

Methodological Statement

Progress in improving
the natural environment
in Northern Ireland
2024/2025

The Office for Environmental Protection is a non-departmental public body, created in November 2021 under the Environment Act 2021. Our mission is to protect and improve the environment by holding government and other public authorities to account. Our work covers England and Northern Ireland. We also cover reserved matters across the UK.

www.theoep.org.uk/what-we-do



© The Office for Environmental Protection 2026

Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/official-documents

Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

The Office for Environmental Protection

Wildwood

Wildwood Drive

Worcester

WR5 2NP

www.theoep.org.uk

03300 416 581

enquiries@theoep.org.uk

E03537857 06/26

Printed on paper containing 40% recycled fibre content minimum

Printed in the UK by HH Associates Ltd. on behalf of the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office

Contents

I. Setting the scene	5
Chapter 1. Introduction	6
1.1. Purpose of this document.....	6
1.2. Our assessment process	6
1.3. Our assessment approach	10
1.4. The overall evidence base	12
1.5. Code of Practice for Statistics	12
II. Progress and prospects	13
Chapter 2. Assessment methodologies	14
2.1. Assessment of key environmental trends	14
2.2. Assessment of progress towards targets and outcomes	16
2.3. Assessment of prospects of meeting targets and outcomes	20
2.4. Summary assessments.....	21
Chapter 3. Assessment of EIP Strategic Environmental Outcomes	22
3.1. Introduction.....	22
3.2. Excellent air, water and land quality.....	25
3.3. Healthy and accessible environment and landscapes everyone can connect with and enjoy	28
3.4. Thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife	30
3.5. Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea	32
3.6. Zero waste and highly developed circular economy.....	35
3.7. Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions and improved climate resilience and adaptability	36
III. Taking stock	41
Chapter 4. Taking stock	42
4.1. The overall picture	42
Chapter 5. Continuous improvement	43
Annex: Indicator reference tables	45
SEO 1 – Excellent air, water and land quality (Air quality).....	46
SEO 1 – Excellent air, water and land quality (Water resources: quality and quantity)	52
SEO 1 – Excellent air, water and land quality (Marine and coastal water resources: quality and quantity).....	55
SEO 2 – Healthy and accessible environment and landscapes everyone can connect with and enjoy (Landscapes, seascapes and natural beauty)	59
SEO 2 – Healthy and accessible environment and landscapes everyone can connect with and enjoy (Access and natural space provision).....	60

SEO 2 – Healthy and accessible environment and landscapes everyone can connect with and enjoy (The next generation)	62
SEO 3 – Thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife (Protecting nature on land).....	64
SEO 3 – Thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife (Protecting nature at sea)	68
SEO 4 – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea (Future Agricultural Policy).....	71
SEO 4 – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea (Energy).....	74
SEO 4 – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea (Productive and sustainably used seas).....	75
SEO 4 – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea (Producer responsibility).....	77
SEO 4 – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea (Chemicals).....	78
SEO 5 – Zero waste and highly developed circular economy (Circular economy).....	80
SEO 5 – Zero waste and highly developed circular economy (Waste management).....	82
SEO 6 – Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions and improved climate resilience and adaptability	84
Glossary of terms and acronyms.....	85
References.....	87

I. Setting the scene

The background of the slide is a repeating pattern of stylized, teal-colored leaves. Each leaf is pointed and has a central vein, with smaller veins branching out. The leaves are arranged in vertical columns, creating a dense, textured effect. The color is a consistent teal or light blue.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose of this document

In line with our commitment to transparency and the three pillars of the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Statistics¹ – trustworthiness, quality and value – we have developed this Methodological Statement to accompany our report Progress in improving the natural environment in Northern Ireland 2024/2025 (2024/2025 progress report).

This Methodological Statement provides further detail of our assessment approach, including the data sources we have used, our analytical methods and the stakeholder engagement we have undertaken. We also identify limitations and areas for development. The structure of this Methodological Statement follows that of the 2024/2025 progress report.

1.2. Our assessment process

Governance

The Office for Environmental Protection's (OEP's) role in monitoring, assessing and reporting on progress to improve the environment in Northern Ireland (NI) is set out in Schedule 3, Part 1 of the Environment Act 2021.² The Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) assessment process takes a wide perspective. This enables annual progress reporting and connects a range of activities within the OEP, such as monitoring progress, developing the evidence base, capacity building, and stakeholder engagement.

We develop our EIP progress reports and Methodological Statements in line with the OEP's Strategy and Enforcement Policy, and Governance Framework. We report on them annually in the OEP's Annual Report and Accounts.³⁻⁵

Oversight and strategic input are provided by the OEP's Executive Committee (ExCo) and the Board. ExCo and the Board approve the scope of the EIP progress reports, review the draft reports, and oversee the development of key messages and communication activities. The Board approves the final report.

We develop an implementation plan for the EIP progress reports. Regular updates are provided to ExCo and the Board in line with the OEP's Governance Framework,⁴ and individual Board members may act as critical friends during the development of the assessment.

Assessment development

Our integrated assessment aims to be credible, relevant and legitimate. To ensure it is credible, we use reliable, technically sound methods and approaches and have formal quality assurance procedures. To ensure it is relevant, we assess progress towards the Northern Ireland Executive's own ambitions, targets and commitments, and analyse the issues facing the Executive and stakeholders in improving the natural environment. To ensure it is legitimate, we are transparent about our evidence base, methodologies, and stakeholder interactions.

We develop our assessment in an iterative way. We start with a scoping process that sets out the structure and initial content of the assessment. Content is developed through a combination of individual analyses and interactive team working sessions that address key topics and cross-cutting aspects, including summary assessments and the development of recommendations. Regular working sessions ensure effective project management and co-ordination.

We undertake risk management in accordance with the OEP Governance Framework, which defines the approach to identifying, managing, and reporting on risk and is based on HM Treasury's Orange Book: Management of Risk – Principles and Concepts.⁶

Issues, actions and changes made during the EIP assessment process are recorded at the project and process levels in a risks, assumptions, issues and dependencies log. This has developed our previous approach to change control by integrating our existing logs to provide a single source of information and audit trail for decisions and approvals.

Roles and responsibilities

The Head of Assessments oversees the planning and development of the EIP progress assessment. They report to the Chief Insights Officer/Chief Scientist, who is accountable to ExCo and the Board.

Team roles and responsibilities focus on process, the assessment approach, and content development.

Process focused roles include project management, quality assurance and peer review, graphics, stakeholder engagement, development of the Methodological Statement and our statement of compliance with the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Statistics.

Assessment focused roles include development of the assessment approach and authorship of the related report text. Assessment strands include the methodological approach to past trends, progress and prospects assessments, and summary assessments (see Chapter 2: Assessment methodologies).

Each chapter of our 2024/2025 progress report focuses on one of the six Strategic Environmental Outcomes (SEOs) in the EIP.^{7,8} Each chapter has a lead author and, in the majority of cases, authors for individual themes in addition to other contributors. The Head of Assessments acts as the coordinating lead author and is responsible for integrating analyses and ensuring the overall coherence of the assessment.

The development of the 2024/2025 progress report also draws on input from other OEP directorates, ensuring the assessment process informs activities across the organisation.

Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement and review are essential to producing a high-quality assessment and ensuring our analysis and findings are credible, relevant and legitimate.

For our 2024/2025 progress report, we engaged with experts across the EIP's SEOs and themes to develop our assessment – particularly in areas that are less rich in publicly available evidence and delivery plans – and conducted a multi-stage peer review process.

We engaged with key stakeholders from a range of sectors, including Northern Ireland’s Executive departments, wider public bodies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), industry, and academia.

We list the organisations engaged with for our 2024/2025 progress report in Table 1.1. This list is not exhaustive. It focuses on those stakeholders with whom we engaged directly, and so does not include wider engagement – for example, respondents to calls for evidence or project-level workshop attendees.

Table 1.1. Organisations engaged during development of our 2024/2025 progress report

Organisations engaged
Climate Change Committee
Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA)
Department for the Economy
Education for Sustainable Development Forum (part of Northern Ireland Environment Link)
Environmental Standards Scotland
Joint Nature Conservation Committee
Live Here Love Here (previously Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful)
Landscapes NI
National Biodiversity Data Centre
Northern Ireland Environment Agency
Northern Ireland Environment Link
Northern Ireland Marine Task Force
Northern Ireland Resource Network
OEP College of Experts (and wider subject-matter academic experts)
Outscape
Sustainable Northern Ireland
Ulster Wildlife
Waste and Resources Action Programme
Woodland Trust

Quality assurance

We follow a rigorous quality assurance process, consistent with our application of the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Statistics, to ensure the data and evidence we use and publish are trustworthy, of high quality, and provide value to the public.

The quality assurance process consists of a range of activities. These include checks of the accuracy of the data and calculations underpinning our assessment of indicator trends, and the accurate use and referencing of wider evidence throughout the assessment.

We also run a series of workshops to ensure that the analytical methodologies used to assess past trends, progress within the reporting year, and prospects are applied consistently. A review is also undertaken by our General Counsel team to ensure accuracy of legal content.

Quality assurance is integral to our commitment to continuous improvement, and we welcome feedback following the publication of our EIP progress reports to identify areas for improvement in future iterations. You can reach us through our website.⁹

Peer review

Where possible, the data and evidence underpinning our EIP progress reports have been peer reviewed and/or quality assured. For example, much of the data underpinning the indicators we use to assess past trends are based on official or national statistics (see Chapter 3: Assessment of EIP Strategic Environmental Outcomes and Annex: Indicator reference tables).

In addition to our internal quality assurance process and engagements with Board and ExCo, we also undertake an extensive three-part peer review process. This includes an internal peer and legal review by OEP experts and General Counsel, who are independent of the authorship team. Draft progress report chapters are then also sent for external peer review, including by members of the OEP College of Experts and others.¹⁰ There are typically two independent reviewers per chapter (Table 1.2).

This process is particularly important for areas where publicly available evidence is lacking, and a greater degree of expert judgement is necessary to assign assessment ratings.

The overall aim of peer review was to ensure that the narrative, analysis, findings and recommendations are comprehensive, objective and transparent. The following questions guided the reviews:

1. Evidence
 - a. Is there any key evidence that has not been considered?
 - b. Has any evidence been misinterpreted or over-interpreted?
2. Progress/prospects
 - a. Are there any key actions or issues that have not been considered?
 - b. Is the overall structure logical?
 - c. Are assessment ratings consistent with the narrative?
3. Opportunities/recommendations
 - a. Do the opportunities and recommendations target the most important areas?
4. Overall
 - a. Do each chapter's findings cover the most important issues?
 - b. Is there a logical thread to the assessment that is well evidenced and explained, and that substantiates conclusions and recommendations?
 - c. Please provide a summary of your overall thoughts/impressions.

Table 1.2. The OEP would like to thank the following external peer reviewers for their contribution to our 2024/2025 progress report (College of Experts members are identified with CoE)

External peer reviewer
Dr. Paul Caplat, Queen’s University Belfast
Sonia Carrera, Office for National Statistics
Dr. Annika Clements, Queen’s University Belfast
Climate Change Committee
Carol Forster, Foundation for Environmental Education
Nichola Hughes, Sustainable Northern Ireland
Stephanie Metzger, Royal Society of Chemistry
Eimear Montague, Northern Ireland Resource Network
Wendy McKinley, CoE
Dr. Neil Reid, Queen’s University Belfast
Dr. Natalie Sims, Royal Society of Chemistry
Dr. Rachael Singleton, Ulster University
David Tyrer, CoE

1.3. Our assessment approach

Our assessments are based on available knowledge, evidence and analysis. We take an integrated approach to assess issues within and across environmental domains, geographic scales, and past, present and future timescales.

Our overall approach consists of four main components: past trends, progress over the reporting period, overall prospects of meeting ambitions, targets and outcomes, and identification of opportunities for improvement (Figure 1.1). We provide an integrated assessment of each SEO theme.



Figure 1.1. The Office for Environmental Protection’s integrated assessment approach

Our assessment of past trends mainly reflects developments over the five most recent years or periods of data. Our assessment of progress focuses on the reporting period of the APR. Our assessment of prospects looks ahead along the timeframes of the Executive’s ambitions, targets and commitments.

We use summary assessments throughout the report to present analyses in a concise, accessible way. We assign assessment ratings to past trends, progress within the reporting year, and prospects of meeting ambitions, targets and outcomes. The different timeframes mean they can have different assessment ratings. For example, changes in long-term environmental trends are unlikely to reflect progress within the reporting year. In addition, good or poor progress within a reporting year will inform but may not change our assessment of prospects over longer timeframes.

Our assessment aims to support decision making, so we are transparent about our assumptions, uncertainties and the quality of the evidence, and include this in our summary assessments.

We have assessed progress and prospects for improving the natural environment in accordance with the EIP. The 2024/2025 progress report is structured in three parts, as outlined below.

In **Part I. Setting the scene**, we describe the overall policy framework and wider context for achieving targets and outcomes. We introduce the structure and overall approach for our assessment.

In **Part II. Progress and prospects**, we provide an integrated assessment of EIP themes. We assess environmental trends and respond to DAERA's Annual Progress Report (APR) by assessing progress during the annual reporting period towards individual targets and outcomes as well as the prospects of achieving them. For each theme we then assess the overall progress and prospects, consider how progress could be improved and provide recommendations on how this could be achieved.

In **Part III. Taking stock**, we bring together the theme level analysis and summary assessments to provide an overall picture of trends, progress and prospects and to highlight cross-cutting issues.

Our assessment provides a picture of the current situation within a changing political and policy context. It forms part of our contribution to environmental protection and the improvement of the natural environment in Northern Ireland.

1.4. The overall evidence base

In developing our assessment, we consider DAERA's APR September 2024 – September 2025 (APR 2026),⁸ and published data that relate to the annual reporting period, but we also look beyond this.

1.5. Code of Practice for Statistics

We have voluntarily adopted the Code of Practice for Statistics¹² (the Code), which is administered by the Office for Statistics Regulation and aims to ensure that statistics have public value, are of high quality, and are trustworthy.

The Code sets out the standards to which the organisations that produce official statistics should commit, but can also be applied by any organisation that publishes data, evidence and statistics.

While we do not produce official statistics, we use, analyse and publish those produced by others. We have applied the Code to improve transparency and ensure that users of the report have confidence in its robustness. This is due to our consideration and application of the three pillars of the Code, which are:

- Trustworthiness – confidence in the people and organisations that produce statistics and data
- Quality – data and methods that produce assured statistics
- Value – statistics that support society's needs for information

Our statement of compliance with the Code is published alongside this Methodological Statement and demonstrates how we have adhered to the pillars and principles of the Code in our work. It is a process of continuous improvement, so we will regularly review and update our statement of compliance.

II. Progress and prospects



Chapter 2. Assessment methodologies

This chapter outlines how we assessed past trends, progress in the annual reporting period, and the overall prospects of meeting EIP and wider environmental ambitions, targets and outcomes.

2.1. Assessment of key environmental trends

Background

We have identified indicators that enable assessment of progress against the environmental targets and outcomes. The indicator set for our 2024/2025 progress report draws on those selected by DAERA to inform the APR 2026. Additional indicators have been included to understand environmental drivers and pressures, and to enable our independent assessment of changes in the state of the environment, while remaining relevant to the EIP. The indicators used for this assessment are presented for each theme and SEO in Chapter 3.

The APR 2026 includes a set of indicators for each theme and SEO, referred to as the EIP Outcome Indicator Framework (OIF). Not all indicators in the OIF have been selected for our assessment of key environmental trends because they are outside the scope of our assessment, lack sufficient data to present a time series, or show significant overlap with other OIF indicators. For example, Indicator 9a, 'The Condition Survey of Listed Buildings' is not included in our past trends assessment, as built heritage is not a focus of our assessment. These indicators are listed in Table 3.2.








We have allocated some indicators to different SEOs. For example, in the APR 2026, Indicator 10f, 'Area of land exposed to damaging levels of ammonia (NH₃) in the atmosphere' is used in the assessment of SEO 3: Thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife. For the purposes of our assessment, we have allocated this indicator to SEO 1: Excellent air, water and land quality, alongside the other air quality indicators.

The Annex provides reference tables for the indicators used in our assessment, including the data sources and a description of the methodology.

Trend assessment

To summarise and communicate changes in indicator trends and whether change is for better or worse, we use icons that combine a red-amber-green (RAG) system and symbols (Table 2.1). Arrows indicate the direction of change, and so, improvement can be indicated by either a downward arrow (for example, a decrease in the emission of air pollutants) or an upward arrow (for example, increased tree cover). Where we have not made an assessment due to the lack of a time series, we use a grey circle with a line through it. Where data are not available, we use a grey circle with a cross.

Table 2.1. Indicator trend assessment categories

Icon	Trend category	Trend direction	Assessment of change
	Improvement	Increasing	Positive developments more prevalent
	Improvement	Decreasing	Negative developments less prevalent
	Little or no change	No change	No change for better or worse
	Deterioration	Increasing	Negative developments more prevalent
	Deterioration	Decreasing	Positive developments less prevalent
	Not assessed	Single data point, or time series too short to adequately assess progress	Only the current state can be evaluated
	Not assessed	No appropriate data to assess progress	Represents a major data gap

For our 2024/2025 progress report, we have assessed 48 trends across 44 indicators. Typically, we assess one trend per indicator. However, for the emissions of five key pollutants indicator (refer to Table A.3. in the Annex), we present five trends, one for each pollutant.

Indicator trends within each theme are aggregated to provide an overall assessment rating. This provides a past trends rating for the theme level summary assessments. Themes are rated as improving trends dominate, trends show a mixed picture, or deteriorating trends dominate. The aggregated ratings are assigned using expert judgment in an iterative process, which considers the relative importance of each indicator for the given theme.

We assess individual indicator trends by calculating the percentage difference between the first and last year of the given period. Most indicators are assessed across the latest five years of available data. We apply a 3% threshold to the change between the first and last data points to determine whether there is improvement or deterioration. This is consistent with methodologies widely used across UK government, such as for the UK Biodiversity Indicators assessments.¹³

The 3% threshold we apply to our past trends assessment is intuitive, easy to apply and communicate. While it reflects the magnitude of change, it does not reflect data variation, and the relative importance of a 3% change varies across indicators. To enable the OEP and report users to have more confidence that annual changes in past trend indicators are meaningful, we also apply a measure of statistical significance.

We apply a one-sample t-test to assess the statistical significance of the change over time. The t-test determines whether the most recent year of data can be robustly distinguished from the preceding five data points (the baseline period). A threshold of 0.05 (95%) was

applied to the resulting p-value, whereby less than 0.05 is deemed a statistically significant change. Indicators that did not meet the criteria required for the t-test (such as having fewer than six data points or insufficient variability) were not analysed.

The combination of these approaches supports a more robust and transparent assessment. The percentage calculation reflects the magnitude of the change, while the statistical analysis looks at variation over the time period. As a result, a percentage change over a five-year period could be high, but not statistically significant, and vice versa. To ensure that trends are clearly communicated, the statistical analysis does not affect the ratings, but it can be considered alongside them to provide additional insights.

Detailed results are set out in both Chapter 3 and the indicator reference tables (Annex), where we present the effect size (expressed as percentage changes) alongside the p-values, allowing both the OEP and report users to more confidently assess whether changes are meaningful (that is, sizeable and statistically distinguishable).

Further detail on the t-test methodology can be found in the report commissioned from Biomathematics and Statistics Scotland (Developing statistical methodologies for analysing change and trends in environmental indicators), which is published on the OEP website.¹⁴

Our past trends analysis is further informed by other indicators and data for which we do not provide trend assessment ratings. These may vary between progress reports. If significant processing or analysis is used to understand these indicators, the methodology is explained in Chapter 3. These indicators and data are subject to our peer review and quality assurance processes.

2.2. Assessment of progress towards targets and outcomes

We assess progress in the reporting period at two levels: first, towards individual targets and outcomes, and then at the theme level. This fulfils our statutory obligations under Schedule 3, Part 1 of the Environment Act 2021 to monitor progress in improving the natural environment in accordance with the current EIP.⁷

Selection of targets and outcomes

For our 2024/2025 progress report, we assess environmental targets and outcomes derived from the EIP (see Chapter 3).

The final list was determined by considering their relevance to our assessment, whether they were measurable and thus distinguishable from actions, and whether they represent significant environmental outcomes or pressures on the environment. They were finalised in a series of internal workshops.

The source for each target and outcome we assess is listed in Chapter 3. Where appropriate, we have simplified the target descriptions to make them more accessible, rather than presenting the wording of the source legislation.

Rationale for the assessment approach

The interaction between the Executive's activities and the state of the natural environment is complex. As such, it can be challenging to describe and analyse objectively. Any attempt

to do so requires clear definitions, pragmatic choices about scope, and appropriate methodologies.

As we are required to monitor progress in improving the natural environment, we organise our assessment around the 22 themes and six SEOs in the EIP, along with their ambitions, targets, and outcomes. While this helps structure our approach and findings, it also poses challenges for analysis because much policy activity spans multiple areas. We have not separately assessed five of the themes; these are explained in Table 3.1.

Accordingly, we adopt a flexible approach to setting boundaries around which policies to consider in our assessment for each target and outcome, and for each SEO. This is based on two key assumptions. First, there is no definitive list of the relevant policies set out by the Executive for each target, outcome, or SEO. Second, the policies themselves are developing and often changing (in relevance and in practice), so any definitive list would be quickly out of date.

While the above assumptions introduce a degree of subjectivity into our approach, they also offer the opportunity for analysis that can provide an independent perspective and insights. We believe this is the best way for us to fulfil our duty to monitor progress, and our strategic aim to sustain environmental improvement.

Definitions

To assess the progress regarding the Executive's activities in delivering actions, we developed a working definition of what good progress would look like:

The Executive's current and planned actions to deliver a target or commitment are comprehensive (they cover the most important issues), credible (their development and delivery are effective) and coherent (they work together).

This definition is necessarily broad and therefore applicable to any area of the environment or cross-cutting theme, and can consider any type of activity, such as policy, research, and communications. It allows us to comment on the adequacy of activities in total and on the specifics of their design and delivery.

In addition to this fundamental definition of good progress, we use categories and operational definitions to identify and organise the various activities that were the subject of our analysis. These categories are based on the UK government's definitions and guidance for policymakers, such as HM Treasury's Green Book: UK Government Guidance on Appraisal, and the Magenta Book: Central Government Guidance on Evaluation.^{15,16} Table 2.2 shows the definitions we developed and adapted to our assessment context, along with their positions in the policymaking process.

This enables us to be consistent with our terminology over reporting periods and when comparing across themes. It also enables us to be transparent about how we categorised and interpreted the activities described in the APR 2026 and elsewhere.

Table 2.2. Activity types and their definitions, grouped into three stages of the policy process, based on the ROAMEF cycle (Rationale, Objectives, Appraisal, Monitoring, Evaluation, Feedback cycle)¹⁵

Activity	Definition	ROAMEF Policy stage
Design	Any steps taken towards or announcements about a policy’s mission and vision, strategic objectives, rationale, options appraisal, quantification, scope and key features	<i>Development:</i> Explaining the Rationale , setting Objectives , and Appraisal of options
Research	Commissioning, undertaking or publishing research and consultations to gather evidence to understand the problems and solutions, and any piloting or testing of ideas	
Target	Statements of intent that quantify the desired level of performance, based on measurable indicators	
Funding	Statements about the amount or types of funding being made available	
Delivery	Steps taken to implement policies and projects, including money being made available or spent, and projects undertaken or supported	<i>Delivery:</i> Monitoring during implementation
Collaboration	Forums and mechanisms that bring stakeholders together to achieve shared objectives	
Monitoring	Gathering information about delivery progress and the environmental context	
Evaluation	Research and analysis to assess the design, implementation and outcomes of policies	<i>Learning:</i> Evaluation of delivery and Feedback of learning
Learning	Any activity that uses feedback, or creates opportunities for its use, to improve policy	

Understanding what each activity means for progress towards specific outcomes and long-term targets requires knowledge of the intended delivery pathways. Because delivery pathways for most targets and outcomes are currently unavailable, we drew on our own knowledge of the environmental and policy systems involved.

Evidence sources

Our analysis focused on the 12-month reporting period of September 2024 to September 2025. This is because we must provide our assessment of progress over the period covered by the APR 2026. However, we also considered additional information beyond the reporting period. This longer timeframe is important for contextualising progress within the reporting year, particularly for long-term actions that have multiple phases of development and delivery.

Our evidence sources included the APR 2026, official data for the reporting period, the EIP, and the links and references contained therein. In addition, we looked at draft strategies, policy announcements, policy papers, ministerial statements, minutes of Assembly committee sessions, action plans, blogs, peer reviewed literature, commissioned research, and monitoring and evaluation reports. This enabled us to consider a larger number and

wider range of actions than those included in the APR 2026. These additional sources were selected for their value in helping us address our analytical questions.

For some themes, we have identified actions to achieve targets and outcomes through calls for evidence, monitoring and evaluation reports for this and previous OEP work, and discussions with stakeholders.

Analysis

We developed a set of guiding questions to ensure consistency in our approach to analysing progress, and to provide transparency about how we made our assessments.

The analytical questions were:

1. Are actions addressing the most important issues? (comprehensive)
 - a. To what extent are the actions addressing the important issues?
 - b. Are there any gaps in the environmental policy system for this theme?
2. Are the actions being developed and delivered effectively? (credible)
 - a. How well is the environmental policy system functioning?
 - b. Are the actions producing significant and timely outcomes?
3. Do the actions work well together? (coherent)
 - a. How well is the mix of actions within each theme and SEO described and justified?
 - b. Are synergies and trade-offs being managed?

Answering these questions required gathering, sorting and interpreting the content of various evidence sources referenced throughout our 2024/2025 progress report. We used several templates and tools for standardising our analysis.

We extracted key information from the EIP, the APR 2026 and other strategies to create summaries for each SEO. These showed the links between indicators, targets, outcomes, and actions to improve understanding and effect change; drivers and pressures acting on the SEO; enablers of change; and the identification of delivery partners and stakeholders.

These templates and tools enabled us to have a consistent approach to summarising information, to check that the methodology had been applied consistently across all themes and SEOs, and to contextualise our analysis within the broader policy and environmental context.

Following the guiding questions above, we developed a narrative assessment of progress in each theme and SEO. The summary narratives were developed in an iterative way, drawing on stakeholder and expert engagement as well as formal internal and external reviews.

Ratings and conclusions

Having finalised our narrative assessment of progress for individual targets and across the breadth of action for each theme, we converted our findings into a red-amber-green (RAG) rating for our summary assessment, based on expert judgement (Table 2.3). This is a simplification of the underlying analysis, but a useful step to ensure transparency and accessibility. The summary assessments were developed and refined through an iterative process to ensure consistency across assessments of individual targets, outcomes and themes.

Table 2.3. Descriptions of RAG ratings of progress in the reporting period

Assessment rating		Descriptions
Good		<p>Important issues are all being addressed.</p> <p>Development, delivery and learning are progressing.</p> <p>Actions are working well together.</p>
Mixed		<p>Most but not all of the important issues are being addressed.</p> <p>Development, delivery and learning is mixed.</p> <p>Some actions work well together whereas others do not.</p>
Limited		<p>Some of the important issues are not being addressed.</p> <p>Development, delivery and learning are not progressing.</p> <p>Many actions do not work well together.</p>
Not assessed		<p>No assessment of progress has been possible because of a lack of available evidence.</p>

2.3. Assessment of prospects of meeting targets and outcomes

The third component of our assessment framework looks ahead and assesses the prospects of achieving individual targets and outcomes, as well as the overall prospects for each theme. We provide a narrative assessment of prospects and then convert our findings into a summary assessment. We again use a red-amber-green (RAG) rating, where green is largely on track, amber is partially on track, and red is largely off track (Table 2.4).

Our assessment of prospects uses a range of evidence, including past trends, policy evaluation, and forward-looking evidence such as quantified projections and qualitative assessments on the drivers of change, where available. We combine this with expert judgement to provide a perspective on the gap between the current situation and targets and outcomes. We also consider stakeholder input during its development.

2.4. Summary assessments

We developed summary assessments to enable integration of our analyses and a clear and concise presentation of our findings.

The overall summary table for each theme is based on a combination of available evidence and expert judgement. It provides a summary of past trends, progress and overall prospects of meeting targets and commitments for each theme. It also provides an assessment of the robustness of the evidence base (Table 2.4). Our approach has adapted the European Environment Agency (EEA) approach to assessing the state and outlook of the European environment.¹⁷

Table 2.4. SEO theme level summary assessment methodology (adapted from EEA¹⁷)

Component	Assessment approach	Assessment rating	
Past trends	Assessment of trends is based on available indicators and other data as observed	Green	Improving trends dominate
		Amber	Trends show a mixed picture
		Red	Deteriorating trends dominate
		Grey	Not assessed
Progress in the annual reporting period	Assessment of progress is based on the APR, official data that relate to the reporting period and any other reports, documents or information we consider appropriate. It is informed by progress towards individual targets and analysis of whether actions are comprehensive (they cover the most important issues), credible (their development and delivery are high-quality) and coherent (they work well together)	Green	Good progress
		Amber	Mixed progress
		Red	Limited progress
		Grey	Not assessed
Overall prospects of meeting ambitions, targets and commitments	Assessment of the prospects of meeting selected targets and outcomes is based on the APR, official data that relate to the reporting period, distance to target assessments, evidence reports and impact assessments, other assessments and information, including calls for evidence, policy evaluation and expert judgement	Green	Largely on track
		Amber	Partially on track
		Red	Largely off track
		Grey	Not assessed
Robustness	Assessment of the robustness of the evidence base which identifies key gaps and uncertainties and indicates the degree of expert judgement used.		

For each SEO, we also include a one-page summary assessment. This consists of key messages and an overall table of the summary assessment ratings for each theme within the SEO.

Chapter 3. Assessment of EIP Strategic Environmental Outcomes

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents further details of our analysis. We present the indicators we assessed to understand the key environmental trends for each theme and SEO. For consistency, we use the indicator names used by DAERA in the EIP Outcome Indicator Framework (OIF).⁸

We provide data sources for all indicators where available, and we include indicator reference tables with more detailed metadata in the Annex, in line with our commitment to continuous improvement.

We also present the ambitions, targets and outcomes selected for our assessments of progress in the annual reporting period.

Selected themes

Five of the 22 themes in the EIP have not been assessed separately and have been integrated into assessments of other themes and SEOs (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1. Integration of EIP themes assessments across our 2024/2025 progress assessment

Theme	Rationale
SEO 1: Local environment quality	Focuses on litter and has been incorporated into our wider assessment of SEO 1 and waste management in SEO 5
SEO 2: Sustainable settlements	Addresses green transport and has been incorporated into our assessment of our three selected themes in SEO 2
SEO 2: Historic environment	Historic and cultural heritage has been incorporated into our wider assessment of the three selected themes in SEO 2 and Energy in SEO 4
SEO 4: Reducing single-use plastic (SUP)	A key consideration for sustainable resource use, this has been integrated in into our assessment of circular economy in SEO 5
SEO 4: Antimicrobial and disinfectant contamination	Aspects have been incorporated into our assessment of chemicals in SEO 4

EIP OIF indicators that have not been included in our 2024/2025 progress assessment

We have not assessed 11 of the indicators in the EIP OIF because they are outside the scope of our assessment, lack sufficient data to present a time series, or show significant overlap with other indicators. These are summarised in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2. EIP OIF indicators for which we have not assigned an assessment rating

SEO	Indicator	Rationale
SEO 1	1c: Air Pollution Trends Report 2024: Critical load and critical level exceedances in the UK; National Ammonia Monitoring Network Report	To avoid overlap between ammonia and nitrogen indicators across the analysis, we have removed Indicator 1c and incorporated SEO 3 indicators 10f and 10g into SEO 1. These provide sufficient coverage of the percentage of land where ammonia exceeds critical levels, where nitrogen exceeds critical loads, and show the magnitude of nitrogen exceedance In addition, the National Ammonia Monitoring Network 2022 to 2024 dataset for Indicator 1c is unavailable
	4a: LEAMS Indicator	Used as contextual indicator
SEO 2	7a: The Next Generation	No available indicator
	8a: Percentage of journeys under two miles people choose to make by walking or cycling	Was not a focus of our assessment
	9a: The Condition Survey of Listed Buildings	Was not a focus of our assessment
SEO 3	12a: Natural Capital	No available indicator

Table 3.2. EIP OIF indicators for which we have not assigned an assessment rating (cont.)

SEO	Indicator	Rationale
SEO 4	13e: Ammonia Emissions from NI Agriculture	Ammonia emissions are included in SEO 4 as an indicator for future agricultural policy. We have included ammonia in SEO 1 alongside the other four pollutants covered under the National Emission Ceilings Regulations 2018. This approach enables us to consider holistically the link between ammonia emissions from agriculture and the exceedance of critical loads and critical levels at nitrogen-sensitive sites, which is an indicator within SEO 1
	13f: Condition of Features (Protected Sites)	<p>This indicator tracks the percentage of features in protected sites that are in favourable condition, including all terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine sites. This is used in the EIP to assess the progress of the Future Agricultural Policy</p> <p>Some protected sites will benefit from nature-friendly farming, and some may be affected by agricultural pressures, or a combination of both. In these instances, the condition of protected features is a relevant agricultural indicator to track environmental improvement resulting from agricultural policy</p> <p>Many protected sites are not part of, or connected to, the farmed environment. For this reason, we have not used Indicator 13f in our assessment</p>
	13g: Wild Birds	Duplication of indicator 10d: Wild Bird Population in NI
	17a: Reduction in littered SUP (single use plastic) items	No available indicator
	19a: Monitor AMR through 300 annual abattoir samples and passive surveillance	Not a focus of our assessment

3.2. Excellent air, water and land quality

Clean air, water and land play a crucial role in sustaining both the natural world and human society. Environmental quality reflects the degree to which they are free from pollution and degradation. Maintaining high environmental quality ensures that nature can thrive and is essential to human health and well-being, economic sustainability, and climate resilience.

This SEO aims to significantly improve the quality of air, water and land by reducing pollution, restoring degraded environments, and embedding environmental protection into policy, planning and practice. In doing so, it supports the achievement of all other SEOs. It is comprised of themes focused on air quality and the quality and quantity of freshwater, marine and coastal water resources.

SEO 1 also addresses local environmental quality with a focus on litter. We also address litter under SEO 5, while addressing local environmental quality in each of the remaining themes in SEO 1.

Key environmental trends

For our 2024/2025 progress report, we have selected 14 indicators to assess 18 trends; 11 of these are used in the EIP OIF, and three are additional. These are: 'Emissions of five key pollutants'; 'Average accumulated exceedance of nutrient nitrogen critical loads'; and 'Number of pesticide drinking water samples at water treatment works above the regulatory limit'.

Within Marine and Coastal Water Resources, we have included an assessment of Good Environmental Status (GES) as defined under the Marine Strategy Regulations (2010).¹⁸ We present the current assessment status for each of the 15 descriptors as reported in UK Marine Strategy Part One (see Box 2.3 in the 2024/2025 progress report).^{19,20} We have not used this information as an indicator to assess trends, as the descriptors are not defined at the Northern Ireland level, but we have referred to it in relation to the UK-level assessment. We have also included this in the selected targets and outcomes for this theme within Table 3.5.

Table 3.3. Selected indicators – Excellent air, water and land quality

Theme	Indicator	Trend	T-test	Year
1. Air quality	Annual mean roadside levels of nitrogen dioxide as measured in micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) at ten sites across NI	-17.6%	0.36	2019–2024
	Annual mean urban background levels of $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ as measured in micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) at five sites across NI	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
	Emissions of five key pollutants: Data – NO_x	-30.7%	0.01	2018–2023
	Emissions of five key pollutants: Data – SO_2	-52.4%	0.01	2018–2023
	Emissions of five key pollutants: Data – NMVOC	-8.8%	0.04	2018–2023
	Emissions of five key pollutants: Data – $\text{PM}_{2.5}$	-34.1%	0.00	2018–2023
	Emissions of five key pollutants: Data – NH_3	+0.6%	0.49	2018–2023
	Area of land exposed to damaging levels of ammonia (NH_3) in the atmosphere	-1.4%	0.01	2016–2021
	Percentage of nutrient-sensitive habitat area where nutrient nitrogen critical loads are exceeded	-3.1%	N/A	2016–2021
	Average Accumulated Exceedance of nutrient nitrogen critical loads ($\text{kg N ha}^{-1} \text{yr}^{-1}$)	-15.2%	0.00	2016–2021
2. Water resources: quality and quantity	Annual mean nitrate concentrations (groundwater)	-0.6%	0.18	2018–2023
	Soluble Reactive Phosphorus (SRP) in rivers	+3.2%	0.36	2019–2024
	Annual mean nitrate concentrations (rivers)	-53.9%	0.04	2019–2024
	Number of pesticide drinking water samples at water treatment works final sampling points above the regulatory limit	-46.2%	0.27	2019–2024

Table 3.3. Selected indicators – Excellent air, water and land quality (cont.)

Theme	Indicator	Trend	T-test	Year
3. Marine and coastal water resources: quality and quantity	Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen (DIN) Enrichment	+100.0%	0.10	2019–2024
	Bathing water data (<i>Escherichia coli</i> & Intestinal Enterococci levels)	-3.8%	0.02	2018–2023
	Marine Litter (recorded using OSPAR methodology to show changes in volume and types of litter present)	+37.4%	0.69	2020–2025
	Transitional & Coastal Water Classification Statistics	0.0%	N/A	2021–2024

Progress towards ambitions, targets and outcomes

Table 3.4. Selected targets and outcomes – Excellent air, water and land quality – Air quality

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
N/A	National Emission Ceilings Regulations 2018, emission reduction commitments	National Emission Ceilings Regulations 2018 ²¹
N/A	Air Quality Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 limit values, target values and long-term objectives	Air Quality Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010 ²²
N/A	Ammonia emissions reduced to a point where critical loads on nitrogen deposition and critical levels of ammonia are not being exceeded at any designated sites	EIP

Table 3.5. Selected targets and outcomes – Excellent air, water and land quality – Water resources: quality and quantity

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
2C	By 2031: achieve the sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources including water and soils	EIP
2D	By 2027: 100% of waterbodies at Good Ecological Status (surface water) & Good Chemical Status (groundwater)	EIP

Table 3.6. Selected targets and outcomes – Excellent air, water and land quality – Marine and coastal water resources: quality and quantity

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
N/A	Achievement of Good Environmental Status of Northern Ireland seas and a thriving blue economy	EIP
3D	By 2030, to have protected our Bathing Waters and Sensitive Areas including Shellfish Water Protected Areas (SWPAs) from storm sewage discharges and reduce impacts of agriculture on such areas	EIP
3I	By 2030: Maintain at least Sufficient status for all Bathing Waters, with 70% achieving Good or Excellent status throughout the bathing season	EIP
3J	By 2030: Manage all Shellfish Water Protected Areas (SWPAs) to ensure that they meet their ecological and chemical objectives under the Water Environment Regulations 2017 and meet at least Class B under the EU Hygiene Regulations	EIP

3.3. Healthy and accessible environment and landscapes everyone can connect with and enjoy

Northern Ireland’s landscapes, seascapes, and urban green and blue spaces shape the region’s character. They reflect its history, support a shared sense of identity, and provide vital connections to the natural environment. These connections are essential for human health and wellbeing and help drive the behavioural changes needed to meet the ambitions set out across all areas of the EIP.

The EIP recognises that engaging people is fundamental to its success, and that the environment is key to our wellbeing, both in an economic sense and in terms of our general physical, mental and social health – as individuals and as a society. This strategic environmental outcome (SEO 2) comprises five themes.

It includes the aims to ensure that landscapes and seascapes are protected, maintained, and enhanced so they can be enjoyed responsibly by everyone; that all people have access to inclusive, shared, welcoming, and high-quality outdoor spaces; and that future generations are well engaged and well educated to help drive societal change. These three aims are the focus of our assessment and are addressed under landscapes, seascapes and natural beauty, access and natural space provision, and the next generation.

Although landscapes and seascapes are considered holistically (including their historic features) and sustainable settlements are relevant to access to green and blue spaces, this chapter does not separately assess sustainable settlements, the historic environment, or commitments relating to sport and recreation facilities.

We have not identified any suitable ambitions, targets and outcomes for the theme landscapes, seascapes and natural beauty that meet our selection criteria.

Key environmental trends

For our 2024/2025 progress report, we have selected five indicators. Two are used in the EIP OIF, and three are additional. These are: ‘Percentage of adults visiting the outdoors at least once a week’, ‘Level of concern for the environment’ and ‘Actions taken that have a positive impact on the environment’.

Table 3.7. Selected indicators – Healthy and accessible environment and landscapes everyone can connect with and enjoy

Theme	Indicator	Trend	T-test	Year
5. Landscapes, seascapes and natural beauty	Number of Green/Blue Flag sites	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
6. Access and natural space provision	Increase in the % of households that have publicly accessible quality natural space >2 ha and off-road trails within 400 metres	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
	Percentage of adults visiting the outdoors at least once a week	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
7. The next generation	Level of concern for the environment	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
	Actions taken that have a positive impact on the environment	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed

Progress towards ambitions, targets and outcomes

Table 3.8. Selected targets and outcomes – Healthy and accessible environment and landscapes everyone can connect with and enjoy – Access and natural space provision

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
6I	Annual increase in % of households that have publicly accessible quality natural space >2 ha within 400 metres and at least one site >20 ha in size within 2 km	EIP
N/A	By 2050, 84% of households have publicly accessible quality natural space >2 ha within 400 metres and at least one site >20 ha in size within 2 km	EIP
N/A	By 2050, 90% of the population visiting the natural outdoors at least once a week	EIP

Table 3.9. Selected targets and outcomes – Healthy and accessible environment and landscapes everyone can connect with and enjoy – The next generation

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
7C	By 2030 every child spends time in the natural outdoors at least once a week	EIP

3.4. Thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife

Our assessment of this SEO covers the three themes of nature on land (including freshwater ecosystems), nature at sea, and natural capital.

On land and at sea, we assess actions taken within protected site networks, across wider landscape and marine environment protection and restoration, and to address pressures negatively affecting nature. Our assessment accounts for actions, targets, and commitments within the broader policy landscape, including the Peatland Strategy, Blue Carbon Strategy, Marine Protected Area (MPA) Strategy as well as proposed measures such as within the draft Nature Recovery Strategy.

Our assessment of natural capital includes progress made and prospects of achieving specific commitments. Since indicators for natural capital are not yet available, we do not assess trends for this theme.

Key environmental trends

For our 2024/2025 progress report, we have selected seven indicators. Six of these are used in the EIP Outcome Indicator Framework (OIF), and one is additional. This is ‘Extent of marine protected areas network’.

Within protecting nature on land, we have included an assessment of the condition of woodland features within Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs). This was calculated using Summary Feature Condition Status of Protected Areas for 2024/2025.²³ Data related to woodland features were extracted, and the condition was calculated based on the number of features assessed.

Table 3.10. Selected indicators – Thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife

Theme	Indicator	Trend	T-test	Year
10. Protecting nature on land	NI Woodland Cover	+1.8%	0.01	2020–2025
	Peatland Conserved/Restored	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
	Condition of Features within Terrestrial ASSIs (includes freshwater sites)	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
	Wild Bird Population in NI	-13.3%	0.01 (assessed for 2017–2023 due to no data in 2020)	2018–2023
	Area of land (or % land area) protected for nature	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
11. Protecting nature at sea	Condition of marine protected areas network	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
	Extent of marine protected areas network	+0.0%	N/A	2019/20–2024/25

Progress towards ambitions, targets and outcomes

Table 3.11. Selected targets and outcomes – Thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife – Protecting nature on land

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
10A	By 2030: At least 30% of land and freshwater protected, connected and managed for nature	EIP
10B	Increase NI woodland cover to at least 9% (124,000 hectares) by 2030 and 12% woodland cover by 2050	EIP
10E	All semi-natural peatlands are conserved or restored to healthy, functioning ecosystems by 2040	EIP
10M	By 2030: 95% of the features underlying the designation of ASSIs to be in, or approaching, favourable conservation condition	EIP
10R	By 2030: Create or commence restoration of 20,000 ha of wildlife rich habitat outside the protected site network (to support nature recovery networks and nature-based solutions)	EIP

Table 3.12. Selected targets and outcomes – Thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife – Protecting nature at sea

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
11A	By 2030: 30% of seas protected, ensuring an ecologically coherent & well managed MPA network	EIP
11D	By 2030: 85% of designated features in the MPA network to be in favourable condition, with 10% of the remainder in recovering condition	EIP
11E	By 2030: Key marine priority habitats and species are in recovery	EIP

Table 3.13. Selected targets and outcomes – Thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife – Natural capital

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
12B	By 2027: Scope and develop a robust natural capital and ecosystem assessment framework for NI for government departments and public bodies, etc	EIP
12C	By 2027: Enhance our natural capital reporting, data, and habitat mapping systems to make Natural Capital and ecosystem datasets more readily available and integrate into Natural Capital accounting and reporting systems (Natural Capital and ecosystems assessment platform)	EIP

3.5. Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea

Natural resources provide the foundation for our society, economy and well-being. Achieving sustainable production and consumption of our natural resources will enable us to minimise environmental harm, enhance nature’s recovery and support resource security and economic growth.

Our assessment covers the SEOs’ themes of future agriculture policy, energy, productive and sustainably used seas, producer responsibility and chemicals. The theme of reducing single-use plastic is addressed in SEO 5, while elements of antimicrobial and disinfectant contamination have been incorporated into our broader assessment of chemicals.

Key environmental trends

For our 2024/2025 progress report, we have selected 13 indicators, all of which originate from the EIP OIF.

Table 3.14. Selected indicators – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea

Theme	Indicator	Trend	T-test	Year
13. Future agricultural policy	Net GHGs in Agriculture	-0.5%	0.08	2018–2023
	Net GHG Land Use, Land Use Change & Forestry (LULUCF)	-1.0%	0.26	2018–2023
	NI Phosphorus Balance	-3.6%	0.28	2019–2024
	NI Nitrogen Balance	+0.8%	0.46	2019–2024
14. Energy	Renewable electricity generation as a proportion of gross final electricity consumption	-6.4%	0.00	2020–2025
15. Productive and sustainably used seas	For commercial offshore stocks	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
	For commercial inshore stocks	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
16. Producer responsibility	Packaging recycling rates	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
	Percentage of full net costs contributed by packaging producers	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
	Increase of recycling of drinks containers from 70-90% by 2030	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
18. Chemicals	Number of registered holders of firefighting foam stockpiles containing PFOA inspected	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed
	Number of pieces of equipment containing PCBs above the legal threshold registered with NIEA	Not assessed	Not assessed	Not assessed

Progress towards ambitions, targets and outcomes

Table 3.15. Selected targets and outcomes – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea – Future agricultural policy

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
N/A	An industry that is environmentally sustainable in terms of its impact on, and guardianship of, air and water quality, soil health and biodiversity, while making its fair contribution to achieving net zero carbon targets	EIP

Table 3.16. Selected targets and outcomes – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea – Energy

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
N/A	At least 80% of electricity consumption to be from renewable sources by 2030	Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 ²⁴

Table 3.17. Selected targets and outcomes – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea – Productive and sustainably used seas

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
15A	By 2030: Ensure that all fish stocks are recovered to and maintained at levels that can produce their maximum sustainable yield, within constraints of climate change	EIP

Table 3.18. Selected targets and outcomes – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea – Producer responsibility

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
16B	By 2031: Increase overall recycling of packaging to 76%	EIP
16D	From 2025: at least 80% of full net costs of packaging contributed by producers	EIP
16G	By 2030: Increase recycling of drinks containers from 70% to 90%	EIP

Table 3.19. Selected targets and outcomes – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea – Chemicals

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
18B	Eliminate the use of Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs) by 2025, in line with commitments under the Stockholm Convention	EIP
18D	Substantially increase the amount of persistent organic pollutants (POPs) material being destroyed or irreversibly transformed by 2030, to make sure there are negligible emissions to the environment	EIP
N/A	To deliver reduced exposure to chemicals in the Northern Ireland environment through regulation, enforcement, monitoring and assessment	EIP

3.6. Zero waste and highly developed circular economy

Resource consumption, greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and environmental impacts are inextricably linked.

This SEO focuses on eliminating unnecessary waste and the transition to a circular economy. Circular economy and waste management are inherently connected. The circular economy reimagines the traditional linear system of resource use (from resource extraction and use to waste creation) by designing out waste, keeping materials in use for as long as possible, and turning end-of-life products into valuable secondary raw materials. Waste management, guided by the waste hierarchy, seeks to maximise the value of discarded materials.

Food waste and the wider food system are integral to this SEO, reflecting their significant contribution to material flows, environmental pressures and resource inefficiencies across production, consumption and waste stages.

Key environmental trends

For our 2024/2025 progress report, we have selected five indicators, all of which are from the EIP OIF.

Table 3.20. Selected indicators – Zero waste and highly developed circular economy

Theme	Indicator	Trend	T-test	Year
20. Circular economy	Material Footprint	+23.4%	0.00	2017–2022
	Carbon Footprint	+1.7%	0.10	2017–2022
21. Waste management	Waste generated from households	-0.3%	0.52	2019/20–2024/25
	Recycling levels	-1.5%	0.61	2019/20–2024/25
	Municipal Waste Landfilled	-41.7%	0.00	2019/20–2024/25

Progress towards ambitions, targets and outcomes

Table 3.21. Selected targets and outcomes – Zero waste and highly developed circular economy – Circular economy

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
20A	By 2050 we will have reduced our annual material footprint to 8 tonnes per person	EIP

Table 3.22. Selected targets and outcomes – Zero waste and highly developed circular economy – Waste management

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
21D	Achieve 65% of municipal waste recycled by 2035, with interim targets of 55% by 2025 and 60% by 2030 to protect our environment	EIP
21E	By 2035, send no more than 10% of municipal waste to landfill to move waste up the waste hierarchy	EIP
21F	Achieve a 70% recycling rate by 2030	EIP
21I	Contribute to SDG 12.3 (halving per capita food waste in the UK)	EIP

3.7. Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions and improved climate resilience and adaptability

This SEO is central to Northern Ireland’s shift to a low-carbon economy through climate mitigation actions, while ensuring society and the environment can adapt and be resilient to the current and projected impacts of climate change.

The climate and nature crises are fundamentally interlinked. Climate change is a major pressure on the natural environment, and in turn, the natural environment is key to effective adaptation and mitigation. This means the policies implemented within this SEO will be critical to the effective delivery of actions across the wider EIP and the achievement of targets and commitments. Our assessment comprises two main themes: climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Key environmental trends

For our 2024/2025 progress report, we have selected one indicator that is from the EIP OIF.

Table 3.23. Selected indicators – Net zero greenhouse gas emissions and improved climate resilience and adaptability

Theme	Indicator	Trend	T-test	Year
22. Climate change	Total Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Northern Ireland	-13.4%	0.00	2018–2023

Trends – Climate adaptation

Compared with climate mitigation, climate adaptation is difficult to measure directly. Outcomes are generally poorly defined. There are few datasets that directly measure adaptation or climate risk at the national level, and there is currently no widely agreed adaptation monitoring and evaluation framework.

However, by assuming that a healthy natural environment will be more resilient to pressures, we have identified proxy indicators from the set of indicators used in our progress report. We combine these trends with quantitative contextual indicators and broader qualitative evidence to assess changes in key hazards and the natural environment’s resilience to them.

To identify these proxy measures, we mapped the set of EIP progress report indicators to the 61 climate risks identified in the third Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA). This identified areas where adaptation may be important for the delivery of EIP SEOs, and therefore areas where we could use existing analysis to suggest whether EIP relevant climate risks are being managed. We then identified additional supporting contextual indicators from the Climate Change Committee’s (CCC’s) adaptation progress report for Northern Ireland,²⁵ DAERA’s Environmental Statistics Report,²⁶ and the Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme.²⁷

This approach has enabled us to provide a trend assessment for climate adaptation. However, we are reliant on proxy measures, which are often not solely climate driven. Our indicators were also initially collated to assess progress towards EIP targets and commitments, rather than to assess climate adaptation. Therefore, this selection of indicators does not constitute a comprehensive set of climate adaptation indicators for the natural environment.

Table 3.24. Mapping the progress report indicators to CCRA3 risks

CCRA3 risk	Relevant 2024/2025 progress report indicator
H7 Risks to health and well-being from changes in air quality	Indicator 1a: Annual mean roadside levels of Nitrogen Dioxide (NO ₂) as measured in micrograms per cubic metre (µg/m ³) at ten sites across NI Indicator 1b: Annual mean urban background levels of PM _{2.5} as measured in micrograms per cubic metre (µg/m ³) at five sites across NI Emissions of five key air pollutants
I11 Risks to offshore infrastructure from storms and high waves	Renewable generation as a proportion of gross final electricity consumption
N1 Risks to terrestrial species and habitats	Indicator 10c: Condition of Features within Terrestrial ASSIs (includes freshwater sites) Indicator 10d: Wild Bird Population in Northern Ireland Indicator 10e: Area of land (or % land area) protected for nature
N11 Risks to freshwater species and habitats	Indicator 10c: Condition of Features within Terrestrial ASSIs (includes freshwater sites)
N14 Risks to marine species, habitats and fisheries	Indicator 11a: Condition of Marine Protected Areas Network Extent of Marine Protected Areas Network
N17 Risks and opportunities to coastal species and habitats	Indicator 11a: Condition of Marine Protected Areas Network Extent of Marine Protected Areas Network
N5 Risks to natural carbon stores and sequestration from changing conditions	Indicator 10a: NI Woodland Cover Indicator 10b: Peatland Conserved/Restored Indicator 13b: Net GHG Land Use, Land Use Change & Forestry (LULUCF)
N6 Risks to and opportunities for agricultural and forestry productivity	Indicator 10a: NI Woodland Cover

Table 3.25. Additional indicators considered for the climate adaptation past trends assessment

Contextual indicators	Source
Terrestrial protected sites under favourable management	CCC's Adapting to climate change (Progress in Northern Ireland) report 2023 (and references therein) ²⁵
Marine protected sites under favourable management	
Area of land under previous and new targeted agri-environment schemes	
Total leakage reduction target compared with actual reduction achieved	
Area of certified woodland by ownership, Northern Ireland, 2004 to 2025	
Percentage of water bodies at good ecological status	
Mean annual temperature	Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics report (and references therein) ²⁶
Area of new forest and woodland planting	
Sea temperature	
Warm days per year	
Buildings and monuments at risk	
Condition of Features within Marine and Terrestrial protected sites	

Progress towards ambitions, targets and outcomes

Table 3.26. Selected targets and outcomes – Net Zero GHG Emissions and improved climate resilience and adaptability

APR Action Number	Target or outcome	Source
N/A	Net zero greenhouse gas emissions in Northern Ireland by 2050, including Carbon Budgets 1, 2 and 3, and the 2030 and 2040 emissions targets	Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 ²⁴ ; The Climate Change (Carbon Budgets 2023–2037) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 ²⁹

III. Taking stock



Chapter 4. Taking stock

4.1. The overall picture

Chapters 2 to 7 of our 2024/2025 progress report provide an overview of past trends, progress in the annual reporting period and prospects of meeting ambitions, targets and commitments. These are brought together in Chapter 8: Taking stock to provide the overall picture structured by the themes and strategic environmental outcomes of the EIP.

We provide summaries of the OEP's assessments of past trends, progress for the year 2024/2025 and overall prospects of meeting ambitions, targets and outcomes. An overall summary assessment of trends, progress, and prospects is then presented, along with a supporting narrative and conclusions.

Chapter 5. Continuous improvement

In line with our commitment to continuous improvement, we identify potential improvements to our approach throughout the development of our EIP progress assessments.

Development is also informed by an evaluation and learning process, discussions with external stakeholders, and engagement with the OEP Board on our multi-annual approach to EIP progress reports. Where possible, we implement these opportunities immediately. However, some take longer or require greater resources than available, so are deferred for future consideration.

We have commissioned contractors OfficeLabs to develop a data management system for our next progress report.³⁰ The system will enhance our capability to analyse and present our indicators, make our assessments more efficient, and enable authors to provide analyses with greater depth and complexity. The system will further strengthen our commitment to the Code of Practice for Statistics by incorporating new, more efficient quality-assurance, data-entry, and data-security features.

We will also develop our Methodological Statement to ensure our assessments are fully transparent. We will also continue to review our voluntary statement of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics annually, and remain active members of the community of practice to ensure we learn from good examples across other organisations.

Quality assurance is integrated into our commitment to continuous improvement, and we welcome feedback after publication of our EIP progress reports to identify areas of improvement for future iterations. You can reach us through our website.

The background of the page features a repeating pattern of stylized, light gray leaves. Each leaf is elongated and pointed at the tip, with a central vein and smaller veins branching out. The leaves are arranged in vertical columns, creating a textured, organic backdrop.

Annex: Indicator reference tables

Annex: Indicator reference tables

Here we present details of the indicators used in our 2024/2025 progress report.

The indicator reference tables include key metadata, such as the data source(s), and whether the indicator is included in the Outcome Indicator Framework presented in the APR 2026.⁸ The methodology section provides a brief description of the indicator, often based on information provided in the APR 2026.

Our analytical rationale for selecting the indicator, and any methodologies used to process or assess the data, are also presented in the methodology section for transparency and to enable replication of our analysis.

For consistency, we use the indicator names used by DAERA in the OIF.⁸

SEO 1 – Excellent air, water and land quality (Air quality)

Table A.1. Indicator reference table – Annual mean roadside levels of nitrogen dioxide as measured in micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) at ten sites across NI

SEO 1		
Data source(s)	Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 Data Tables ²⁶	
Category	OIF Indicator 1a: Annual mean roadside levels of nitrogen dioxide as measured in micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) at ten sites across NI	
Methodology	Nitrogen dioxide is a key pollutant primarily produced by road traffic. There are 10 established roadside monitoring sites that track annual mean NO_2 levels. These 10 sites are also used as an indicator within the Programme for Government Wellbeing Framework. ³¹	
Data	Year	Annual mean
	2019	31.4
	2020	24.3
	2021	26.3
	2022	26.9
	2023	26.7
	2024	25.9
Unit	Micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$)	
Years	2019–2024	
Trend	-17.6%	
T-test (p-value)	0.36	
Accessed	17 April 2026	

Table A.2. Indicator reference table – Annual mean urban background levels of PM_{2.5} as measured in micrograms per cubic metre (µg/m³) at five sites across NI

SEO 1			
Data source(s)	UK Air Information Resource: Annual and Exceedance Statistics ³² Environmental Improvement Plan Annual Progress Report September 2024–September 2025 ⁸		
Category	OIF Indicator 1b: Annual mean urban background levels of PM _{2.5} as measured in micrograms per cubic metre (µg/m ³) at five sites across NI		
Methodology	<p>PM_{2.5} is a key pollutant produced from industrial processes and product use, road transport, domestic combustion (including solid fuel burning) and industrial combustion.³³</p> <p>APR 2026 presents two data points (2023 and 2024) for five PM_{2.5} urban background monitoring sites across Northern Ireland reporting. Trends indicate if policies and changes in behaviour are leading to a reduction in PM_{2.5} levels with the potential to improve our health and the environment.</p> <p>Longer-term data are available for individual monitoring sites.</p>		
Data	Year	2023	2024
	Annual average	6.8	7.0
Unit	Micrograms per cubic metre (µg/m ³)		
Years	Not assessed		
Trend	Not assessed		
T-test (p-value)	Not assessed		
Accessed	17 April 2026		

Table A.3. Indicator reference table – Emissions of five key pollutants

SEO 1							
Data source(s)	Air Pollutant Inventories for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: 2005–2023 ³⁴						
Category	OEP indicator: Emissions of five key pollutants						
Methodology	<p>This indicator tracks the emissions in thousand tonnes (kT) of the five key air pollutants in Northern Ireland: nitrogen oxides (NO_x), sulphur dioxide (SO₂), non-methane volatile organic compounds (NMVOC), fine particulate matter less than 2.5 micrometres (µm) in diameter (PM_{2.5}), and ammonia (NH₃).</p> <p>Data for all previous years are extracted from the most recent publication, as emissions can be retrospectively updated due to changes in inventories.</p>						
Data	Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	NO _x						
	Emissions	28.90	26.45	23.20	24.14	22.34	20.04
	SO ₂						
	Emissions	8.46	7.92	6.94	6.25	5.43	4.03
	NMVOC						
	Emissions	39.56	38.89	38.85	38.59	35.43	36.07
	PM _{2.5}						
	Emissions	3.71	3.66	3.44	3.26	2.88	2.44
	NH ₃						
	Emissions	31.60	31.95	31.93	32.68	31.56	31.79
Unit	Thousand tonnes (kT)						
Years	2018–2023						
Pollutant	NO _x						
Trend	-30.7%						
T-test (p-value)	0.01						
Pollutant	SO ₂						
Trend	-52.4%						
T-test (p-value)	0.01						
Pollutant	NMVOC						
Trend	-8.8%						
T-test (p-value)	0.04						
Pollutant	PM _{2.5}						
Trend	-34.1%						
T-test (p-value)	0.00						
Pollutant	NH ₃						
Trend	+0.6%						
T-test (p-value)	0.49						
Accessed	08 April 2026						

Table A.4. Indicator reference table – Area of land exposed to damaging levels of ammonia (NH₃) in the atmosphere

SEO 1																
Data source(s)	Air Pollution Trends Report 2024: Critical load and critical level exceedances in the UK ³⁵															
Category	OIF Indicator 10f: Area of land exposed to damaging levels of ammonia (NH ₃) in the atmosphere															
Methodology	<p>Excess ammonia in the atmosphere affects vegetation, with very low concentrations causing damage to sensitive plant species such as lichens and bryophytes (mosses and liverworts), which are integral to many ecosystems. Agriculture is the main source of ammonia emissions.</p> <p>This indicator shows changes in the percentage of land where ammonia concentrations exceeded the lower critical level of 1 µg/m³, which protects sensitive vegetation.</p> <p>In the APR 2026, this indicator is used in the assessment of SEO 3. We include this in our assessment of SEO 1 because it is more informative to provide an integrated assessment of emissions and impacts within one SEO.</p> <p>Data points are calculated using a three-year moving average. The mid-point year is used to describe the trend (2020-2022 is referred to as 2021).</p>															
Data	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Percentage of land area</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2016</td> <td>93.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017</td> <td>96.1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018</td> <td>96.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019</td> <td>96.0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020</td> <td>93.6</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021</td> <td>92.6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Percentage of land area	2016	93.9	2017	96.1	2018	96.0	2019	96.0	2020	93.6	2021	92.6	
Year	Percentage of land area															
2016	93.9															
2017	96.1															
2018	96.0															
2019	96.0															
2020	93.6															
2021	92.6															
Unit	Percentage															
Years	2016–2021															
Trend	-1.4%															
T-test (p-value)	0.01															
Accessed	30 March 2026															

Table A.5. Indicator reference table – Percentage of nutrient-sensitive habitat area where nutrient nitrogen critical loads are exceeded

SEO 1																
Data source(s)	Air Pollution Trends Report 2024: Critical load and critical level exceedances in the UK ³⁵															
Category	OIF Indicator 10g (component 1): Percentage of nutrient-sensitive habitat area where nutrient nitrogen critical loads are exceeded															
Methodology	<p>In our 2024/2025 progress report, we use the indicator names used by DAERA in the APR 2026. However, for indicator 10g, the APR 2026 title – ‘Exceedance of damaging levels of nutrient nitrogen deposition on ecosystems’ can be misleading, given there are two components to this indicator. For this first component of the indicator, we use ‘Percentage of nutrient-sensitive habitat area where nutrient nitrogen critical loads are exceeded’.</p> <p>This indicator shows the percentage change in sensitive habitats exceeding the internationally-agreed thresholds for harmful effects (critical loads) of nutrient nitrogen deposition. The nutrient nitrogen comes predominantly from emissions of ammonia from Northern Ireland.</p> <p>There are 11 nitrogen-sensitive habitat types included in this indicator: grassland, calcareous grassland, dwarf shrub heath, montane, bog, managed coniferous woodland, acidophilous oak woodland, other broadleaved woodland, mixed woodland, dune grassland, and saltmarsh.</p> <p>The first component of this APR indicator is determined by calculating the area of sensitive habitat exceeding the internationally agreed critical load thresholds.</p> <p>Data points are calculated using a three-year moving average. The midpoint year is used to describe the trend (2020-2022 is referred to as 2021).</p>															
Data	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Percentage of sensitive habitats where nutrient nitrogen critical load is exceeded</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2016</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021</td> <td>96.9</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Percentage of sensitive habitats where nutrient nitrogen critical load is exceeded	2016	100	2017	100	2018	100	2019	100	2020	100	2021	96.9	
Year	Percentage of sensitive habitats where nutrient nitrogen critical load is exceeded															
2016	100															
2017	100															
2018	100															
2019	100															
2020	100															
2021	96.9															
Unit	Percentage															
Years	2016–2021															
Trend	-3.1%															
T-test (p-value)	N/A (not enough variability in the data)															
Accessed	08 April 2026															

Table A.6. Indicator reference table – Average Accumulated Exceedance of nutrient nitrogen critical loads (kg N ha⁻¹ yr⁻¹)

SEO 1																
Data source(s)	Air Pollution Trends Report 2024: Critical load and critical level exceedances in the UK ³⁵															
Category	OEP indicator: second component of OIF indicator 10g Average Accumulated Exceedance of nutrient nitrogen critical loads (kg N ha ⁻¹ yr ⁻¹)															
Methodology	<p>In our 2024/2025 progress report we use the indicator names used by DAERA in APR 2026. For indicator 10g, the APR 2026 title – ‘Exceedance of damaging levels of nutrient nitrogen deposition on ecosystems’ – can be misleading given there are two components to this indicator. For the second component of this indicator, we use ‘Average Accumulated Exceedance of nutrient nitrogen critical loads’.</p> <p>This indicator shows the percentage change in sensitive habitats exceeding the internationally-agreed thresholds for harmful effects (critical load) of nutrient nitrogen deposition. The nutrient nitrogen comes predominantly from emissions of ammonia from Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Eleven nitrogen-sensitive habitat types are included in this indicator: grassland, calcareous grassland, dwarf shrub heath, montane, bog, managed coniferous woodland, acidophilous oak woodland, other broadleaved woodland, mixed woodland, dune grassland, and saltmarsh.</p> <p>This second component of the APR 2026 indicator measures the magnitude of the nutrient-nitrogen exceedance, above the critical load thresholds known as Excess nitrogen or Average accumulated exceedance.</p> <p>Data points are calculated using a three-year moving average. The mid-point year is used to describe the trend (2020-2022 is referred to as 2021).</p>															
Data	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Average accumulated exceedance for nutrient nitrogen</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2016</td> <td>13.40</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2017</td> <td>14.87</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2018</td> <td>16.22</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2019</td> <td>16.07</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020</td> <td>13.83</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021</td> <td>11.36</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Average accumulated exceedance for nutrient nitrogen	2016	13.40	2017	14.87	2018	16.22	2019	16.07	2020	13.83	2021	11.36	
Year	Average accumulated exceedance for nutrient nitrogen															
2016	13.40															
2017	14.87															
2018	16.22															
2019	16.07															
2020	13.83															
2021	11.36															
Unit	Kilograms of nitrogen per hectare per year (kg N ha ⁻¹ yr ⁻¹)															
Years	2016–2021															
Trend	-15.2%															
T-test (p-value)	0.00															
Accessed	30 March 2026															

SEO 1 – Excellent air, water and land quality (Water resources: quality and quantity)

Table A.7. Indicator reference table – Annual mean nitrate concentrations (groundwater)

SEO 1							
Data source(s)	Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 Data Tables ²⁶						
Category	OIF Indicator 2a: Annual mean nitrate concentrations (groundwater)						
Methodology	<p>Annual mean nitrate concentration in groundwater is an indicator of general groundwater chemical status. Regional monitoring of nitrate concentrations in groundwater in Northern Ireland began in 2000 and continues to the present day, with concentration being monitored at 65 locations.</p> <p>The Water (Amendment) (NI) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 ensure that the Water Framework Directive, as transposed, maintains the groundwater quality standard of 50 mg nitrate per litre (NO₃/L) set by the Groundwater Daughter Directive (2006/118/EC).</p> <p>We assess the percentage of sites achieving 0 to <25 mg NO₃/L that is within the groundwater quality standard and in accordance with the APR 2026.⁸</p>						
Data	Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	Sites with concentrations of <25 mg NO ₃ /L	94.4	96.4	94.0	98.2	93.3	93.8
Unit	Percentage						
Years	2018–2023						
Trend	-0.6%						
T-test (p-value)	0.18						
Accessed	31 March 2026						

Table A.8. Indicator reference table – Soluble Reactive Phosphorus (SRP) in rivers

SEO 1							
Data source(s)	Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 Data Tables ²⁶						
Category	OIF Indicator 2b: Soluble Reactive Phosphorus (SRP) in rivers						
Methodology	Soluble reactive phosphorous is a nutrient which is closely linked to plant growth in the freshwater environment. At elevated concentrations it can lead to eutrophication and can impact the overall ecological status of water. The annual average SRP can provide an assessment of the nutrient status of rivers. ⁸						
Data	Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
	Average SRP	0.063	0.067	0.071	0.073	0.062	0.065
Unit	Milligrams per litre						
Years	2019–2024						
Trend	+3.2%						
T-test (p-value)	0.36						
Accessed	31 March 2026						

Table A.9. Indicator reference table – Annual mean nitrate concentrations (rivers)

SEO 1							
Data source(s)	Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 Data Tables ²⁶						
Category	OIF Indicator 2c: Annual mean nitrate concentrations (rivers)						
Methodology	<p>Elevated nitrate, alongside phosphorus, can have an impact on the ecological quality of surface waters through the process of eutrophication. This occurs when excess nutrients cause an increase in the growth of algal and plant communities.</p> <p>The Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC)³⁶ is currently implemented in Northern Ireland through the 2019–2022 Nutrient Action Programme Regulations³⁷ contained in the Nutrient Action Programme Regulations (NI) 2019 and subsequent amending regulations.³⁸</p> <p>The annual mean nitrate concentration from samples collected monthly at river sites across Northern Ireland is assessed against quality bandings in order to identify different levels of nutrient enrichment that may lead to eutrophication.</p> <p>The indicator assesses the percentage of monitoring sites with nitrate concentrations above 10mg per litre.</p>						

Table A.9. Indicator reference table – Annual mean nitrate concentrations (rivers) (cont.)

SEO 1							
Data	Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
	Sites with concentrations of >10mg/L	20.4	9.8	12.2	21.5	21.1	9.4
Unit	Percentage						
Years	2019–2024						
Trend	-53.9%						
T-test (p-value)	0.04						
Accessed	13 April 2026						

Table A.10. Indicator reference table – Number of pesticide drinking water samples at water treatment works final sampling points above the regulatory limit

SEO 1							
Data source(s)	Drinking Water Quality in Northern Ireland, 2024 ³⁹						
	Drinking Water Quality in Northern Ireland, 2023 ⁴⁰						
Category	OEP indicator: Number of pesticide drinking water samples at water treatment works final sampling point above the regulatory limit						
Methodology	Drinking water provides a link between the environmental quality and quantity of surface and groundwaters, and the health and well-being of communities. Pesticides represent a challenge to drinking water quality as a result of human activity.						
	Data for this indicator has been sourced from the Drinking Water Quality in Northern Ireland reports 2023 and 2024.						
Data	Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
	Number of samples	13	18	12	6	3	7
Unit	Number of samples						
Years	2019–2024						
Trend	-46.2%						
T-test (p-value)	0.27						
Accessed	09 April 2026						

SEO 1 – Excellent air, water and land quality (Marine and coastal water resources: quality and quantity)

Table A.11. Indicator reference table – Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen (DIN) Enrichment

SEO 1							
Data source(s)	Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 Data Tables ²⁶						
Category	OIF Indicator 3a: Dissolved Inorganic Nitrogen (DIN) Enrichment						
Methodology	<p>The dissolved inorganic nitrogen DIN enrichment indicator provides an overview of nutrient enrichment in transitional and coastal waters, which are influenced by both diffuse and point sources of nutrients.</p> <p>The DIN enrichment indicator is calculated as the proportion by which DIN values either exceed or fall below the relevant good standard as set out in the WFD (Classification, Priority Substances and Shellfish Waters) Regulations (NI) 2015.⁴¹</p> <p>By expressing DIN concentrations as a function of the relevant thresholds, a standardised enrichment value is obtained for all water bodies irrespective of their type and normalisation procedure. An overall percentage DIN enrichment indicator is calculated as the mean enrichment value across all water bodies in a particular year.</p> <p>An enrichment value close to zero indicates that DIN values are, on average, close to the good threshold. Values above zero indicate excess nutrients overall.⁸</p>						
Data	Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
	DIN enrichment	31	29	35	62	66	62
Unit	Percentage						
Years	2019–2024						
Trend	+100.0%						
T-test (p-value)	0.10						
Accessed	31 March 2026						

Table A.12. Indicator reference table – Bathing water data (*Escherichia coli* & Intestinal Enterococci levels)

SEO 1																															
Data source(s)	A review of implementation of the Bathing Water Regulations in Northern Ireland, OEP ⁴²																														
Category	OIF Indicator 3b: Bathing water data (<i>Escherichia coli</i> & Intestinal Enterococci levels)																														
Methodology	<p>In our 2024/2025 progress report we use the indicator names used by DAERA in the APR 2026. For indicator 3b this is misleading as the data assessed does not relate to changes in <i>Escherichia coli</i> & Intestinal Enterococci levels.</p> <p>Implementation of the Bathing Water NI Regulations⁴³ is led by DAERA. Bathing water operators, such as local councils, also have a role under the regulations. Though not specifically referenced in the regulations, their focus on public health protection means that other authorities, such as the Department of Health and the Public Health Agency, also have a potential interest.</p> <p>The Bathing Water NI Regulations require DAERA to identify all bathing waters in Northern Ireland on an annual basis. These are surface waters where, among other criteria, the Department ‘expects a large number of people to bathe’.</p> <p>At the end of every bathing season, DAERA assesses bathing water quality, and uses it to classify bathing waters as excellent, good, sufficient or poor. DAERA and bathing water operators must also exercise certain functions to manage and report on bathing waters.</p> <p>Among other requirements, DAERA must exercise its functions so that all bathing waters are classified as, at least, sufficient. It must also take such realistic and proportionate measures as it considers appropriate to increase the number of bathing waters classified as good or excellent.</p> <p>Our assessment is based on the percentage of bathing waters classified as meeting sufficient, good and excellent status. We have used data supplied by DAERA for our 2024 review of implementation of the Bathing Water Regulations in Northern Ireland, correcting the percentages to those displayed below.⁴²</p> <p>Data published by DAERA.⁴⁴</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr style="background-color: #003366; color: white;"> <th>Year</th> <th>2022</th> <th>2023</th> <th>2024</th> <th>2025</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Excellent</td> <td>21</td> <td>19</td> <td>22</td> <td>23</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Good</td> <td>3</td> <td>7</td> <td>5</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sufficient</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> <td>4</td> <td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Poor</td> <td>1</td> <td>5</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>26</td> <td>32</td> <td>32</td> <td>32</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	2022	2023	2024	2025	Excellent	21	19	22	23	Good	3	7	5	5	Sufficient	1	1	4	3	Poor	1	5	1	1	Total	26	32	32	32
Year	2022	2023	2024	2025																											
Excellent	21	19	22	23																											
Good	3	7	5	5																											
Sufficient	1	1	4	3																											
Poor	1	5	1	1																											
Total	26	32	32	32																											

Table A.12. Indicator reference table – Bathing water data (*Escherichia coli* & Intestinal Enterococci levels) (cont.)

SEO 1							
Methodology (cont.)	DAERA also publishes bathing water quality data from 2017 to 2025, displaying <i>Escherichia coli</i> & Intestinal Enterococci levels for each sample taken. ⁴⁵ For 2022–2025, the classification of each bathing water is summarised in a colour-coded table, allowing the number of sites given each classification to be calculated. ⁴⁴ These values are different to those supplied by DAERA for our review of the implementation of the Bathing Water Regulations in Northern Ireland. ⁴²						
Data	Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	Percentage of sites meeting at least sufficient	100	99.9	100	100	96.2	96.2
Unit	Percentage						
Years	2018–2023						
Trend	-3.8%						
T-test (p-value)	0.02						
Accessed	22 April 2026						

Table A.13. Indicator reference table – Marine Litter (recorded using OSPAR methodology to show changes in volume and types of litter present)

SEO 1							
Data source(s)	Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful (KNIB) / Live Here Love Here, Marine Litter Reports ⁴⁶						
Category	OIF Indicator 3c: Marine Litter (recorded using OSPAR methodology to show changes in volume and types of litter present)						
Methodology	<p>Beach litter surveys are carried out using OSPAR marine litter monitoring and assessment criteria. The UK is a signatory to the OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic. As a signatory, the UK supplies annual data on beach litter. Northern Ireland submits data for the OSPAR Celtic Seas region.</p> <p>Marine litter is monitored by assessing the amount of litter present on a 100-metre section of beach in accordance with OSPAR guidelines, a process that has been in place since 2012.</p>						
Data	Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
	Items of litter	364	752	364	513	341	500
Unit	Items of litter per 100m beach surveyed						
Years	2020–2025						
Trend	+37.4%						
T-test (p-value)	0.69						
Accessed	06 May 2026						

Table A.14. Indicator reference table – Transitional & Coastal Water Classification Statistics

SEO 1															
Data source(s)	Water Classification Statistics for Northern Ireland 2024 Report ⁴⁷														
Category	OIF Indicator 3d: Transitional & Coastal Water Classification Statistics														
Methodology	<p>This indicator assesses the ecological, chemical, and overall status of Northern Ireland’s transitional (estuarine) and coastal waters under the Water Environment Regulations (NI) 2017.</p> <p>The assessment is based on monitoring data collected on a variety of quality elements that reflect the ecological status. These include flora and fauna as well as supporting physico-chemical and hydromorphological components, specific pollutants, and high-impact invasive species. Chemical status is assessed through monitoring of priority substances in water and biota. Overall surface water status is determined by combining the results of ecological and chemical status.</p> <p>For our indicator, we assess the overall combined ecological and chemical status where data are available. Assessment data including priority substances, new substances and uPBTs (ubiquitous, persistent, bioaccumulative, and toxic chemicals) are only reported for the most recent two cycles.</p>														
Data	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>2021</th> <th>2024</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Good</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Failing to Achieve Good</td> <td>25</td> <td>25</td> </tr> <tr> <td>No data</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	2021	2024	Good	0	0	Failing to Achieve Good	25	25	No data	0	0		
Year	2021	2024													
Good	0	0													
Failing to Achieve Good	25	25													
No data	0	0													
Unit	Number of waterbodies														
Years	Not assessed														
Trend	N/A														
T-test (p-value)	N/A (not enough data)														
Accessed	01 April 2026														

SEO 2 – Healthy and accessible environment and landscapes everyone can connect with and enjoy (Landscapes, seascapes and natural beauty)

Table A.15. Indicator reference table – Number of Green/Blue Flag sites

SEO 2	
Data source(s)	<p>Green Flag Sites:</p> <p>Environmental Improvement Plan Annual Progress Report September 2024-September 2025⁸</p> <p>Northern Ireland Environment Link⁴⁸</p> <p>Farming Life⁴⁹</p> <p>Blue Flag Sites:</p> <p>Environmental Improvement Plan Annual Progress Report September 2024-September 2025⁸</p>
Category	OIF Indicator 5a: Number of Green/Blue Flag sites
Methodology	<p>Green and Blue Flags are accredited awards for the quality of green spaces, beaches and marinas, respectively. This indicator reflects the levels of engagement, quality and management of these spaces. It measures the extent to which district councils and communities apply for and obtain accreditation, rather than changes in the underlying environmental quality.</p> <p>The data for 2023 to 2025 for Blue Flag sites are taken from Figure 17: Number of Blue Flag sites per year published in the APR 2026. As the data bars for Blue Flag sites intersect the y-axis gridlines, the values can be determined.⁸</p> <p>Green Flag site data for 2025 and 2024 are taken from the Overview of Indicator text and from supporting text to Figure 18: Number of Green Flag- awarded sites per year in the APR 2026.⁸</p> <p>The 2023 Green Flag site data cannot be determined from Figure 18 in the APR 2026 because the data bars do not intersect the y-axis grid lines, making the actual data difficult to assess, and there are no data labels. In addition, the supplementary source link on page 160 of the APR 2026 is incorrect and does not provide Green Flag site data.</p> <p>When searching the Live Here Love Here website, it has not been possible to identify historic data.^{50,51} We have used data presented by Northern Ireland Environment Link on release of the 2023 data (which have been confirmed at a further website – Farming Life), which also includes a figure for 2022.^{48,49}</p> <p>Although the 2023 data visually vary from those shown in Figure 18 of APR 2026, as we cannot ascertain the values, we have relied on data from these alternative sources.⁸</p>

Table A.15. Indicator reference table – Number of Green/Blue Flag sites (cont.)

SEO 2					
Data	Year	2022	2023	2024	2025
	Green Flag	93	98	104	118
	Blue Flag	-	18	16	16
Unit	Number of sites				
Years	Green Flag: 2022–2025				
	Blue Flag: 2023–2025				
Trend	N/A				
T-test (p-value)	N/A (not enough data)				
Accessed	10 April 2026				

SEO 2 – Healthy and accessible environment and landscapes everyone can connect with and enjoy (Access and natural space provision)

Table A.16. Indicator reference table – Increase in the % of households that have publicly accessible quality natural space >2 ha and off-road trails within 400 metres

SEO 2	
Data source(s)	Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 (values quoted in pdf report) ²⁶
Category	OIF Indicator 6a: Increase in the % of households that have publicly accessible quality natural space >2 ha and off-road trails within 400 metres
Methodology	<p>Connecting people with nature is key to a thriving environment. Outdoor recreation in nature delivers benefits to society, including improving health and well-being, increasing active travel, growing and greening the economy, tackling inequality and enhancing education and learning.⁸</p> <p>The indicator includes natural space spanning 2 ha or more within 400 metres of households, as well as off-road trails throughout Northern Ireland. It encompasses natural spaces accessible to the public with permission from the landowners, including urban and rural parks, forests, beaches, and off-road trails.⁸</p> <p>Annually, it will monitor where new areas of accessible natural space and new trails have been established, thereby increasing the percentage of the population with access. It will also identify locations where access has been reduced or lost.⁸</p>

Table A.16. Indicator reference table – Increase in the % of households that have publicly accessible quality natural space >2 ha and off-road trails within 400 metres (cont.)

SEO 2				
Data	Year	2023	2024	2025
	Households within 400 metres of greenspace >2 ha or off-road trails	47.9	47.9	47.8
Unit	Percentage			
Years	2023–2025			
Trend	N/A			
T-test (p-value)	N/A (not enough data)			
Accessed	19 March 2026			

Table A.17. Indicator reference table – Percentage of adults visiting the outdoors at least once a week

SEO 2			
Data source(s)	People in the Outdoors Monitor for Northern Ireland Headline Report from the 2025 survey ⁵²		
Category	OEP indicator: Percentage of adults visiting the outdoors at least once a week		
Methodology	<p>The People in the Outdoors Monitor for Northern Ireland undertakes population-wide research on how people in Northern Ireland engage with the natural environment, the benefits they gain from it, the barriers they encounter in accessing it, and the extent to which these patterns align with current and emerging policy development and implementation.</p> <p>Data for this indicator are taken from Figure 1: ‘Frequency of visits to the outdoors in the last 12 months – 2020/21 and 2025’ of the headline report from the 2025 survey.</p>		
Data	Year	2020/21	2025
	Every day	18	17
	Several times a week	30	40
	Once a week	15	13
	Once or twice a month	10	13
	Once every 2 or 3 months	5	4
	Once or twice a month	5	9
	Never	8	4
Unit	Percentage		
Years	2020/21–2025		
Trend	N/A		
T-test (p-value)	N/A (not enough data)		
Accessed	20 April 2026		

SEO 2 – Healthy and accessible environment and landscapes everyone can connect with and enjoy (The next generation)

Table A.18. Indicator reference table – Level of concern for the environment

SEO 2					
Data source(s)	Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 Data Tables ²⁶				
Category	OEP indicator: Level of concern for the environment				
Methodology	<p>Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency’s (NISRA) Continuous Household Survey (CHS) has been running since 1983.⁵³ The CHS asks respondents about their level of concern for the environment.</p> <p>The data are sourced from Table 1.1 of the Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 Data Tables. This source presents data from 2003/04 to 2024/25. However, the Northern Ireland environmental statistics report advises caution when comparing data from 2020/21 with other data, due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, since 2020/21, the survey methodology has changed, with data collected by telephone. For this reason, we only present data from 2021/22 onwards.</p> <p>Due to insufficient data, a trend assessment is not made.</p>				
Data	Year	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	Very concerned	28	27	27	27
	Fairly concerned	52	52	51	46
	Not very concerned	15	16	17	20
	Not at all concerned	4	4	5	8
Unit	Percentage				
Years	2021/22–2024/25				
Trend	N/A				
T-test (p-value)	N/A (not enough data)				
Accessed	01 April 2026				

Table A.19. Indicator reference table – Actions taken that have a positive impact on the environment

SEO 2					
Data source(s)	Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 Data Tables ²⁶				
Category	OEP indicator: Actions taken that have a positive impact on the environment				
Methodology	<p>Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency’s (NISRA’s) Continuous Household Survey (CHS) has been running since 1983.⁵³ The CHS asks respondents about the actions they take that have a positive impact on the environment.</p> <p>The data are sourced from Table 1.3 of the Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 Data Tables.</p> <p>Due to insufficient data, a trend assessment is not made.</p>				
Data	Year	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	Reused, recycled and disposed of waste products appropriately	92	93	91	91
	Reduced food waste	69	74	73	70
	Reduced consumption of household utilities	51	68	63	59
	Encouraged plant and wildlife biodiversity	39	38	33	32
	Bought organic or sustainable products	35	36	31	28
	Reduced the number of car journeys	32	36	28	27
	Joined or donated to an environment group/ organisation	9	8	7	7
Unit	Percentage of respondents				
Years	2021/22–2024/25				
Trend	N/A				
T-test (p-value)	N/A (not enough data)				
Accessed	19 March 2026				

SEO 3 – Thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife (Protecting nature on land)

Table A.20. Indicator reference table – NI Woodland Cover

SEO 3							
Data source(s)	Woodland area, UK, 1998–2025 ⁵⁴						
Category	OIF Indicator 10a: NI Woodland Cover						
Methodology	<p>This indicator assesses change in the area of woodland in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>The APR 2026 includes data on the area of new woodland planting and the changing area of woodland cover by ownership for the most recent five years as indicators of progress.⁸</p> <p>We have used data published by Forest Research from 1998 to 2025 to assess how total woodland cover has changed. This is the same data, covering a longer time period. We use Table 4: Woodland area by forest type and ownership, Northern Ireland, 1998–2025 from the published spreadsheet entitled Woodland area, UK, 1998 to 2025.⁵⁴</p>						
Data	Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
	Area	116.841	117.207	117.706	118.063	118.482	118.898
Unit	Thousand hectares						
Years	2020–2025						
Trend	+1.8%						
T-test (p-value)	0.01						
Accessed	23 April 2026						

Table A.21. Indicator reference table – Peatland Conserved/Restored

SEO 3							
Data source(s)	N/A						
Category	OIF Indicator 10b: Peatland Conserved/Restored						
Methodology	<p>The APR 2026 outlines that peatland habitats cover approximately 12% of the land area in Northern Ireland. Most peatlands are in a degraded condition, resulting in reduced biodiversity and significant carbon emissions – estimated at around two million tonnes annually.⁸</p> <p>Condition of peatland features within Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) was calculated using Summary Feature Condition Status of Protected Areas for 2024/2025.²³ Data related to peatland features were extracted, and condition was calculated based on number of features assessed.</p>						
Data	Metric currently under development						
	Sources of data are being developed in accordance with the Peatland Strategy ⁵⁵						

Table A.22. Indicator reference table – Condition of Features within Terrestrial ASSIs (includes freshwater sites)

SEO 3	
Data source(s)	<p>Data for all features of Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs):</p> <p>2024/25 Summary Feature Condition Status of Protected Areas (rolling six year assessment: March 2019–March 2025)²³</p> <p>2023/24 Summary Feature Condition Status of Protected Areas (rolling six year assessment: March 2018–March 2024)⁵⁶</p> <p>2022/03 data (rolling six-year assessment: March 2017–March 2023), provided by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) to the OEP as part of our review of the implementation of laws relating to terrestrial and freshwater protected sites⁵⁷</p> <p>Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Reports 2009–2020²⁸</p> <p>NIEA’s The Condition of Northern Ireland’s Areas of Special Scientific Interest: The Results of the First Condition Assessment Monitoring Cycle 2002–2008 (2008) Research and Development Series No 08/10 – provided by NIEA to the OEP as part of our review of the implementation of laws relating to terrestrial and freshwater protected sites⁵⁷</p>
Category	OIF Indicator 10c: Condition of Features within Terrestrial ASSIs (includes freshwater sites)
Methodology	<p>NIEA aims to monitor the condition of Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) on a rolling six-year basis, evaluating the condition of the qualifying features in each protected site within this period. NIEA uses Common Standards Monitoring guidance, supplemented by a monitoring handbook produced by NIEA’s Habitat Survey Team.⁵⁷ The condition of features within ASSIs is assessed by monitoring carried out by NIEA and Marine Division DAERA as well as some specialist contracted work. Two sources of data are published on the condition of ASSI features. These include the Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Reports 2009–2025,²⁶ and the Summary Feature Condition Status of Protected Area excel data sheets published in 2024 and 2025.⁵⁸ These present the condition of terrestrial, freshwater and coastal ASSIs, including those with marine features. This reflects that ASSIs are designated down to the mean low water mark.⁵⁷</p>

Table A.22. Indicator reference table – Condition of Features within Terrestrial ASSIs (includes freshwater sites) (cont.)

SEO 3					
Methodology (cont.)	<p>Beginning in the 2021 Environmental Statistics Report, DAERA presents a combined condition assessment of protected sites. This includes ASSIs, Special Protection Areas (SPA), Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), and Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs). Due to this change in reporting, and as excel data sheets are not available for 2021/2022 and 2022/2023, an assessment of the indicator is not possible.</p> <p>Instead, for consistency with our Review of implementation of laws for terrestrial and freshwater protected sites in Northern Ireland,⁵⁷ we use Summary Feature Condition Status of Protected Area data to understand recent changes (2023–2025). Data for years 2009–2020 are derived from environmental statistics reports and the First Condition Assessment to visualise longer-term changes.</p> <p>We consider that this approach, where we include all ASSI features, better enables us to assess progress against the target of having 95% of ASSI features in or approaching favourable condition by 2030.</p> <p>For this indicator, we assess the percentage of features in favourable condition.</p> <p>In support of the overall ASSI feature trend, in our 2024/2025 progress report, we also assess the condition of biological features only, and freshwater, woodland and peatland features for the 2019–2025 6-year rolling period. This was completed using the 2024/25 Summary Feature Condition data. To determine the condition of biological features we filtered out earth science features. In addition, freshwater, woodland and peatland features were filtered from the data list and their condition calculated.</p>				
	Data	Year	2017-2023	2018-2024	2019-2025
		Favourable condition	58	58	57
	Unit	Percentage			
Years	2017–2023 to 2019–2025				
Trend	N/A				
T-test (p-value)	N/A (not enough data)				
Accessed	12 April 2026				

Table A.23. Indicator reference table – Wild Bird Population in NI

SEO 3								
Data source(s)	Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 Data Tables ²⁶							
Category	OIF Indicator 10d: Wild Bird Population in NI							
Methodology	<p>This indicator is based on the 56 most widespread wild bird species. Northern Ireland’s wild bird population is monitored as part of the UK British Trust for Ornithology / Royal Society for the Protection of Birds / JNCC Breeding Bird Survey. This annual survey is conducted at almost 4,000 1 km grid squares across the UK. In Northern Ireland, 128 sites were surveyed during 2023, an increase in coverage over 2022.</p> <p>For our indicator, we use all species data from Table 5.3a (Wild bird populations in Northern Ireland, 1996–2023, 56 species) and species group data from Table 5.3b (Wild bird populations in Northern Ireland by species type, 1996–2023) of the Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 Data Tables.</p> <p>The assessment of change has been undertaken on unsmoothed all species data. We have compared 2023 to a 2018 baseline to assess the percentage change.</p> <p>There is no unsmoothed index value for 2020 due to the Covid-19 impacts on data collection. For the t-test we have therefore used the available datapoints from 2017 to 2023.</p>							
Data	Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	Farmland (17 species)	75	71	69	67	68	70	71
	Woodland (20 species)	121	119	116	115	116	122	130
	Wetland (6 species)	126	126	122	116	108	99	90
	Upland (8 species)	129	126	122	120	119	118	116
	Urban (5 species)	134	130	127	124	123	126	131
	All species (56) Smoothed	107	104	101	99	99	100	103
	All species (56) Unsmoothed	112	98	106	n/d	92	95	85
Unit	Index: 1996 = 100							
Years	2018–2023							
Trend	-13.3% (2018–2023)							
T-test (p-value)	0.01 (2017–2023 – see methodology)							
Accessed	18 March 2026							

Table A.24. Indicator reference table – Area of land (or % land area) protected for nature

SEO 3	
Data source(s)	N/A
Category	OIF Indicator 10e: Area of land (or % land area) protected for nature
Methodology	<p>The APR 2026 states that a metric is being developed to calculate the total area of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) that will contribute to the Global Biodiversity Framework Target 3, commonly referred to as 30x30.</p> <p>DAERA have not defined what types of designations they consider qualify as part of the 30% area target. Nor have they defined what site types contribute to OECMs.</p> <p>We obtained data related to the area of terrestrial and freshwater protected sites including ASSIs, SPAs, and SACs as part of our review of the implementation of protected site law. We use this data, and assessment of protected landscapes by the British Ecological Society, as context in our EIP progress report 2024/2025 to provide an indication of the area.</p>
Data	Metric currently under development.

SEO 3 – Thriving, resilient and connected nature and wildlife (Protecting nature at sea)

Table A.25. Indicator reference table – Condition of marine protected areas network

SEO 3	
Data source(s)	<p>2024/25 Summary Feature Condition Status of Protected Areas (rolling six year assessment: March 2019–March 2025)²³</p> <p>2023/24 Summary Feature Condition Status of Protected Areas (rolling six year assessment: March 2018–March 2024)⁵⁶</p>
Category	OIF Indicator 11a: Condition of marine protected area network
Methodology	<p>The Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network is made up of ASSIs, Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs) and Ramsar (wetland) sites, which together should be ecologically coherent and well connected. In doing so, the network should enable the maintenance or improvement of the conservation status of marine species and habitats.</p> <p>This indicator reports the condition of the overall network based on the condition of each feature within designated sites (some sites have multiple features). The indicator reports condition monitoring undertaken by the DAERA Marine and Fisheries Division in collaboration with NIEA. Sites are monitored on a six-year rolling basis to track changes and inform management decisions where required.⁵⁹</p>

Table A.25. Indicator reference table – Condition of marine protected areas network (cont.)

SEO 3			
Methodology (cont.)	<p>The APR 2026 includes an assessment of the condition of MPAs, providing the percentage of features in favourable condition status. There are, however, uncertainties around the APR 2026 figure as it relates to marine habitats since it does not account for marine species or geological features.</p> <p>Beginning in the 2021 Environmental Statistics Report, DAERA presents a combined condition assessment of terrestrial and marine protected sites. It is, therefore, not possible to derive MPA condition from the data presented through the Environmental Statistics Reports and related data tables.</p> <p>We have, therefore, used the Summary Feature Condition Status of Protected Area's excel data sheets for 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 published by DAERA. We use this to provide an indication of condition for the purpose of our assessment towards the EIP's MPA condition target.</p> <p>We have not been able to use the excel data sheet for 2022/2023 provided to the OEP through the protected sites report, as it includes a different number of marine features and so is not comparable to the 2023/2024 and 2024/2025 data.</p> <p>With just two data points available, an assessment of the indicator is not possible.</p>		
Data	Year	2023/24	2024/25
	Features in favourable condition	87.5	85.7
Unit	Percentage		
Years	2023/24–2024/25		
Trend	N/A		
T-test (p-value)	N/A (not enough data)		
Accessed	25 March 2026		

Table A.26. Indicator reference table – Extent of marine protected areas network

SEO 3							
Data source(s)	Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 Data Tables ²⁶ Data provided by NIEA to the OEP on site extent as part of the OEP’s review of the implementation of protected site law ⁵⁷						
Category	OEP indicator: Extent of marine protected areas network						
Methodology	<p>The MPA network includes areas designated as ASSIs, SPAs, SACs and MCZs, and Ramsar sites.⁶⁰ The network should cover rare, threatened and important marine ecosystems, habitats and species, protecting them from damage caused by human activities.</p> <p>The APR 2026 does not include an indicator to track changes to the extent of the MPA network. However, the EIP includes a target related to MPA extent (30% of seas), and DAERA has ongoing legal duties to designate MPAs where the relevant criteria are met, and to ensure an ecologically coherent network.</p> <p>DAERA reports the extent of terrestrial and marine protected sites as a combined figure within the Environmental Statistics Reports. In addition, DAERA has not defined the landward limit of MPAs. This creates some uncertainties in distinguishing between terrestrial and marine sites.</p> <p>Available data for SPAs, SACs and MCZs designated below mean low water have been used to determine a short-term trend (2019–2025) for MPA extent. This approach is consistent with our review of the implementation of the laws governing terrestrial and freshwater protected sites.</p> <p>This indicator is based on the Northern Ireland statistics report Figure 5.1(a) Area of nature conservation designations (MCZ data) and data provided by NIEA through information request to the OEP (SPAs and SACs). The indicator does not include data related to ASSI and Ramsar site extent.</p>						
Data	Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	Area	250.3	250.3	250.3	250.3	250.3	250.3
Unit	Thousand hectares						
Years	2019/20–2024/25						
Trend	0.0						
T-test (p-value)	N/A (not enough variability in the data)						
Accessed	18 March 2026						

SEO 4 – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea (Future Agricultural Policy)

Table A.27. Indicator reference table – Net GHGs in Agriculture

SEO 4							
Data source(s)	Northern Ireland greenhouse gas inventory 1990 – 2023 statistical bulletin, Table 1 ⁶¹						
Category	OIF Indicator 13a: Net GHG in Agriculture						
Methodology	<p>Greenhouse gases (GHGs) such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and F-gases released into the atmosphere contribute to global warming and climate change.</p> <p>The agricultural sector produces GHG from livestock, agricultural soils, stationary combustion, and off-road machinery. These emissions are affected by the number of livestock, the quantity of fertiliser applied to land, and the intensity of activity. The agricultural sector accounts for approximately 31% of total GHG emissions in 2023.⁸ This indicator assesses changes in agricultural GHG emissions.</p>						
Data	Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	Agricultural GHG emissions	5,646	5,645	5,684	5,861	5,709	5,615
Unit	Thousand tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (ktCO ₂ e)						
Years	2018–2023						
Trend	-0.5%						
T-test (p-value)	0.08						
Accessed	13 April 2026						

Table A.28. Indicator reference table – Net GHG Land Use, Land Use Change & Forestry (LULUCF)

SEO 4							
Data source(s)	Northern Ireland greenhouse gas inventory 1990–2023 statistical bulletin, Table 8 ⁶¹						
Category	OIF Indicator 13b: Net GHG Land Use, Land Use Change & Forestry (LULUCF)						
Methodology	<p>Greenhouse gases (GHG) such as carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and F-gases released into the atmosphere contribute to global warming and climate change.</p> <p>The land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF) sector is both a sink and a source of GHG emissions.⁸ This indicator assesses the net emissions resulting from the land management activities.</p>						
Data	Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	GHG Emissions	2,170	2,135	2,171	2,176	2,145	2,149
Unit	Thousand tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (ktCO ₂ e)						
Years	2018–2023						
Trend	-1.0%						
T-test (p-value)	0.26						
Accessed	13 April 2026						

Table A.29. Indicator reference table – NI Phosphorus Balance

SEO 4							
Data source(s)	Nutrient Balance Spreadsheet provisional 2024 data ⁶²						
Category	OIF Indicator 13c: NI Phosphorus Balance						
Methodology	<p>Phosphorus (P) balance provides an indication of the phosphorus surplus or deficit for the agricultural sector. Phosphorus is added to the Northern Ireland agricultural sector through inputs (feed, fertilisers) and removed through outputs (livestock and livestock products, such as milk, eggs and crops).</p> <p>This indicator is calculated using the farm-gate approach (that is, agricultural sector P inputs less P outputs) and is expressed on a per-hectare basis (kilograms P per hectare per year). Within the phosphorus balance methodology, the agricultural land is defined as the total area of crops and grass (excluding rough grazing). This indicator is based solely on calculating phosphorus inputs and outputs, and not on soil sampling.</p> <p>In addition to indicating the phosphorus surplus or deficit, the balance also provides trends in the sources of phosphorus inputs and outputs to the agricultural sector over time.⁸</p> <p>The link provided in the APR 2026 for the phosphorus balance data is incorrect, and so we have used data provided by DAERA.⁶²</p>						

Table A.29. Indicator reference table – NI Phosphorus Balance (cont.)

SEO 4							
Data	Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
	Phosphorus input total	19.7	19.8	19.2	17.8	17.8	20.0
	Phosphorus output total	9.3	9.3	9.5	9.7	9.6	9.9
	Phosphorous balance	10.4	10.6	9.7	8.1	8.2	10.1
Unit	Kilograms per hectare (kg/ha)						
Years	2019–2024						
Trend	-3.6%						
T-test (p-value)	0.28						
Accessed	13 April 2026						

Table A.30. Indicator reference table – NI Nitrogen Balance

SEO 4							
Data source(s)	Nutrient Balance Spreadsheet provisional 2024 data ⁶²						
Category	OIF Indicator 13d: NI Nitrogen Balance						
Methodology	<p>Nitrogen (N) balance provides an indication of the nitrogen surplus or deficit for the agricultural sector. Nitrogen is added to the Northern Ireland agricultural sector through inputs (feed, fertilisers) and removed through outputs (livestock and livestock products, such as milk, eggs and crops).</p> <p>This indicator is calculated at the Northern Ireland level using the farm-gate approach (that is, agricultural sector N inputs less N outputs) and is expressed on a per-hectare basis (kg N per hectare per year).</p> <p>In addition to indicating the nitrogen surplus or deficit, the balance also provides trends in the sources of nitrogen inputs and outputs to the agricultural sector over time.</p> <p>The link provided in the APR 2026 to Northern Ireland carbon intensity indicators 2024⁶³ provides data on soil nitrogen balance with livestock feeds at 17% protein level to 2022 (Table 6.3). In the APR 2026, data are provided to 2024. We have therefore used N balance data provided by DAERA extending to 2024.⁶²</p>						
Data	Year	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
	Nitrogen input total	177.8	188.9	181.5	168.6	162.2	181.9
	Nitrogen output total	43.3	43.3	44.5	45.2	44.9	46.3
	Nitrogen balance	134.5	145.5	137.0	123.3	117.3	135.6
Unit	Kilograms per hectare (kg/ha)						
Years	2019–2024						
Trend	+0.8%						
T-test (p-value)	0.46						
Accessed	14 April 2026						

SEO 4 – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea (Energy)

Table A.31. Indicator reference table – Renewable electricity generation as a proportion of gross final electricity consumption

SEO 4							
Data source(s)	Electricity Consumption and Renewable Generation in Northern Ireland ⁶⁴						
Category	OEP indicator: Renewable generation as a proportion of gross final electricity consumption						
Methodology	<p>This indicator tracks progress towards the target that at least 80% of electricity consumption to be from renewable sources by 2030.</p> <p>Data is taken from Electricity Consumption and Renewable Generation in Northern Ireland, published 05 March 2026.⁶⁴ The data originate from the downloadable spreadsheet for Figure 1: Monthly renewable generation as a proportion of gross final electricity consumption.</p> <p>We use the rolling average for June as a proxy for that year, presented in the column entitled ‘Renewable generation as a proportion of gross final electricity consumption (rolling 12-month basis)’. The rolling 12-month average is considered to better reflect the underlying trend over time by smoothing monthly volatility.</p>						
Data	Year	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
	Electricity generation from renewables	47	45	46	46	46	44
Unit	Percentage of total electricity generation						
Years	2020–2025						
Trend	-6.4%						
T-test (p-value)	0.00						
Accessed	01 April 2026						

SEO 4 – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea (Productive and sustainably used seas)

Table A.32. Indicator reference table – For commercial offshore stocks

SEO 4	
Data source(s)	N/A
Category	OIF Indicator 15a: For commercial offshore stocks
Methodology	<p>The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) annual assessment advice sheets provide scientific guidance for the management of fish stocks, including those relevant to Northern Ireland’s commercial offshore fisheries.⁶⁵ ICES is a long-established international scientific advisory body. This scientific advice provides an indicator of stock development against management standards. It informs the setting of total allowable catches (TACs) and other management measures, with the latest advice issued in 2025 for application in 2026.</p> <p>ICES’ purpose is to deliver independent, science-based advice to governments and regulatory bodies such as the UK and EU, regarding the status of fish stocks and recommended catch limits. This information supports sustainable fisheries management and contributes to the protection of marine ecosystems.</p> <p>For Northern Ireland, the advice covers commercially significant offshore species such as cod, haddock, whiting, plaice, sole, herring and nephrops. Each advice sheet includes details on stock status, indicating whether a stock is overfished or within sustainable limits. It also outlines catch limits under various management approaches, presents trends in biomass and fishing mortality rates over time, and highlights uncertainties, including data limitations and level of confidence in the assessments. These stock assessments are a critical part of the work that DAERA is committed to delivering under the statutory Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) for Irish Sea Pelagic and Irish Sea Demersal stocks.</p>
Data	Combining data from multiple stocks into a single trend is not statistically appropriate and this indicator could not therefore be assessed.

Table A.33. Indicator reference table – For commercial inshore stocks

SEO 4	
Data source(s)	N/A
Category	OIF Indicator 15b: For commercial inshore stocks
Methodology	<p>The annual stock assessments prepared by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) for species such as crab, lobster, and scallop provide an indication of the state of these fisheries and their future sustainability.⁶⁶ These assessments form a critical component of the work DAERA is committed to delivering under the FMPs for non-quota shellfish stocks. FMPs are a statutory requirement under the Fisheries Act 2020 and are evidence-based action plans developed in collaboration with the fishing sector and other stakeholders. Their purpose is to ensure the delivery of sustainable fisheries for current and future generations.</p> <p>The assessments monitor the status of inshore shellfish stocks, including crab, lobster, and scallop, using landings and survey data. This is part of an established annual programme undertaken by AFBI. The latest assessments show mixed results, with some stocks able to sustain higher landings while others need reductions. Trends over the past year indicate species- and area-specific variation, with both increases and reductions recommended.</p>
Data	Combining data from multiple stocks into a singular data trend is not statistically appropriate and this indicator could not therefore be assessed.

SEO 4 – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea (Producer responsibility)

Table A.34. Indicator reference table – Packaging recycling rates

SEO 4	
Data source(s)	N/A
Category	OIF Indicator 16a: Packaging recycling rates
Methodology	<p>The new Packaging Extended Producer Responsibility (pEPR) scheme started in April 2025, and data are not yet available, but recycling rates attributed to this scheme will be available from 2026.</p> <p>Data will be provided by the scheme administrator, PackUK. Under the new system, packaging recycling rates will be measured by individual material types, such as plastic, paper, and cardboard.</p> <p>The Report Packaging Data system, introduced in 2023, measures packaging placed on the market. The first set of data is expected in the second half of 2026. This data will inform packaging recycling rates and the percentage of full net costs contributed by packaging producers under Packaging Extended Producer Responsibility, using 2025 figures when they become available. The volume of packaging placed on the market will also provide an indication of the influence of pEPR on packaging design, as it is hoped that unnecessary packaging is eliminated and more recyclable materials are used.</p>
Data	The first set of data is expected in the second half of 2026. This will provide a baseline to inform future analysis of packaging recycling rates.

Table A.35. Indicator reference table – Percentage of full net costs contributed by packaging producers

SEO 4	
Data source(s)	N/A
Category	OIF Indicator 16b: % of full net costs contributed by packaging producers
Methodology	The Report Packaging Data system, introduced in 2023, measures packaging placed on the market. This information will be used to inform packaging recycling rates and the percentage of full net costs contributed by packaging producers under Packaging Extended Producer Responsibility.
Data	As the scheme only started in April 2025, and the first producer invoices were issued in October 2025, the first full set of data is not expected until the second half of 2026.

Table A.36. Indicator reference table – Increase of recycling of drinks containers from 70-90% by 2030

SEO 4	
Data source(s)	N/A
Category	OIF Indicator 16c: Increase of recycling of drinks containers from 70-90% by 2030
Methodology	From 01 October 2027, customers will pay a refundable deposit for certain single-use drink containers under the Deposit Return Scheme. The deposit can be claimed back when the item is returned to a collection point, such as a local supermarket. The aim is to boost recycling rates and increase the circularity of metal and plastic materials.
Data	Data will be provided by the Deposit Management Organisation following the start of the scheme in 2027, with first data being available from 2029.

SEO 4 – Sustainable production and consumption on land and at sea (Chemicals)

Table A.37. Indicator reference table – Number of registered holders of firefighting foam stockpiles containing PFOA inspected

SEO 4	
Data source(s)	N/A
Category	OIF Indicator 18a: Number of registered holders of firefighting foam stockpiles containing perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) inspected
Methodology	NIEA maintains a register of holders of PFOA containing firefighting foam stockpiles, and inspections are due for completion by 31 March 2026. Once items have been registered, holders will have to take these items out of use and send them for destruction by appropriate waste management techniques. They will then be required to deregister items, providing documentary evidence that appropriate disposal has been completed.
Data	We could not identify suitable data and this indicator could not therefore be assessed.

Table A.38. Indicator reference table – Number of pieces of equipment containing PCBs above the legal threshold registered with NIEA

SEO 4	
Data source(s)	N/A
Category	OIF Indicator 18b: Number of pieces of equipment containing PCBs above the legal threshold registered with NIEA
Methodology	<p>Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are persistent organic pollutants (POPs), banned from use under the UN Stockholm Convention on POPs. PCBs are a group of substances that are harmful to the environment and human health and are recognised as a threat to the environment due to their toxicity, persistence, and tendency to build up in the bodies of animals. They are a subset of the synthetic organic chemicals known as chlorinated hydrocarbons; specifically, any chemical substance of the biphenyl molecule that has been chlorinated to varying degrees.</p> <p>In the UK, closed uses of PCBs in new equipment were banned in 1981, when nearly all UK PCB synthesis ceased, but closed uses in existing equipment containing more than five litres of PCBs were not stopped until December 2000. PCBs were used as dielectric filler liquids in some types of electrical equipment such as transformers, switchgear, capacitors and the starter units of fluorescent lights and fractional-horsepower motors.</p> <p>This indicator seeks to measure the remaining contaminated equipment in Northern Ireland, and facilitates NIEA engagement with holders to ensure appropriate disposal plans are in place to prevent PCB escape to the environment.</p>
Data	We could not identify suitable data and this indicator could not therefore be assessed.

SEO 5 – Zero waste and highly developed circular economy (Circular economy)

Table A.39. Indicator reference table – Material Footprint

SEO 5							
Data source(s)	Material Footprint in Northern Ireland 2001-2022 ⁶⁷						
Category	OIF Indicator 20a: Material Footprint						
Methodology	<p>The material footprint for Northern Ireland is based on estimates produced by the University of Leeds. This provides an overview of the total material footprint estimates between 2001 and 2022, including detailed breakdowns by material group and per capita estimates over time.</p> <p>The data is sourced from Table 2: Material footprint per capita, Northern Ireland, 2001–2022 of the Material Footprint report and uses Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency mid-year population estimates for Northern Ireland.⁶⁸</p>						
Data	Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	Material footprint	16.7	16.9	17.2	16.2	18.3	20.6
Unit	Tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO ₂ e) per capita						
Years	2017–2022						
Trend	+23.4%						
T-test (p-value)	0.0						
Accessed	01 April 2026						

Table A.40. Indicator reference table – Carbon Footprint

SEO 5							
Data source(s)	Research Bulletin 25/1 Indicators to Monitor Decarbonisation and the Circular Economy ⁶⁹						
Category	OIF Indicator 20b: Carbon Footprint						
Methodology	<p>The Department for the Economy has identified carbon footprint as a key metric, as it helps measure consumption patterns and their associated environmental impacts. Tracking these emissions can support the assessment of progress towards a more circular economy, which delivers environmental improvements by reducing waste and pollution.</p> <p>The data are sourced from Table 4: Estimates for Northern Ireland’s consumption-based carbon footprint (Totals and per capita) of Research Bulletin 25/1.</p>						
Data	Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
	Carbon footprint	11.7	11.5	11.9	10.9	11.7	11.9
Unit	Tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO ₂ e) per capita						
Years	2017–2022						
Trend	+1.7%						
T-test (p-value)	0.10						
Accessed	17 March 2026						

SEO 5 – Zero waste and highly developed circular economy (Waste management)

Table A.41. Indicator reference table – Waste generated from households

SEO 5							
Data source(s)	Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics 2023/24 annual report, Table 15 ⁷⁰						
Category	OIF Indicator 21a: Waste generated from households						
Methodology	<p>The total quantity of local-authority-collected municipal waste arisings is based on well-established and robust data reported by district councils and waste management groups and analysed by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.</p> <p>The data are sourced from Northern Ireland Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste Management Statistics, Table 15: Household waste arisings.⁷⁰ The 2024/25 data were obtained from page 250 of the Environmental Improvement Plan Annual Progress Report September 2024–September 2025.⁸</p>						
Data	Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	Household waste arisings	880,842	924,224	910,847	846,822	875,443	877,988
Unit	Tonnes						
Years	2019/20–2024/25						
Trend	-0.3%						
T-test (p-value)	0.52						
Accessed	17 March 2026						

Table A.42. Indicator reference table – Recycling levels

SEO 5	
Data source	Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 Data Tables ²⁶ Environmental Improvement Plan Annual Progress Report September 2024–September 2025 ⁸
Category	OIF Indicator 21b: Recycling levels • Municipal waste sent for recycling • Household waste sent for recycling
Methodology	<p>This indicator measures material sent from households for recycling.</p> <p>The data is sourced from the Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025 Data Tables²⁶ for years up to and including 2023/24. The data for 2024/25 are obtained from Figure 69 of the APR 2026.⁸</p>

Table A.42. Indicator reference table – Recycling levels (cont.)

SEO 5							
Data	Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	Household waste sent for preparing for reuse, dry recycling and composting	51.9	50.9	50.1	50.7	51.1	51.1
Unit	Percentage						
Years	2019/20–2024/25						
Trend	-1.5%						
T-test (p-value)	0.61						
Accessed	01 April 2026						

Table A.43. Indicator reference table – Municipal Waste Landfilled

SEO 5							
Data source(s)	Environmental Improvement Plan Annual Progress Report September 2024–September 2025 ⁸						
Category	OIF Indicator 21c: Municipal Waste Landfilled						
Methodology	This indicator measures the proportion of local-authority-collected municipal waste arisings sent to landfill and is based on the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency analysis of data from local councils and waste management organisations.						
	The data are obtained from Figure 71 of the Environmental Improvement Plan Annual Progress Report September 2024–September 2025. ⁸						
Data	Year	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
	Local authority collected municipal waste landfilled	24.0	22.8	24.9	23.1	18.4	14.0
Unit	Percentage						
Years	2019/20–2024/25						
Trend	-41.7%						
T-test (p-value)	0.00						
Accessed	17 March 2026						

SEO 6 – Net Zero greenhouse gas emissions and improved climate resilience and adaptability

Table A.44. Indicator reference table – Total Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Northern Ireland

SEO 6							
Data source(s)	Northern Ireland Greenhouse Gas Inventory 1990 – 2023 statistical bulletin ⁶¹						
Category	OIF Indicator 22a: Total Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Northern Ireland						
Methodology	This indicator tracks greenhouse gas emissions, with data published in a Northern Ireland-level annual inventory report. Indicator 22a (Total greenhouse gas emissions in Northern Ireland) only presents total emissions at a national level. In this reference table, we have also presented sector level data, which are used as contextual indicators in the past trends narrative to provide a more granular assessment. Sector level trends are also set out in Indicator 14a (Greenhouse gas emissions from energy- related sectors).						
Data	Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	Agriculture	5.6	5.6	5.7	5.9	5.7	5.6
	Buildings and product uses	3.5	3.4	3.6	3.5	2.9	2.5
	Domestic transport	4.5	4.4	3.5	3.8	3.9	3.9
	Electricity supply	2.9	2.8	2.9	3.1	3.0	2.1
	Fuel supply	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
	Industry	1.4	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.1
	Land use change	2.2	2.1	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.1
	Waste	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8
	Total greenhouse gas emissions	21.0	20.6	19.9	20.6	19.6	18.2
Unit	Million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO ₂ e)						
Years	2018–2023						
Trend	-13.4%						
T-test (p-value)	0.00						
Accessed	01 April 2026						

Glossary of terms and acronyms

Term	Description
APR, APR 2026	The Annual Progress Report is a statutory government report that assesses progress made in implementing the current Environmental Improvement Plan.
Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs)	Protected site that is designated for its unique wildlife, habitats, or geological features. These sites are identified and managed under the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 to conserve biodiversity and geodiversity.
Baseline data	A set of information representing the baseline position and used to compare data acquired afterwards to determine changes. In an environmental context, the baseline determines the condition or health of the environment prior to an intervention.
CCC	Climate Change Committee.
CCRA	Climate Change Risk Assessment.
College of Experts (CoE)	Provide the Office for Environmental Protection with access to expertise allowing us to broaden our evidence base, identify key areas of research interest and make sure we are challenged and advised from a range of perspectives.
Commitments	Statements that commit to do something but do not define a desired level of performance or include a measurable indicator.
Contextual indicator	A metric that tracks environmental states, drivers, or pressures. In each annual progress report, we may use different contextual indicators. They are used to provide further context to our assessment and to support the indicators used to directly assess key environmental trends.
Critical levels	The maximum concentration of pollutants in the air that plants and ecosystems can withstand before being harmed.
Critical loads of nitrogen	The thresholds above which harmful effects of nitrogen deposition on ecosystems become apparent.
DAERA	Northern Ireland Executive's Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.
DIN	Dissolved inorganic nitrogen.
EEA	European Environment Agency.
Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP)	A statutory plan for significantly improving the natural environment in the period to which the plan relates, which is required to be prepared under the Environment Act 2021.
ExCo	Executive Committee of the Office for Environmental Protection.
GHG	Greenhouse gas.
Indicator	Statistics used to measure current conditions or trends over time. The APR 2026 includes a set of 48 indicators; these measure environmental changes that relate to the 22 EIP themes across six SEOs.
JNCC	Joint Nature Conservation Committee.
Marine Conservation Zones (MCZs)	A type of marine protected areas that can be designated to protect a range of nationally important habitats and species vital for a range of marine processes and other species.

Term	Description
Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)	Refer to an umbrella term for clearly defined geographical spaces, recognised, dedicated and managed through legal or other effective means to achieve long-term nature conservation (SPA, SAC, MCZ, etc.).
NGO	Non-governmental organisation.
Natural capital	The parts of nature which directly or indirectly underpin value to people, including ecosystems, species, freshwater, soils, minerals, the air and oceans, as well as natural processes and functions. Natural capital forms part of our wealth, that is, our ability to produce actual or potential goods and services into the future to support our wellbeing.
NI	Northern Ireland.
NIEA	Northern Ireland Environment Agency.
NIEL	Northern Ireland Environment Link.
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.
Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs)	Geographically defined areas other than Protected Areas, which are governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and other locally relevant values.
The Office for Environmental Protection (OEP)	A statutory body established by Parliament under the Environment Act 2021. Our mission is to protect and improve the environment by holding government and other public authorities to account.
Outcome Indicator Framework (OIF)	A set of 48 Indicators; these measure environmental changes that relate to the 22 EIP themes across 6 SEOs.
PfG	Programme for Government.
PFOA	Perfluorooctanoic acid.
PM_{2.5}	Particulate matter (in this context with a size of less than or equal to 2.5 µm).
ROAMEF	Rationale, Objectives, Appraisal, Monitoring, Evaluation, Feedback.
Special Areas of Conservation (SACs)	Designated habitats and species (excluding birds) under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995.
Strategic Environmental Outcomes (SEOs)	SEOs, as presented in the EIP and APR 2026.
Special Protection Areas (SPAs)	Areas designated for species of, and habitats for, breeding, over-wintering, and migrating birds under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc.) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995.
SRP	Soluble reactive phosphorus.
WFD	Water Framework Directive.

References

- (1) UK Statistics Authority. *Code of Practice for Statistics*. Code of Practice for Statistics. <https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk> (accessed 2026-02-18).
- (2) UK Parliament. *Environment Act 2021*. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/contents/enacted>.
- (3) Office for Environmental Protection. *Strategy and Enforcement Policy*; 2022. www.theoep.org.uk/strategy-and-enforcement-policy (accessed 2023-11-16).
- (4) Office for Environmental Protection. *OEP Governance Framework*. www.theoep.org.uk/report/oep-governance-framework (accessed 2023-11-16).
- (5) OEP. *Annual Report and Accounts 2024/2025*; 2026. www.theoep.org.uk/report/annual-report-and-accounts-20242025 (accessed 2026-02-18).
- (6) Government Finance Function; HM Treasury. *Orange Book*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/orange-book> (accessed 2024-11-04).
- (7) DAERA. *Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland*; 2024. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/environmental-improvement-plan-northern-ireland> (accessed 2026-02-26).
- (8) DAERA. *Environmental Improvement Plan Annual Progress Report 2024-2025*; 2026. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/environmental-improvement-plan-northern-ireland> (accessed 2026-01-28).
- (9) OEP. *Office for Environmental Protection*. <https://www.theoep.org.uk/> (accessed 2026-03-09).
- (10) OEP. *OEP appoints the first members to its College of Experts*. <https://www.theoep.org.uk/news/oep-appoints-first-members-its-college-experts> (accessed 2026-04-21).
- (12) UK Statistics Agency. *Code of Practice for Statistics*. <https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk> (accessed 2026-01-08).
- (13) JNCC. *Assessing Indicators*. <https://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/assessing-indicators/> (accessed 2026-04-24).
- (14) BioSS. *Developing Statistical Methodologies for Analysing Change and Trends in Environmental Indicators*; 2025. <https://www.theoep.org.uk/commissioned-research/developing-statistical-methodologies-analysing-change-and-trends> (accessed 2026-04-24).
- (15) HM Treasury; Government Finance Function. *The Green Book. UK Government Guidance on Appraisal*; 2026. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-green-book-appraisal-and-evaluation-in-central-government> (accessed 2026-03-18).
- (16) HM Treasury; Evaluation Task Force. *The Magenta Book. Central Government Guidance on Evaluation*; 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book> (accessed 2026-03-18).
- (17) EEA. *The European Environment: State and Outlook 2020: Knowledge for Transition to a Sustainable Europe*. Publications Office: LU, 2019. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/en/analysis/publications/soer-2020>.
- (18) *The Marine Strategy Regulations 2010*; 2010. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1627/contents/made> (accessed 2023-11-21).
- (19) Defra; Welsh Government; DAERA; Scottish Government. *Marine Strategy Part One: Update*; 2026. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/marine-strategy-part-one-update> (accessed 2026-04-20).
- (20) Cefas. *MOAT – Marine online assessment tool*. <https://moat.cefas.co.uk/> (accessed 2026-03-16).
- (21) UK Parliament. *The National Emission Ceilings Regulations 2018. UK Statutory Instruments 2018 No. 129*; 2018. www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/129/contents (accessed 2026-04-21).
- (22) Northern Ireland Assembly. *The Air Quality Standards Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2010. Northern Ireland Statutory Rules 2010 No. 188*; 2010. www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2010/188/contents/made (accessed 2026-04-21).
- (23) DAERA. *2024/25 Summary Feature Condition Status of Protected Areas, 2025*. www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/202425-summary-feature-condition-status-protected-areas (accessed 2026-03-14).
- (24) Northern Ireland Assembly. *Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly 2022 c. 31*; 2022. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2022/31/enacted> (accessed 2026-04-21).
- (25) CCC. *Adapting to Climate Change – Progress in Northern Ireland*; 2023. <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Adapting-to-climate-change-Progress-in-Northern-Ireland-Web.pdf> (accessed 2024-06-30).
- (26) DAERA. *Northern Ireland Environmental Statistics Report 2025*; 2025. www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-environmental-statistics-report-2025 (accessed 2026-03-16).
- (27) DAERA. *Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2024-2029*. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-climate-change-adaptation-programme-2024-2029> (accessed 2026-03-20).
- (28) DAERA. *Northern Ireland environmental statistics reports*; www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-environmental-statistics-report (accessed 2024-10-07).

- (29) Northern Ireland Assembly. *The Climate Change (Carbon Budgets 2023-2037) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024*; Government Printer for Northern Ireland, 2024. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2024/215/contents/made> (accessed 2026-04-16).
- (30) OfficeLabs. *Transform Information into Intelligence*. OfficeLabs. <https://www.officelabs.co.uk/> (accessed 2026-04-21).
- (31) NISRA. *Programme for Government (PfG) Wellbeing Dashboard*. www.nisra.gov.uk/news/programme-government-pfg-wellbeing-dashboard (accessed 2026-07-04).
- (32) Defra. *UK Air Information Resource: Annual and Exceedance Statistics*. <https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/data/exceedance> (accessed 2026-03-23).
- (33) Defra. *Emissions of air pollutants in the UK – Particulate matter (PM10 and PM2.5)*. GOV.UK. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/emissions-of-air-pollutants/emissions-of-air-pollutants-in-the-uk-particulate-matter-pm10-and-pm25> (accessed 2026-03-13).
- (34) NAEI. *Air Pollutant Inventories for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland: 2005-2023; 2025*. <http://naei.energysecurity.gov.uk/reports/air-pollutant-inventories-england-scotland-wales-and-northern-ireland-2005-2023> (accessed 2026-04-07).
- (35) UKCEH. *Air Pollution Trends Report 2024: Critical Load and Critical Level Exceedances in the UK*; UKCEH, 2024. https://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/library/reports?report_id=1157 (accessed 2026-08-04).
- (36) *Council Directive 91/676/EEC of 12 December 1991 Concerning the Protection of Waters against Pollution Caused by Nitrates from Agricultural Sources [1991]*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/1991/676/oj/eng>.
- (37) DAERA. *Nutrients Action Programme*. www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/nutrients-action-programme (accessed 2025-08-12).
- (38) *The Nutrient Action Programme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019*; Government Printer for Northern Ireland. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2019/81/contents/made>.
- (39) NIEA. *Drinking Water Quality in Northern Ireland, 2024; 2026*. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2026-02/DWI%20Annual%20Report%20on%20Drinking%20Water%20Quality%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%20in%202024.pdf> (accessed 2026-04-01).
- (40) NIEA. *Drinking Water Quality in Northern Ireland, 2023; 2023*. www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-02/Drinking%20Water%20Quality%20in%20Northern%20Ireland%20C%202023_0.PDF.
- (41) Northern Ireland Assembly. *The Water Framework Directive (Classification, Priority Substances and Shellfish Waters) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015; 2015*. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2015/351/contents/made> (accessed 2026-03-16).
- (42) OEP. *A Review of Implementation of the Bathing Water Regulations in Northern Ireland; 2024*. www.theoep.org.uk/report/updates-bathing-water-regulations-would-better-protect-public-says-oep-2 (accessed 2026-04-22).
- (43) Northern Ireland Assembly. *The Quality of Bathing Water Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2008. Northern Ireland Statutory Rules 2008 No. 231; 2008*. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2008/231/introduction> (accessed 2026-04-22).
- (44) DAERA. *About Bathing Water Quality*. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/about-bathing-water-quality> (accessed 2026-04-20).
- (45) DAERA. *Bathing Water Quality*. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/bathing-water-quality> (accessed 2026-04-22).
- (46) DAERA. *KNIB (Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful) Marine Litter Reports*. www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/knib-marine-litter-reports (accessed 2026-04-01).
- (47) DAERA. *Water Classification Statistics for Northern Ireland 2024 Report; 2025*. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/water-classification-statistics-northern-ireland-2024-report> (accessed 2026-03-09).
- (48) NIEL. *Record-Breaking Number of Green Flags Awards for NI*. www.nienvironmentlink.org/record-breaking-number-of-green-flags-awards-for-ni/ (accessed 2026-03-19).
- (49) NIEL. *Record-Breaking Number of Green Flags Awards for NI*. www.nienvironmentlink.org/record-breaking-number-of-green-flags-awards-for-ni/ (accessed 2026-03-19).
- (50) Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful. *Blue Flag Award*. <https://www.keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org/cgi-bin/generic?instanceID=29> (accessed 2026-03-16).
- (51) Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful. *Green Flag Award*. www.keepnorthernirelandbeautiful.org/cgi-bin/generic?instanceID=28 (accessed 2026-03-16).
- (52) Stewart, D., Annett, E., Taylor, M., Walker, L., Campbell, A., (2026). *People in the Outdoors Monitor for Northern Ireland – Headline report from the 2025 survey*. Natural Science Evidence Series. No. 26/04, Belfast, Northern Ireland Environment Agency. <https://outscape.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/15161214/POMNI-Headline-Report-from-the-2025-Survey.pdf> (accessed 2026-04-20).
- (53) Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. *Continuous Household Survey*. www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/find-your-survey/continuous-household-survey (accessed 2026-03-19).

- (54) Forest Research. *Woodland area, UK, 1998 to 2025*. www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/time-series/ (accessed 2026-03-18).
- (55) DAERA. *Northern Ireland Peatland Strategy to 2040*; 2025. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-peatland-strategy-2040> (accessed 2026-03-11).
- (56) DAERA. *2023/24 Summary Feature Condition Status of Protected Areas, 2024*. www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/202324-summary-feature-condition-status-protected-areas (accessed 2026-03-14).
- (57) OEP. *Review of Implementation of Laws for Terrestrial and Freshwater Protected Sites in Northern Ireland*; 2025. www.theoep.org.uk/sites/default/files/reports-files/Website_Protected%20Sites%20%28Northern%20Ireland%29_Accessible.pdf (accessed 2026-01-19).
- (58) DAERA. *Protected Areas – Protected Areas Monitoring Results*. www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/protected-areas-protected-areas-monitoring-results (accessed 2026-03-20).
- (59) DAERA. *Monitoring marine habitats and species*. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/monitoring-marine-habitats-and-species>.
- (60) DAERA. *Marine Protected Areas Strategy for the Northern Ireland Inshore Region 2025-2030, 2026*. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/marine-protected-areas-strategy-northern-ireland-inshore-region-2025-2030> (accessed 2026-03-13).
- (61) DAERA; NISRA. *NI Greenhouse Gas Inventory 1990-2023*. <https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/daera/northern-ireland-greenhouse-gas-inventory-1990-2023-statistical-bulletin.html> (accessed 2026-03-11).
- (62) DAERA. *Nutrient Balance Spreadsheet Provisional 2024 Data – Supplied to the OEP by DAERA, n.d.*
- (63) DAERA. *Northern Ireland carbon intensity indicators 2024*. <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-carbon-intensity-indicators-2024> (accessed 2026-04-14).
- (64) NISRA; DfE. *Electricity Consumption and Renewable Generation in Northern Ireland*. <https://datavis.nisra.gov.uk/Economy/electricity-consumption-and-renewable-generation-report.html> (accessed 2026-03-12).
- (65) ICES CIEM. *Latest advice*. <https://www.ices.dk/advice/Pages/Latest-Advice.aspx> (accessed 2026-04-24).
- (66) AFBI. *Inshore fishery advice sheets 2025*. <https://www.afbini.gov.uk/publications/advice-sheets-2025> (accessed 2026-04-23).
- (67) DfE. *Material Footprint in Northern Ireland 2001-2022*. www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/material-footprint-northern-ireland-2001-2022 (accessed 2026-04-12).
- (68) NISRA. *2024 Mid-Year Population Estimates for Northern Ireland and Estimates of the Population Aged 85 and Over for Northern Ireland, 2024 (and 2001 to 2023 revised)*. <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/2024-mid-year-population-estimates-northern-ireland-and-estimates-population-aged-85> (accessed 2026-03-18).
- (69) DfE. *Research Bulletin 25/1 | Indicators to Monitor Decarbonisation and the Circular Economy*. <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/research-bulletins-2025> (accessed 2026-03-15).
- (70) DAERA. *Northern Ireland local authority collected municipal waste management statistics 2023/24 annual report*. www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-local-authority-collected-municipal-waste-management-statistics-2023 (accessed 2026-04-12).

