

**From the Office of the
Minister of Agriculture,
Environment and Rural Affairs**



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

Dame Glenys Stacey
Chair
The Office for Environmental Protection
Wildwood Offices
Wildwood Drive
Worcester
WR5 2QT
privateoffice@theoep.org.uk

DAERA Private Office
First Floor, Clare House
303 Airport Road West
Sydenham Intake
Belfast, BT3 9ED
Telephone: 028 9052 4140
Email: private.office@daera-ni.gov.uk

Our Ref: COR-0935-2025
Date: 11 December 2025

Dear Glenys

PUBLICATION OF REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL PRINCIPLES POLICY STATEMENT

Thank you for your letter of the 26 November 2025 regarding the publication of the Review of Environmental Governance in Northern Ireland Final Report and progress on the Environmental Principles Policy Statement. I very much welcome the constructive engagement from the OEP on these two key areas of work and look forward to its continued oversight and support as we move into implementation. I was also delighted to meet with you and the OEP Board during your recent visit to Northern Ireland.

Review of Environmental Governance in Northern Ireland

Strengthening environmental governance is a key priority of mine and I fully accept the panel's recommendation to establish an independent Environmental Protection Agency in Northern Ireland as a Non-Departmental Public Body, sponsored by DAERA. In the panel's view the new model would ensure a clear separation between policymaking and regulation, aligning with best practice across these islands. It would also provide the necessary independence to build public trust whilst maintaining accountability to the Assembly.

The provisions of the Environment Act 2021 provide a strong framework for achieving significant improvement in our natural environment, and I am committed to ensuring these are fully implemented. I look forward to publication of the first EIP Annual Progress Report which as you will know must be laid before the Assembly in January 2026.

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®
We invest in people Standard

I agree that ambition alone is not enough, delivery must be collaborative and supported by clear and meaningful action to secure the environmental outcomes that are so desperately needed. Successful planning and delivery of the EIP and wider governance arrangements is of course subject to adequate resourcing being available, and this continues to present significant challenges for my Department and the Executive. I will of course continue to make the case for change, and for the resources to deliver that change.

I note your support for statutory targets for nature's recovery, and I can confirm that my officials are currently at the final stages of drafting the Nature Recovery Strategy for Northern Ireland, and this will then go out to public consultation early in 2026. I look forward to receiving input from stakeholders and the wider public on the strategy that will seek to address the drivers of biodiversity loss and undertake the restorative work required to secure a nature-positive future.

EPPS

I was delighted to gain Executive approval for the draft Environmental Principles Policy Statement (EPPS), to ensure policy making gives due regard to the environment, supporting efforts to balance social inclusion, environmental protection, and economic growth in Northern Ireland. The draft EPPS has now been laid before the Assembly for statutory scrutiny, with officials briefing the AERA Committee early in that process.

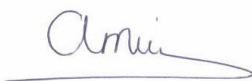
There was extensive stakeholder engagement during the development of the draft NI EPPS, and we are thankful to all those who responded but particularly the recommendations from OEP, all of which have been incorporated, significantly strengthening the document. We look forward to continuing our constructive collaboration with the OEP EPPS team as we move into the implementation phase.

As you have mentioned the duty to have due regard to the NI EPPS will come into force 6 months after publication. This time will be used as an opportunity to ready departments for its introduction and encouraging proactive use of the EPPS. My officials have already begun work in forming a toolkit for practical use and guidance for policy makers and Ministers. I will be sure to make officials aware of the lessons within the OEP review of implementation, as well as the high-level review undertaken by Defra, to ensure best practice can be built upon, and pitfalls avoided.

Conclusion

I share your sense of urgency and agree that this is a pivotal moment for environmental governance in Northern Ireland. Good progress is being made although there is still much to do. The EPPS is advancing through scrutiny, the first EIP Annual Progress Report is being prepared, and work to strengthen environmental governance is under way. I look forward to continued engagement with the OEP on these important matters.

Yours sincerely



ANDREW MUIR MLA

Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs