



Office for Environmental  
Protection  
Wildwood  
Wildwood Drive  
Worcester  
WR5 2QT

03300 416 581  
[www.theoep.org.uk](http://www.theoep.org.uk)

Chair and Deputy Chair  
Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs  
Northern Ireland Assembly  
Parliament Buildings  
Ballymiscaw  
Stormont  
Belfast  
BT4 3XX

14 February 2024

By email only

Dear Mr Elliott and Mr McAleer,

### **Introductory Meeting**

Congratulations on your appointments as Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. I look forward to working with you and the Committee members to improve Northern Ireland's environment. I have always felt that the interface between environment and agriculture is crucial, and the Committee will have an important role in ensuring that the correct balance is struck.

The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) was created by the Environment Act (2021) and extended to Northern Ireland by the Executive in February 2022. We are tasked to play a full and independent role in protecting and improving the environment, through holding public bodies to account. There are of course a wide range of issues facing our environment, and we have already engaged extensively with DAERA officers. For example, we have provided advice on the proposed Environmental Improvement Plan, and on the Environmental Principles Policy Statement. We have also engaged with other stakeholders on issues such as Lough Neagh.

As well as our monitoring, scrutiny and advice functions, our role includes oversight of public bodies' compliance with environmental law. In Northern Ireland, we have been particularly concerned about issues around meeting statutory deadlines, which have frequently been linked to the absence of Ministers. Now that the Executive and Assembly are restored, we hope that these will be progressed with urgency. We are particularly

OFFICIAL

concerned about the Environmental Improvement Plan, which is fundamental to the protection and improvement of the environment here.

We hope to meet with Minister Muir soon. Following that meeting, I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the role of the OEP, to explain some of the work that we have been doing and to hear your initial thoughts on emerging priorities.

I look forward to meeting with you at your earliest convenience. OEP Private Office will be happy to liaise on diary arrangements.

Yours sincerely



Dame Glenys Stacey  
Chair of the Office for Environmental Protection



Office for  
**Environmental  
Protection**

[www.theoep.org.uk](http://www.theoep.org.uk)

Cc DAERA Permanent Secretary  
Liz Loughran  
Shane Doris  
AERA Committee Clerk

OFFICIAL