

Corporate Plan 2025-2027

Towards 2050:

Delivering a net zero nature positive future, supporting sustainable agriculture and thriving rural communities.



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department of

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk



Contents

Minister’s Foreword	3
About DAERA	4
What We Do	5
Our Vision	6
Our Values	6
Our Strategic Direction	6
Our Priorities	8
Our Ten Key Pledges	9
Our priorities in more detail	10
Making it happen	15

Minister's Foreword

I am proud to be Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and I am determined to deliver for our environment, for our agri-food sector and for our rural communities.

With the Executive's new Programme for Government, built round the key missions of People; Planet; Prosperity and a clear commitment to Peace, now agreed, I am pleased to publish my Department's Corporate Plan for 2025-27. Its theme is ***Towards 2050: Delivering a net zero nature positive future, supporting sustainable agriculture and thriving rural communities*** and it sets a clear strategic direction for my Department that will take it through this Assembly mandate, delivering improvements and building firm foundations for the future that will help us achieve our Net Zero by 2050 legal requirement.

DAERA's 3,500 staff, spread across the core department and our two agencies, the NIEA and Forest Service, deliver many different functions and services that are so important for businesses, for our environment, for food safety and animal welfare and for rural communities. They do so against a backdrop of constrained public expenditure, global volatility, technological change and increasing customer expectations. In this context, it is important that my Department has a clear framework for delivery, one that reflects

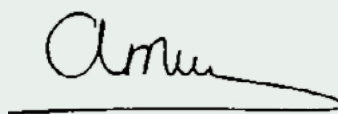


the ambitions of the Executive as set out in the Programme for Government and that can guide its actions and help it prioritise the resources available to it.

I want to emphasise my steadfast commitment to the farming community at this time of considerable change. I believe whole heartedly in the potential of our agriculture sector and I am determined to support our farmers as they continue to produce healthy, nutritious food whilst also improving the environment and tackling climate change.

I want to emphasise my commitment as Minister to working collaboratively to deliver our responsibilities. We cannot drive progress without the support and engagement of our staff, of other parts of government and of our partners, stakeholders and those who rely on our services. We will also work inclusively, valuing diversity in all its forms and respecting different backgrounds and perspectives.

Together we will make a difference!



Andrew Muir MLA

Minister of Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs

About DAERA

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has responsibility for the environment, food, farming, fisheries, forestry and sustainability policy plus the development of the rural sector in Northern Ireland.

The Department delivers most of its functions under the direction of the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Minister Andrew Muir MLA, with some functions sitting under the direction of Ministers in Defra.

DAERA has two executive agencies: the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA); and Forest Service.

The Department is also accountable for several non-departmental public bodies and (jointly with the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications) one North South Implementation Body. These are listed below.

- The Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI);
- The Livestock & Meat Commission for Northern Ireland (LMC);
- The Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority (NIFHA);
- The Council for Nature, Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC);
- The Agricultural Wages Board (AWB);
- The Loughs Agency.

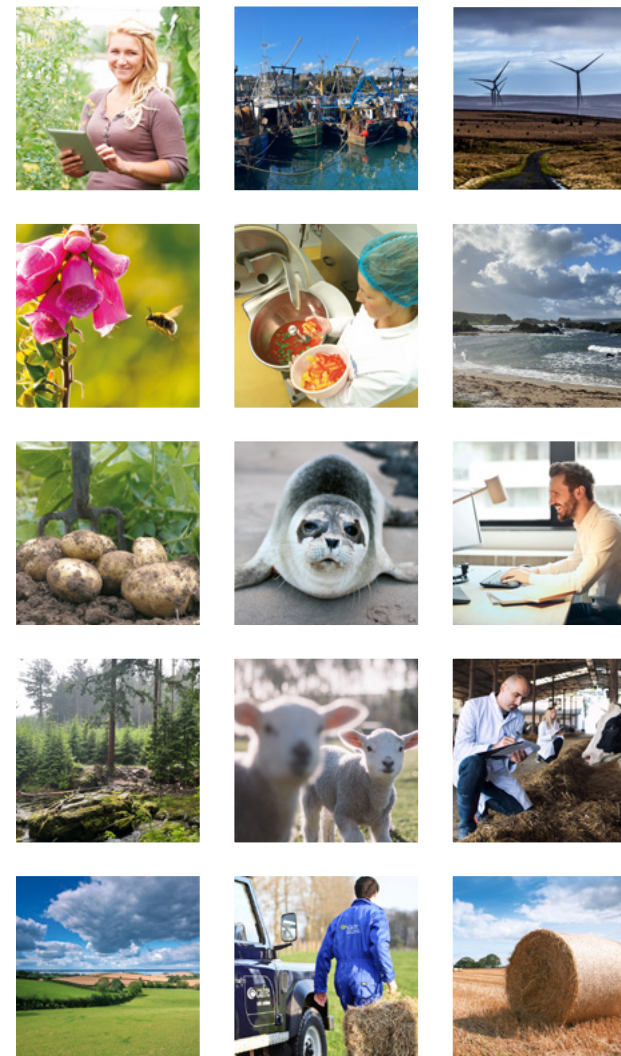


What We Do

The work of the Department touches the daily lives of everyone in Northern Ireland by delivering cross cutting activities that protect and enhance our natural environment, address the challenge of climate change, support sustainable agri-food and fishing sectors, develop our rural communities and improve animal health and welfare in our ambitious drive towards disease eradication.

Together with its agencies, non-departmental public bodies and stakeholders, DAERA:

- leads on the Executive's climate change agenda, working with all NICS departments and sectors to develop and implement Northern Ireland's first Climate Action plan and reduce carbon emissions;
- takes action to protect and enhance the environment for future generations;
- assists the sustainable development of the environmental, agri-food, fishing and forestry sectors of the Northern Ireland (NI) economy, having regard to the needs of the consumer, the protection of human, animal and plant health, the welfare of animals and the conservation and enhancement of the environment;
- delivers knowledge transfer and education programmes as essential components of successful policy delivery programmes across DAERA;
- supports rural communities by working in partnership with other departments to address wider socio-economic rural issues and achieve improved outcomes for rural communities.



Further information about DAERA can be found [here](#).

Our Vision

‘Delivering a net zero nature positive future, supporting sustainable agriculture and thriving rural communities.’

Our Values

Our staff are proud to be part of the NICS and we are committed to working in a way that reflects the Seven Principles of Public Life and that upholds the core NICS values of:

- **honesty;**
- **integrity;**
- **objectivity; and**
- **impartiality.**

Our Strategic Direction

Our corporate plan sets our strategic direction for the 2025-27 period and beyond and helps ensure that our work is strategically aligned; our policy interventions are coherent, effective and deliverable; our resources are collectively focused; and that we work collaboratively with partners to address the many challenges we face in delivering our key priorities.

‘Sustainability’ is our watchword - we want everything we do to be guided



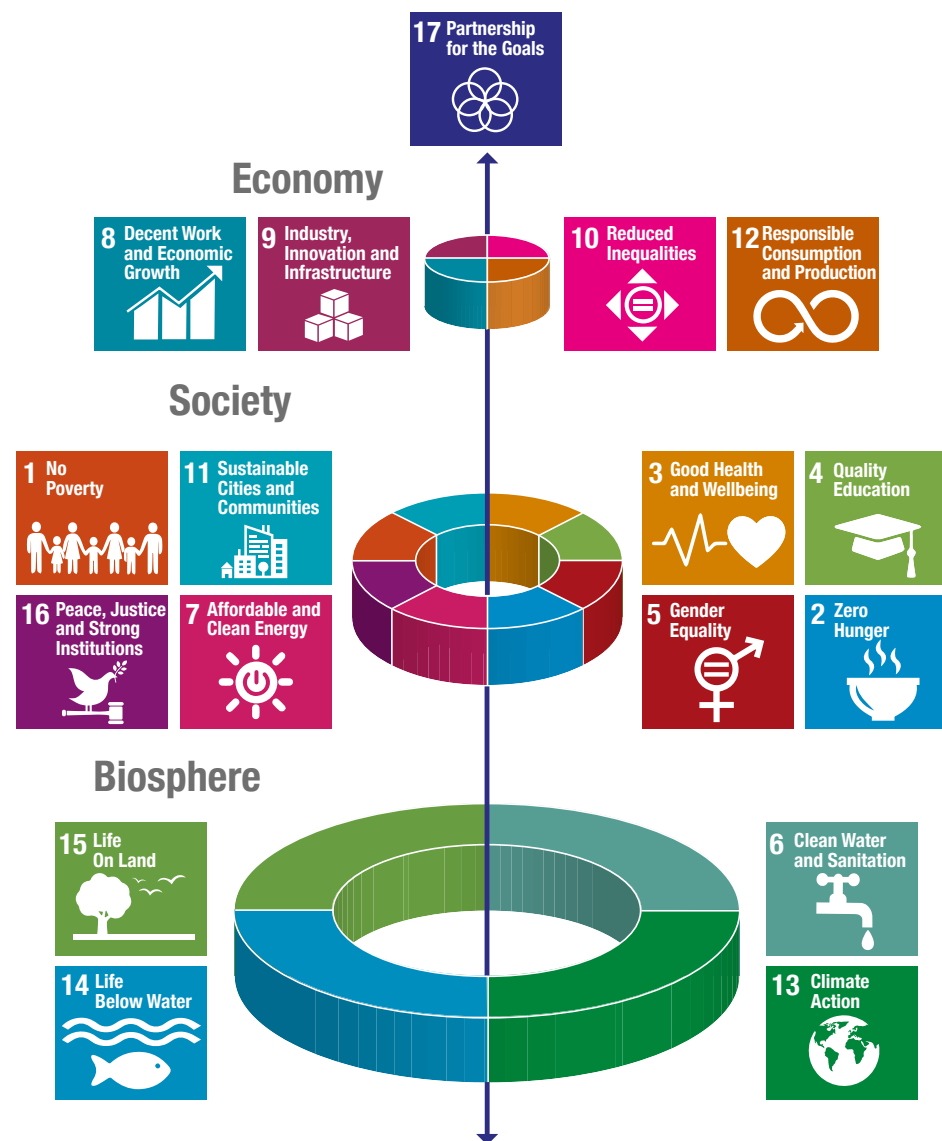
by and reflect the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and we want to build, during this Assembly mandate, the foundations that can deliver the Assembly's Net Zero commitment by 2050.

Recognising that the health of our people is connected to the health of animals and of our environment, we are also determined to take a more joined-up approach to how we develop and deliver policies and programmes, making better use of the **'One Health'** approach.

We have therefore built our corporate plan around eight key interconnected priorities that guide our work. We have also included ten key pledges that we will work tirelessly to deliver by the end of this Assembly mandate.

The corporate plan is supported by annual business plans that set out the detailed measures we will deliver year on year within the resources available to us.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



Our Priorities

The priorities that shape our work are set out below.
More detail is provided on the following pages.

- Tackling and responding to Climate Change together in a fair and just way.
- Protecting and restoring our terrestrial and marine environment.
- Strengthening environmental governance.
- Supporting sustainable, resilient and productive agri-food and fishing sectors.
- Safeguarding animal health and welfare plus plant health.
- Building strong, sustainable and diverse rural communities.
- Investing in our science and research and development capacity.
- Implementing the Windsor Framework.



Our Ten Key Pledges

We will deliver many policies, programmes and services during the life of this corporate plan, but we are committing in particular to delivering ten key pledges by the end of the Assembly mandate in May 2027. They are:

1	We will have brought forward the Carbon Budget Regulations to set carbon budgets and published climate action plans capable of delivering those budgets. The Just Transition Commission will be established.	6	We will have delivered a range of new animal welfare priorities, including legislation to better protect domestic and farmed animals.
2	We will have delivered improvements to water quality , including through implementation of the Lough Neagh Action Plan and other related interventions.	7	We will have delivered a new, partnership-based rural policy framework capable of improving the wellbeing of our rural communities coupled with new support arrangements.
3	We will have presented to the Executive and the Assembly a robust and effective way forward for improving environmental governance .	8	We will have published and worked to deliver a new Nature Recovery Strategy to ensure 30% of our land and seas are protected and well managed for nature by 2030.
4	We will continue roll out of the Sustainable Agriculture Programme to help drive sustainable agricultural practices and a positive future for agri-food , whilst also protecting animal health and restoring our natural environment.	9	We will have published and will be working to implement a new Waste Management Strategy to help build a low carbon circular economy.
5	We will have brought forward new, effective and evidence-based solutions capable of reducing and then eradicating bovine Tuberculosis .	10	We will continue to fulfil our international obligations through full, timely and faithful implementation of Windsor Framework and in supporting the UK Government to negotiate a new ambitious and comprehensive agri food, drink and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and Veterinary Agreement with the EU.

Our priorities in more detail



Tackling and responding to Climate Change in a fair and just way

Climate Change is the biggest single challenge facing this generation and tackling it will require everyone to work together, across all areas of society. Warming temperatures, rising sea levels and an increase in extreme weather events threaten our health by affecting the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe, and the weather we experience.

While all government departments will play a role in this significant transformation, DAERA will lead the implementation of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, which sets out targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and achieving net zero by 2050. By working together, we have an opportunity to drive real change that enables us to meet our carbon reduction targets, progressing towards a cleaner, greener society that protects and enhances our natural assets.

Northern Ireland's first Climate Action Plan (CAP) will set out our approach to meeting the first carbon budget through a set of policies and proposals for emissions reductions and will also establish a pathway towards the interim targets for 2030 and 2040 and the overall requirement to achieve the net zero by 2050 target.

The Climate Action Plan will be supported by new policies and programmes designed to provide targeted support that helps drive down the carbon footprint of the agriculture sector, using nature-based solutions to reduce emissions and address the decline in biodiversity while also improving animal health. We will also lead on actions within the waste, fisheries and land use sectors to ensure that climate mitigation and adaptation measures are in place.

We will also introduce just transition mechanisms that achieve net zero in a way that is fair and just to everyone, ensuring those most affected by the low carbon transition are not left behind in our journey towards an improved, nature rich environment that maximises our health and wellbeing.

Delivering our climate actions will be further supported with a new multi-decade Green Growth strategy that will provide the framework that balances climate and environmental action with our economic ambition, supported by cross cutting measures that progress us towards a cleaner, greener society.



Protecting and restoring our terrestrial and marine environment

Our natural environment is under unsustainable pressure as we face a wide range of environmental challenges, such as biodiversity loss, the impacts of climate change and pollution. The impacts are seen in many parts of Northern Ireland, including at Lough Neagh, which led to the Assembly declaring an ecological and biodiversity crisis in May 2024.

A healthy environment is inextricably linked with both human and animal health and we want to ensure that our policies and programmes can restore and enhance our natural environment.

We will therefore work collaboratively to implement the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) and the Lough Neagh Action Plan, delivering ambitious measures that will not only improve our air and water quality and restore biodiversity on land and sea, but will also encourage sustainable production and consumption. Progress on implementation of the EIP will be reported to the Assembly and be monitored by the Office of Environmental Protection on an annual basis.



Strengthening environmental governance

To ensure that there is more effective scrutiny of our collective stewardship of our environment, an independent panel has been appointed to review our existing environmental governance frameworks and bring forward recommendations for how these can be strengthened and improved.

Whatever changes we might decide to introduce to strengthen environmental governance will build on the foundations laid by NIEA staff in their commitment and dedication to our environment on a daily basis.



Supporting sustainable, resilient and productive agri-food and fishing sectors

Our agri-food and fishing sectors are a key part of our local economy and also underpin our collective health and wellbeing through the food we eat and how it is produced.

We know we need to help the agri-food and fishing sectors in their transition towards sustainable production that benefits our environment and climate, enabling them to meet the emissions reductions targets set in the Climate

Change Act (NI) 2022 while remaining resilient to external pressures and shocks, particularly in the supply chain. Improvements in productivity are important ways to reduce environmental impacts and lower the carbon footprint of food from animals & plants while also improving animal health and plant health.

We will continue to support our agri-food and fishing industries through a just transition, working with partners to design coherent policies, strategies and legislative measures that can deliver the improvements that are needed while also ensuring sustainable production of quality, nutritious food that supports our economy and enhances Northern Ireland's international image.



Safeguarding animal health and welfare plus plant health

Safeguarding our animal and plant health is important not only in terms of protecting animal health, but also public health, the environment, food security and our economy. Many jobs and livelihoods depend on our biosecurity status which uniquely ensures we have continued access to markets in both the EU and Great Britain.

Animal and plant health are also impacted by climate change, for example, the spread of vector-borne diseases, and reducing endemic disease is an important way to reduce lower the carbon footprint and minimise the environmental impact of the agri-food industry. It is clear that investing in animal welfare can lead to long-term economic benefits for industries that rely on animals, such as agriculture, making them more productive and efficient, leading to improved quality and quantity of products and services.

We know in particular that Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) presents a deep-rooted challenge, and we are determined to deliver a comprehensive science and evidence led strategy to reduce bTB that will minimise the impact of this disease on farm families and will

improve productivity, helping the industry in its transition to net zero. We will also deliver significant cross cutting action on Anti-Microbial Resistance through reducing endemic disease, improving animal health and welfare and thereby reducing the need for on farm anti-microbial usage.

The implementation of Plant Health official controls and biosecurity measures helps to prevent the introduction of pests and disease harmful to our plants and soils. Plant health is increasingly under threat from emerging diseases and therefore maintaining robust and effective plant health biosecurity is vital to support the production of healthy crops, protect the natural environment and to ensure the sustainability of essential ecosystems.

We know too how much people cherish the welfare of all animals - farmed, wildlife and pets - and we will bring forward legislative measures that provide additional welfare protections for domestic and farmed animals, providing further protections to the welfare of domestic animals that ensures they have lives free from suffering and disease.



Building strong, sustainable and diverse rural communities

Rural communities in Northern Ireland are integral to our economic, social, and environmental well-being and development. Our aim is to build stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural communities where people want to live, work, visit and invest.

We recognise that many of the challenges facing rural communities are the responsibility of other departments and that all departments are responsible for exercising their functions both in urban and rural areas. We will therefore partner with other departments in seeking to address the needs of rural communities in a way that complements the functions of other departments rather than displacing or replicating, and in a way that adds value.

This work will include delivery of a new Rural Policy Framework, developed collaboratively with our rural communities and across government and based around three pillars of championing, supporting and understanding rural communities. This framework will help all policy makers and public service providers to better understand and engage with rural communities, enabling them to respond more effectively to the current and future challenges and opportunities faced by rural communities.

Our work to support rural communities will also take account of the need to tackle climate change and to ensure that rural communities are well placed to make the most of the new opportunities presented through our Green Growth strategy.



Investing in our science and research and development capacity

DAERA will continue to invest across all science disciplines in both research and development and monitoring and surveillance testing. Science and innovation outputs support and inform evidence based policy decision making to address key challenges. These include tackling climate change, controlling and eradicating animal and plant diseases, improving water quality in our rivers, lakes and loughs, and developing science led sustainable agricultural practices that will set us on a fair pathway to Net Zero, whilst ensuring that our natural assets are protected and enhanced, providing a full suite of benefits to society.

The new Higher Level Scientific Advisory Group will deliver independent expert advice to our Chief Scientific Adviser and help to assure the scientific evidence we use is innovative, transformative and collaborative.



Implementing the Windsor Framework

DAERA is the Executive department most directly impacted by EU Exit and, accordingly, carries significant responsibilities under the Windsor Framework, including in areas ranging from animals, food and plants to chemicals, plastics and packaging and carbon trading.

DAERA also finds itself in a unique position as a result of the Windsor Framework (Implementation) Regulations 2024. While none of our responsibilities, including those we carry as competent authority, have changed, we discharge some of those responsibilities under the direction and control of Department for Environment, Fisheries and Rural Affairs (Defra) ministers, accountable to Parliament, and others under the direction and control of Minister Muir, accountable to the Assembly.

We welcome the commitment of the UK Government to deepen its relationship with the EU and fully support its desire to see a new Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Veterinary agreement and solutions for veterinary medicines. We also know that new agreements and arrangements will only be possible if we play our full part in ensuring full, timely and faithful implementation of all the elements of the Windsor Framework.

During the period covered by this corporate plan, therefore, we will work collaboratively across government to ensure that both our Windsor Framework SPS Programme and our wider Windsor Framework implementation programme are delivered effectively and in line with the priorities set by ministers.

Making it happen

Our People

DAERA will invest in its people and their performance.

We will enhance our capability and our capacity to respond to new policy challenges, new technologies and new ways of working.

We will ensure that our policy making skills are strengthened so that we develop policy that is credible, evidenced, well-grounded and focused on outcomes.

We will contribute to wider NICS initiatives and programmes designed to ensure that everyone feels valued in work for who they are and the talents they bring.



Working in Partnership

In partnership with our stakeholders, we will shape our future policies and services by adopting an outward looking approach and learning from good practice across the world, building on their successes and learning from our shared experiences.



Technology

Through our DAERA Digital & Data Strategies we will deliver success through digital excellence.

We will provide efficient, highly available, usable, accessible, cost effective and secure services to our users, making it easy to interact with our digital services and provide a best-in-class user experience.



Science and Research & Development

DAERA will continue to invest in science to support evidence based policy-making in tackling our big strategic challenges such as: water quality issues related to NI rivers, lakes and loughs; developing a balanced and fair pathway to Net Zero; and, ensuring that our natural assets can deliver their full economic potential on a sustainable basis.



Budget

Through good financial planning, we will make the best use of our budgets, targeting our funding where it will deliver most, ensuring that we manage public expenditure in line with the principles of regularity, propriety, and value for money.



Legislation

Within the mandate of this Plan, we will bring forward a number of legislative bills that help empower us to achieve our goals both now and in the future.

Throughout our Corporate Plan period, we will deliver the policies, programmes and schemes agreed and to progress the areas prioritised in the Programme for Government with consideration given to policy coherence to ensure our activities are aligned to a shared goal.



Corporate Plan

2025-2027



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Róinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®
We invest in people Standard