partners such as HSENI, local councils, UK Government , and UK Environment Agencies to develop and strengthen collaborative working, for the suite of Chemicals Regulations - REACH, POPs, mercury, Fluorinated-gas and ODS and Market Surveillance.</p> <p>c) Implement changes of Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) Regulations due to be published 2nd Quarter 2022.</p> <p>d) Undertake at least 2 chemicals information campaigns.</p> <p>*Note - This wording was added on 16th October 2023, in response to the Departmental approval process for the NIEA Business Plan.</p> | 31 st March 2024 | Director, RED |

| NIEA Business Plan targets 2023-2024 | | | |
|---|---|--|------------------------------|
| NIEA Target Number | How We Will Achieve it | Target Date | SRO and Business Area |
| 10 KPT | <p>Help protect the environment by delivering 90% of regulatory inspections and monitoring programme for Waste PPC Permits, Waste Management licences and all IPRI regulated activities.</p> <p>a) Deliver 90% of regulatory inspections and monitoring programme for Waste PPC Permits, Waste Management licences and all IPRI regulated activities</p> <p>b) All non-compliances to be recorded, categorised, and dealt with in accordance with IPRI’s risk-based Quality Assurance procedures, including all substantial non-compliances to be subject to a case review.</p> | 31 st March 2024 | Director, RED |
| 11 KPT | <p>Protect public health and the environment by providing effective and efficient regulation and enforcement of Drinking Water supplies - 95% compliance with microbiological parameters at private drinking water supplies and 90% of events notified by NI Water categorised within 5 days.</p> <p>a) 95% compliance with microbiological parameters at private drinking water supplies.</p> <p>b) 90% of events notified by NI Water categorised within 5 days.</p> <p>c) *contribute to the Water quality Operational Response and Review Teams in relation to the public drinking water supply provided by NI Water from Lough Neagh.</p> <p>*Note - This wording was added on 16th October 2023, in response to the Departmental approval process for the NIEA Business Plan.</p> | 31 st March 2024 | Director, RED |
| 12 | <p>Deliver the Mobuoy Remediation Project 2023-2024.</p> <p>a) Submit the recommended Optimum Remediation Strategy for appropriate approvals (Minister, or in absence of Minister to the DAERA Permanent Secretary).</p> <p>b) Submit the Outline Business Case 2 (OBC 2) for appropriate approvals.</p> | <p>30th September 2023</p> <p>31st December 2023</p> | Director, RED |

| NIEA Business Plan targets 2023-2024 | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| NIEA Target Number | How We Will Achieve it | Target Date | SRO and Business Area |
| 13 | <p>Deliver the 2023/24 targets for a new Environmental Regulatory System (ERS) by 2026.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Regulatory Transformation Programme (RTP) - Complete public consultation on a new Fees & Charges policy to support implementation of ERS. Publish DAERA's response to consultation / comments. Update draft policy based on consultation responses. b) RTP - Procure and complete the review of waste management exemptions. c) RTP - Publish the RTP Stakeholder Engagement & Comms Strategy. d) RTP - Complete a minimum of 85% digitised regulatory site inspections via electronic platform. e) RTP - Digital Transformation of services to achieve a minimum of 90% of water and waste regulatory applications via the online platform. | 31 st March 2024 | Director, RED |
| 14 | <p>Deliver 95% of freshwater sampling and monitoring requirements for NI water protection legislation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Delivery of statutory sampling and analysis programme to deliver agreed Aquatic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) 2023 to provide quality assured evidence base for statutory reporting under NI water protection legislation. b) *Provide information and data to support the DAERA Water Quality Steering Group and the Review Team (T&F) which has been established to identify solutions to the Blue Green Algae and water quality issues in Lough Neagh. <p>*Note - This wording was added on 16th October 2023, in response to the Departmental approval process for the NIEA Business Plan.</p> | 31 st March 2024 | Director, RED |

| NIEA Business Plan targets 2023-2024 | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| NIEA Target Number | How We Will Achieve it | Target Date | SRO and Business Area |
| 15 KPT | <p>Deliver the 2023 Cross Compliance programme for the protection of water resources and the conservation of wild birds, flora, and fauna to include at least 1% of farms and 5% of those operating under a derogation.</p> <p>Deliver the Water Management Unit element of the required 2023 Cross Compliance inspection programme.</p> | 31 st March 2024 | Director, RED |
| 16 | <p>Respond to reports of water pollution and take appropriate enforcement action on confirmed pollution instances.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Meet target response times for high, medium, and low severity pollution incidents. (Quarterly reporting). b) For confirmed high and medium incidents take appropriate enforcement action within 7 months for 90% of cases. (Quarterly reporting). c) *NIEA will respond to reports of blue-green algae to provide identification and notify landowners and relevant stakeholders as appropriate. <p>*Note - This wording was added on 16th October 2023, in response to the Departmental approval process for the NIEA Business Plan.</p> | 31 st March 2024 | Director, RED |
| 17 | <p>Deliver 2023 Water Quality Improvement Grant Scheme as supported by the Environment Fund.</p> <p>Assess and award WQIG Scheme funding. Manage implementation of scheme and drawdown of funds by successful applicants.</p> | 31 st March 2024 | Director, RED |



To find out more about NIEA's work visit:

Website: www.daera-ni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-environment-agency

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