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Minister Muir
DAERA Private Office
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Jubilee House
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By email only

7 February 2024

Dear Minister Muir

Introductory Meeting

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. I look forward to working with you and your officials to improve Northern Ireland's environment.

The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) was created by the Environment Act (2021) and extended to Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland 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. We have already engaged extensively with your officials on the wide range of issues facing our environment. For example, we have provided advice on the proposed Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP), and on the Environmental Principles Policy Statement, which together with us, the OEP, comprise the three corners of the Environment Act in Northern Ireland.

As well as our monitoring, scrutiny and advice functions, our role includes oversight of public bodies' compliance with environmental law. We have one live investigation in Northern Ireland, into DAERA's advice on ammonia emissions. We have also been particularly concerned by failures to meet statutory deadlines, such as those for the EIP and Nutrient Action Plan - the latter is even more concerning given the issues at Lough Neagh. This failure has 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.

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I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the role of the Office for Environmental Protection, to explain some of the work that we have been doing and to hear your initial thoughts on emerging priorities. In particular, we are keen to hear your views on the Environmental Improvement Plan.

I look forward to meeting with you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G Stacey', written in a cursive style.

Dame Glenys Stacey
Chair of the Office for Environmental Protection



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