

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

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“ Our natural assets have never been as valued by so many. The coronavirus pandemic has wakened in many of us our love for nature, reminding us of those simple pleasures in life that our environment delivers. Thankfully in Northern Ireland, we have much to love, from our beaches and parks to our woodlands and rivers. And we also thankfully have many willing custodians not just from environmental groups but also from our children and schools to our local businesses, anglers and farmers. But with ever increasing pressure on our environment it is becoming clear that we can no longer take all of this for granted. Our job in the Agency is to ensure that we work collaboratively to value, protect and enhance these assets for the benefit of the current generation and for generations to come. ”

*Tracey Teague*

*Acting Chief Executive, NIEA*

*Peatlands Park*

## Who We Are

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency is an Executive Agency within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland 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 536 staff (Full Time Equivalents) who are located in offices and regional sites (mainly country parks) across Northern Ireland. There are two major office sites: one in Belfast and one in Lisburn, with the Agency's headquarters located in the Klondyke Building, Belfast. Some Agency staff are also located in the DAERA building at Ballykelly. Regionally NIEA operates seven country parks and 65 nature reserves.

### NIEA Locations





## Chief Executive's Foreword

I am pleased to present our Agency's Business Plan for 2020/21 which sets out the key activities for the year.

The Agency's primary purpose 'to protect and enhance Northern Ireland's environment and in doing so, deliver health and well-being benefits and support economic growth' has not changed, but the context has with the UK leaving the EU on 31 January 2020 and more recently the Coronavirus pandemic.

Not surprisingly, the more strategic nature of the targets reflects the significant impact that Coronavirus (COVID-19) has had and will continue to have on how we deliver our core business alongside our preparations for the EU Exit transition.

Preparations, response and recovery will be at the heart of our business this year.

Our priority will be to protect public health and the environment and to support our stakeholders and those we regulate as we navigate our way through the coronavirus pandemic and transition from the EU.

COVID-19 has impacted on every organisation or business to varying degrees. It has changed the way we work, from our operating models to our organisational agility. In recognising these changes, we will continue to work with the industry and environment sectors through the COVID-19 recovery phase, just as we have through the initial response phases. I have no doubt, however, that we will collectively respond to the challenges of the pandemic and through innovative thinking and collaboration seek to progress new ways of working to deliver on and improve environmental outcomes.

We will continue with the implementation of the transition from the EU Exit with work progressing on aspects of policy frameworks, legislation and transitional operational planning for day one and beyond. Our work will also consider the implications on the environment of administering the Northern Ireland Protocol.

In recovery from COVID-19, in conjunction with transitioning from the EU, we now potentially have a real opportunity to deliver jointly on a sustainable thriving environment, through a Green Growth approach.

## Northern Ireland Environment Agency Business Plan 2020-2021

This will of course increase the importance of continuing to work with our customers and stakeholders who have a responsible and progressive approach to environmental management, but we will also seek to enforce against those who want to take short cuts or who damage our environment.

To ensure that our environment is at the heart of a shared sustainable future for Northern Ireland, the Agency will also continue to play an important role in supporting and influencing policy development on key issues such as climate change, waste, biodiversity, outdoor recreation, animal disease control, environmental farming schemes and future agri-environment policies.

Agency staff are at the heart of this work - their dedication, commitment and expertise is a vital asset as we deliver a complex programme of work. This was particularly evident during the recent pandemic where they regularly went the extra mile to do the right thing for public health and the environment.

Our relationships with our stakeholders are also crucial and have strengthened as we responded to COVID-19. We will build on this further and continue to engage with the wider Department, public and community groups to help us to deliver our environmental outcomes.

For example, through the Environment Fund, over £3 million will be provided to not-for-profit organisations and councils to deliver a range of environmental outcomes. These opportunities will also help us to address a number of significant long term environmental challenges.

A challenging issue for the protection of our biodiversity is the continued impact that nitrogen deposition is having on our protected areas and special sites across Northern Ireland primarily due to emissions of ammonia and nitrogen oxides. During 2020/21, the Agency will therefore continue to assist wider DAERA in the delivery of a cross departmental approach to the management of ammonia and nitrogen deposition.

In relation to water quality, we are still battling to improve the status. This year we will prepare a draft Third Cycle River Basin Management Plan to tackle a decline in water quality. This will be informed by the consultation responses from the 'Significant Water Management Issues' report and joined up policies on environment, land use, agriculture and economy will be essential.


In managing a range of lands encompassing seven country parks and 65 nature reserves we are committed to continuing our role in connecting the public with the living landscape available on our doorstep. These facilities and their biodiversity are also crucial to the conservation of our natural environment. The management of these sites will continue to be a significant work area given the impact of COVID-19 as we seek to ensure the provision of safe and enjoyable outdoor experiences for all.

## Northern Ireland Environment Agency Business Plan 2020-2021

Our key role of environmental regulation remains a top priority. This includes working with local councils to ensure that waste is responsibly managed. We will continue to highlight that going beyond environmental compliance can bring significant benefits for the business arena, helping to unlock the economic opportunities provided by the climate change and resource efficiency agendas.

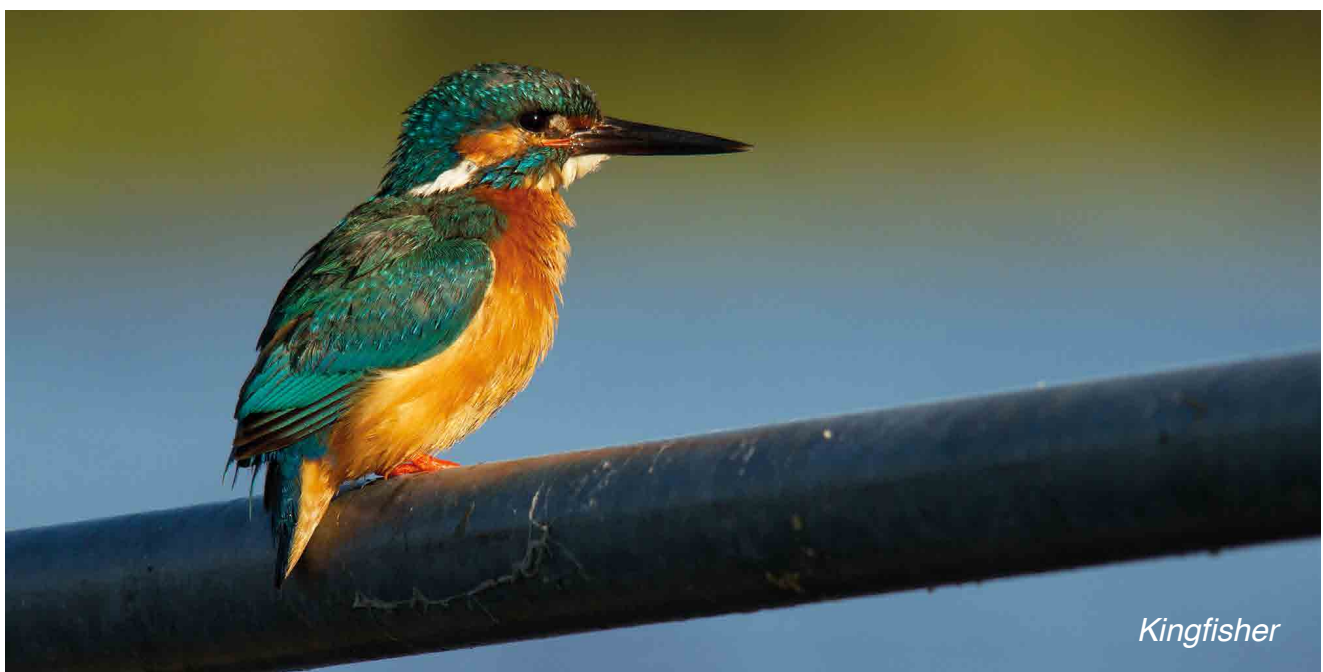
Learning from COVID 19, we are developing and using alternative regulatory approaches. This includes desk-based compliance checks, greater use of IT and a focus on active frontline teams to respond to priority issues that are likely to cause environmental harm. We will of course need to be clear about the allocation of resources to our competing priorities, in particular to meet the pressures arising from the recovery phase of COVID-19 but also delivering the transition from the EU Exit. This will be one of the greatest challenges the Agency has faced given the current backdrop and will require greater flexibility, new ways of operating and realistic expectations.

There is also no doubt that the environment is becoming front and centre in terms of public awareness, behaviours and policy development. We must recognise the opportunities all of this presents and continue to tackle the challenges we face in 2020/21.



Tracey Teague

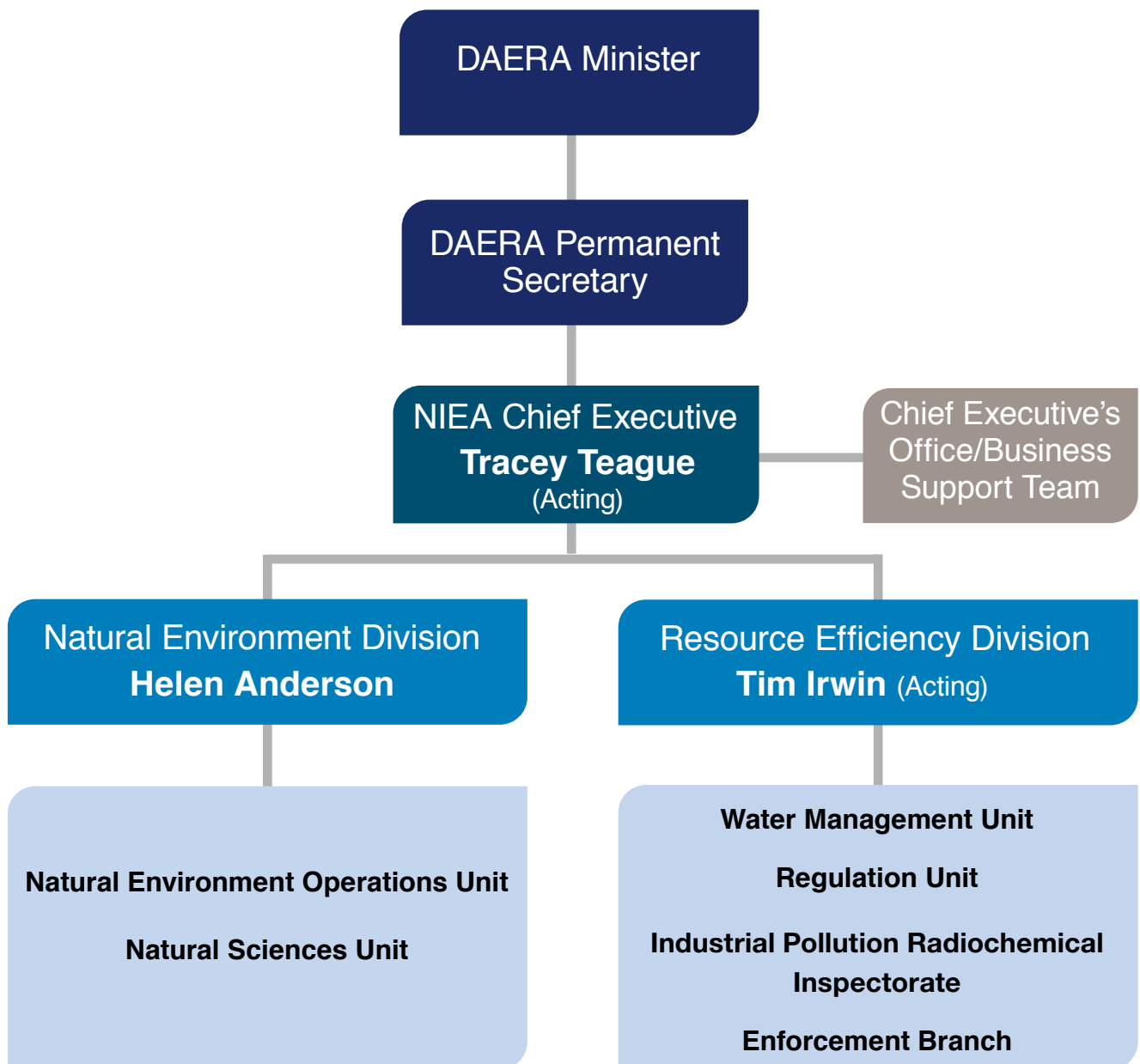
*Acting Chief Executive, NIEA*



## Governance

NIEA is headed by a Chief Executive supported by two Executive Directors with responsibility for the Agency's two divisions, Natural Environment and Resource Efficiency. A Business Support Team assists the Chief Executive and Directors in the delivery of key corporate functions such as strategic planning, financial management and governance.

NIEA Organisation Chart at 1 April 2020





## Northern Ireland Environment Agency Business Plan 2020-2021

The Agency's Framework Document sets out its relationship with the Department and the approach to corporate governance to ensure proper and effective management of the Agency's affairs. The Chief Executive of the Agency is also the Agency Accounting Officer in line with Department of Finance guidance.

A Statutory Advisory Council, the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC), provides the Agency with independent advice on matters relating to nature conservation.

A formal Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC), which includes a non-executive chair, three independent members and representatives from both internal and external audit, advises the Chief Executive on issues of risk, control, governance and assurance.



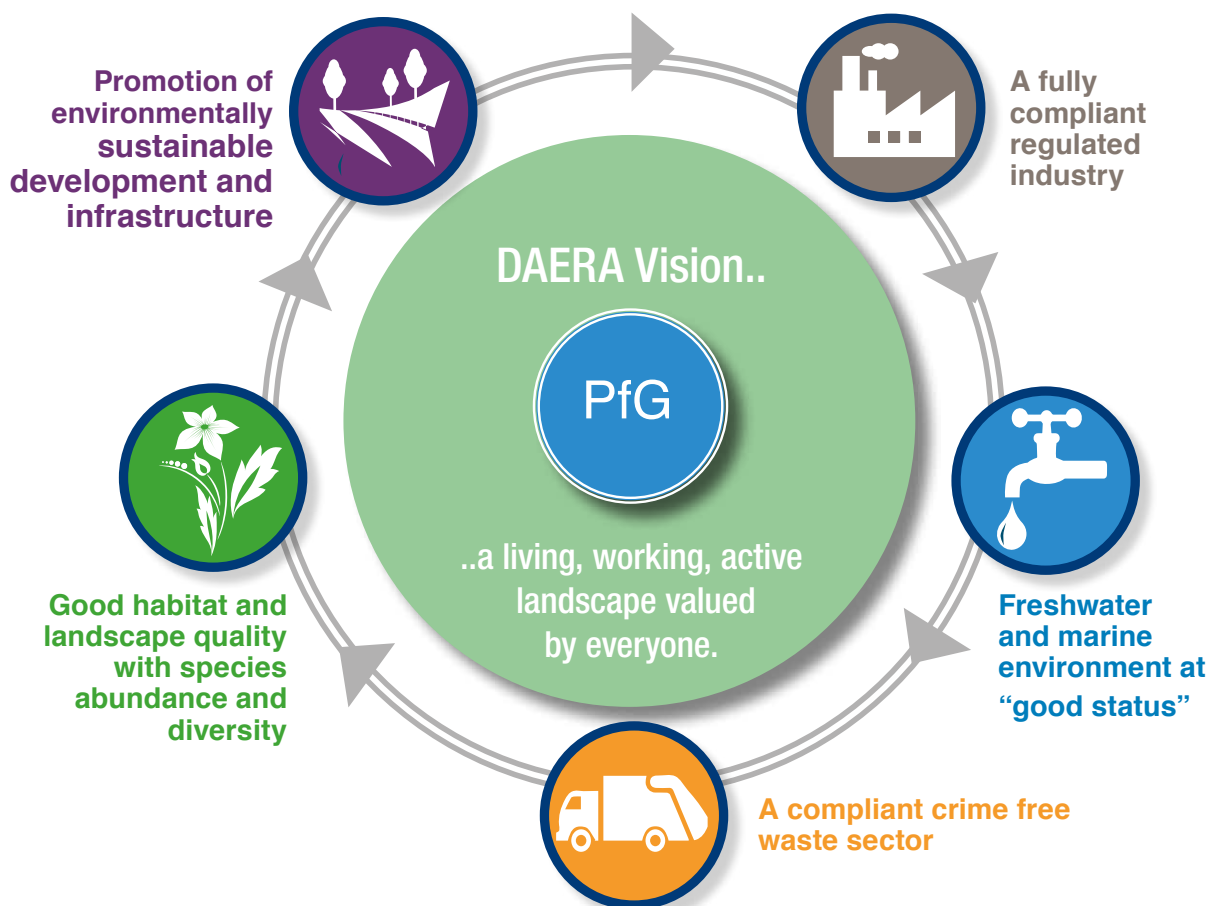
## NIEA Purpose

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".

One of DAERA's four strategic objectives is "To protect and enhance our natural environment now and for future generations whilst advocating its value to and wellbeing for all", which underpins the draft Programme for Government (PfG) Outcome 2, "We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment".

In line with NIEA's overall purpose, the Agency has a pivotal role in delivering these outcomes through its own five key priorities (shown in the diagram below).



The Agency also plays an important role in supporting policy development within DAERA's Environment, Marine and Fisheries Group as well as contributing to wider policy development across DAERA on key issues such as waste, biodiversity, animal disease control, environmental farming schemes and future agri-environment policies.

## What We Do

The key activities and functions which help to deliver against our 5 key priorities are:



### A fully compliant regulated industry

NIEA promotes a sustainable approach to managing both waste and land resources monitoring - auditing and regulating waste facilities and activities in order to protect our environment and human health and support a Green Growth approach to encourage resource efficiency and support a thriving economy. Many businesses have realised going beyond compliance and acting in a more socially and environmentally responsible way can also positively affect profitability and the long-term success of their business. NIEA wishes to transform its regulatory approach to facilitate opportunities for businesses who have this ambition, whilst rigorously pursuing those who seek to circumvent legal requirements and cause environmental harm.



### Freshwater and marine environment at “good status”

NIEA plays a key role in protecting water quality and quantity. The aim is to achieve ‘good status’ in all waters; from groundwater to rivers and lakes, through to estuaries and coastal waters. This is delivered through a number of statutory instruments that transposed the requirements of the European Commission’s Water Framework Directive (WFD) into Northern Ireland legislation. The objectives of the local regulations are: to get polluted waters clean again, to ensure that clean waters are kept clean and to ensure that sufficient water is available to support the environment as well as for all of its users. NIEA, in partnership with the Marine and Fisheries Division of DAERA, is responsible for development and implementation of the River Basin Management Plan, supported by catchment management work to encourage a sustainable and integrated approach to all the different needs within a water catchment area. The work which we do is based on robust scientific evidence derived from comprehensive, long-term monitoring programmes for all of our water bodies and delivered in partnership with a wide range of organisations and stakeholders.



## A compliant crime free waste sector

Environmental offenders can inflict significant and long term damage on our environment, deprive communities of valuable natural resources and place considerable burden on the public purse through remediation and clean up. These offences also negatively impact on the ability of legitimate businesses to compete. Therefore, NIEA, working with a range of partners and stakeholders, will encourage compliance through education, advice and regulation. For serious or persistent breaches of the law, often involving organised criminality, we will robustly apply our enforcement policy ensuring offenders face the appropriate sanctions and are held accountable under the 'polluter pays' principle.



## Promotion of environmentally sustainable development and infrastructure

NIEA promotes sustainable development through its advisory role as a statutory consultee to the Northern Ireland planning regime. As well as at the planning development stage, the Agency also protects the environment through effective regulation of infrastructure and activities across a range of sectors. Advice and guidance, including through the Net Regs programme, is also provided to many industry types to assist and enable further environmental improvements to be made by operators. Through its Environmental Funding programmes, the Agency also works with partners to support the development of outdoor recreation infrastructure to improve access to green open space for the appreciation of nature, for health and wellbeing and sustainable travel.



### Good habitat and landscape quality with species abundance and diversity

NIEA has a key role in restoring and protecting biodiversity, working with others to look after our landscape and in enabling public enjoyment of nature. The Agency manages 7 Country Parks and 65 Nature Reserves, which are recognised as important for nature conservation. These managed lands, their biodiversity, and their free public access connect people to nature and their natural environment, and also provide a unique value and service in terms of environmental heritage, wellbeing, conservation and natural culture.

NIEA carries out or commissions surveys to identify and monitor the condition of our priority terrestrial habitats and species through fieldwork and remote sensing. This information is used to report on the state of the natural environment and forms the basis of our various statutory returns and to provide advisory products for a range of key stakeholders, including public bodies, business and industry. This evidence is used to inform the designation and management programmes for protected areas and other special habitats, the scope and effectiveness of environmental and agricultural policies and programmes in enhancing biodiversity, and planning and permitting considerations. NIEA works in partnership with the Marine and Fisheries Division of DAERA to protect and manage habitats and species in coastal and marine areas.

NIEA also works in partnership with environmental Non-Government Organisations (eNGOs), Councils and others to deliver a range of strategic priorities, including surveillance and monitoring, habitat and species management, improving the quality of air and water and connecting people with nature. The ongoing work to prepare site-specific Conservation Management Plans for our Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) will be important in shaping conservation management and land management policies and measures. The Agency also works closely with DAERA colleagues in the delivery of a cross departmental approach to reduce and minimise the impacts of air pollution (nitrogen deposition) on our protected areas and wider biodiversity.

# NIEA and Programme for Government (PfG)

The draft Programme for Government (PfG) is the highest level strategic document of the Northern Ireland Executive setting out the priorities that it will pursue in the current Assembly mandate. The draft PfG has 12 outcomes for citizens and DAERA has lead responsibility for delivering against draft PfG Outcome 2: “We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment”. DAERA are developing an overarching Green Growth Strategy and Delivery Framework which will assist in delivering on PfG targets, the New Decade New Approach deal and various other national and international targets.

PfG Outcome 2	We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment
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The main NIEA activities relating to the delivery of PfG Outcome 2 are the protection of the environment through regulation and enforcement, statutory designations, research and monitoring, funded interventions, raising public awareness of the environment and their role in protecting it.

However, NIEA also contributes to other PfG outcomes as follows:

PfG Outcome 1	We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy
PfG Outcome 4	We enjoy long, healthy active lives
PfG Outcome 10	We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest
PfG Outcome 11	We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure

A clean, green and accessible environment makes a major contribution to people having long, healthy and active lives (Outcome 4) as well as creating a place where people want to live in and visit (Outcome 10). A Green Growth approach will help deliver a sustainable environment that supports the economy (Outcome 1) providing the right environmental conditions to allow businesses to flourish while still complying with environmental obligations. By working closely with NI Water, NIEA also has a role to play in regional infrastructure (Outcome 11).



*Wildflower Way,  
Knockbracken*

## Targets

### Monitoring

Following the end of the 2020/21 year the NIEA 2020/21 Annual Report and Accounts will be published and placed on the website. The targets will be monitored quarterly by the NIEA Board and the Annual Report will include a Performance section showing the extent to which the targets in this Plan were achieved.

### Key Performance Targets (KPTs)

In line with HM Treasury guidance (“Setting Key Targets for Executive Agencies; A Guide”), 5 of the targets have been designated as Key Performance Targets (KPTs).



#### Key Priority 1

A fully compliant regulated industry.



#### Key Priority 2

Freshwater and marine environment at “good status”.



#### Key Priority 3

A compliant crime free waste sector.



#### Key Priority 4

Good habitat and landscape quality with species abundance and diversity.



#### Key Priority 5

Promotion of environmentally sustainable development and infrastructure.



## Northern Ireland Environment Agency Business Plan 2020-2021

Number	Division	Agency Key Priority (1-5)	Target	By When
1	Agency	1, 2, 3 & 4	<p>Deliver, as appropriate, the operational changes that will result from the transition from the EU, supporting customers and stakeholders throughout the process and informing Brexit related legislative and policy issues to protect and enhance the environment.</p> <p>DAERA Target</p>	31 December 2021
2	Agency	1, 2, 3, 4 & 5	<p>To respond effectively and efficiently to the issues arising from the impact of COVID-19 on the environment and develop and feed into COVID-19 recovery work to protect and enhance the environment and public appreciation of it.</p>	31 March 2021
3	Agency	1, 2 & 3	<p>Carry out appropriate environmental regulatory checks and monitoring and enforcement that will contribute to the protection and enhancement of the environment and inform future evidence led policy, strategies and decisions to deliver improved environmental outcomes.</p> <p>DAERA Target and KPT</p>	31 March 2021
4	RED (Resource Efficiency Division)	1, 3 & 5	<p>Complete procurement preparation and complete tender process for Integrated Consultancy Team (ICT) for the Mobuoy remediation programme.</p> <p>KPT</p>	31 March 2021
5	RED	2	<p>Implement Year 2 of the 2019 Outcome Action Plan for 20 high priority river bodies identified as having significant water quality issues.</p> <p>KPT</p>	31 March 2021

## Northern Ireland Environment Agency Business Plan 2020-2021

Number	Division	Agency Key Priority (1-5)	Target	By When
6	RED	2	Publish draft 3rd cycle River Basin Management Plan for consultation in line with statutory requirements.	22 December 2020
7	RED	1 & 2	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.	31 March 2021
8	RED	1 & 5	<p>Implement the project plan for delivery of the Regulatory Transformation Programme to include:</p> <p>(i) Deliver NIEA Digital Transformation of services to include:</p> <p>Registration of Carriers, IPRI Pollution Inventory, Domestic Consents and Waste Authorisations;</p> <p>(ii) Review of NIEA Environmental Permitting Fees and Charges; and</p> <p>(iii) Development of guidance and training for new digital systems.</p>	31 March 2021
9	NED (Natural Environment Division)	4	Achieve 6000 hectares of terrestrial protected areas under favourable management.	31 March 2021
10	NED	2 & 4	Deliver strategic environmental outcomes through partnership working by issuing full payment on 90% of all delivery bodies' claims submitted by 15 March 2021 and issue of 2021/22 Environment Fund Letters of Offer.	31 March 2021

## Northern Ireland Environment Agency Business Plan 2020-2021

Number	Division	Agency Key Priority (1-5)	Target	By When
11	NED	1, 2, 4 & 5	Develop an action plan to seek to improve the quality of planning consultations being submitted to DAERA with customers being provided with the necessary support including online and published planning information to enable them to perform at that level.	30 November 2020
12	NED	4	Complete 25 draft Special Area of Conservation (SAC) Conservation Management Plans.  KPT	31 March 2021
13	NED	4 & 5	Consult on revised advice (operational protocol) on assessment of nitrogenous air pollution impact.  KPT	31 October 2020



*Great Spotted Woodpecker*

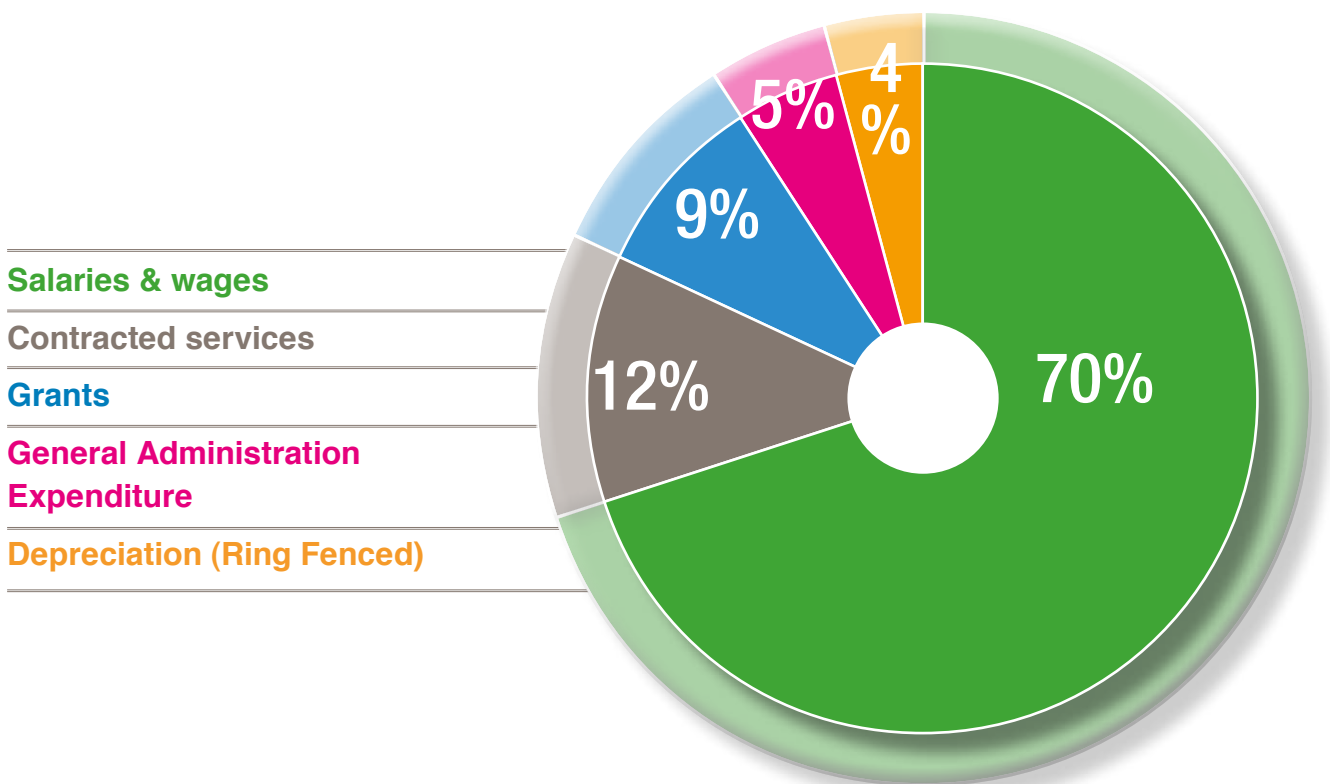
## Funding

The Agency's primary source of funding in terms of Departmental Resource and Capital expenditure comes from the Department's overall initial Budget allocation.

For the 2020/21 financial year, the Agency was allocated an opening budget of £29.6 million for resource expenditure and £1.0 million for capital expenditure. Based on these opening allocations, bids and/or easements may be submitted to the Department at each of the in-year monitoring rounds. The Agency also funds additional expenditure on programmes through income from services and the carrier bag levy. Income for 2020/21 is estimated to be £10.9 million.

The Agency will continue to liaise closely with the Department throughout 2020/21 on additional funding that may be required as a result of COVID-19.

### Analysis of Resource DEL Budget 2020-21



## Budget

Notes		£'000s	% (of Gross Resource Budget)
1	Salaries and wages	28,256	70%
	Depreciation (ring fenced)	1,470	4%
	<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>29,726</b>	<b>74%</b>
	<b>Non salary and non-ring fenced</b>		
2	GAE	2,128	5%
3	Contracted Services	5,042	12%
4	Grants	3,577	9%
	<b>Sub Total</b>	<b>10,747</b>	<b>26%</b>
	<b>Gross Budget</b>	<b>40,473</b>	<b>100%</b>
	<b>Funded By:</b>		
	<b>Income</b>		
	Regulatory & Commercial	9,002	
	Carrier bag levy	1,905	
	<b>Total Income</b>	<b>10,907</b>	<b>27%</b>
	<b>Net Resource DEL Budget</b>	<b>29,566</b>	<b>73%</b>

### Notes:

1. Non industrial salaries, industrial wages, overtime and local council rivers officers.
2. Travel and subsistence and non-salary running costs (including accommodation costs).
3. Management agreements in respect of designated sites; maintenance of country parks and nature reserves; environmental sampling, monitoring and analysis; mapping services; and vehicle running costs.
4. Environmental grants funded from the carrier bag levy income and disbursed mainly through the competitive Environment Fund as well as additional funding received for Strategic Environmental Programmes.

# Capital Investment

Notes	£'000s
Vehicles, machinery, equipment and capital works at country parks	1,000



*River Faughan*

## NIEA's Continuing Impact



### Waste

**In 2019/20 NIEA:**

- Successfully ensured that 92.6% of industry was compliant with its permit or licence conditions.
- Focussed on transforming key areas of how it regulates, for example, placing applications on line for septic tanks and implementing a project to digitise inspection services.



### Working with Industry - Prosperity Agreements

**In 2019/20 NIEA:**

- Continued to deliver an innovative programme of Prosperity Agreements with industry exploring opportunities for reducing significant environmental impacts in ways that create prosperity and well-being.
- Hosted a Prosperity Agreement Forum, for Agreement Holders and a range of other Northern Ireland organisations to network and share their knowledge and experiences.
- Signed Agreements with Dale Farm and also with Coca-Cola HBC Ireland & Northern Ireland, for the second time.



## Water

### In 2019/20 NIEA:

- Published its report on Significant Water Management Issues for public consultation in December 2019.
- Undertook targeted water quality improvement work, successfully delivering Outcome Action plans for 20 high priority river water bodies.
- Completed its inspection programme undertaking around 350 cross-compliance inspections, carried out 132 assessments of river and discharge flows, and lake and groundwater levels; over 6,000 water chemistry samples as well as 472 biological samples from rivers and lakes at over 500 sites.
- Received 1754 reported incidents of water pollution, all of which were investigated with 941 incidents substantiated. During the same period prosecutions led to fines totalling £25,750 being handed down by the courts for water pollution offences.



## Biodiversity

### In 2019/20 NIEA:

- Coordinated EU Interreg Va expenditure of nearly £2.8m to help the recovery of protected habitats and species.
- Provided funding in excess of £3.6m to eNGOs and Councils for environmental projects under the competitive Environment Fund.
- Ensured that almost 350 hectares of dune habitats at Portstewart are now being managed sustainably for future generations.





# Country Parks and Nature Reserves

### In 2019/20 NIEA:

- NIEA sites attracted an estimated 2.33 million visits over the course of the 2019 calendar year, an increase of 30,000 visitors on the previous year.
- Five NIEA country parks received three star awards, with 2 sites receiving a four star award for excellence, through the Tourism NI Visitor Quality Grading Scheme.
- NIEA developed and opened two bespoke nature themed playparks at Ness Country Park and Peatlands Park.
- Over 10km of pathways were upgraded and restored at Crawfordsburn, Ness, Scrabo, Peatlands and Roe Country Parks and the Quoile Nature Reserve. These works included the re-instatement of public access to popular walking routes at Ness and Roe Country Parks which were previously damaged during extreme weather events.
- Over 210 events were held or facilitated at our sites, including filming, sponsored walks, charity events, community search and rescue training, birthday parties and educational visits.



*Roe Valley Visitor Centre*



NIEA Contact Information:

To find out more about NIEA's work visit:

Website: [www.daera-ni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-environment-agency](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-environment-agency)

Follow us on Facebook: @Northern.Ireland.Environment.Agency

Get updates on twitter: @daera\_ni

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Photographs courtesy of John Early, Karen Austin, Jon Lees, David Walsh,  
NIEA Water Assessment Data and Evidence Team.

