

**From the Deputy Secretary of
Environment Marine and Fisheries Group**



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

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Our reference:

16th October 2023

Dear Helen,

Nutrients Action Programme for Northern Ireland

As confirmed by Katrina's letter of 9 August, it has not been possible to progress the NAP Review. I fully accept the points you make regarding the urgency of this matter and agree that the situation at Lough Neagh reaffirms the need to address these issues at pace.

You have asked for more detail in relation to the actions DAERA is taking to address these issues and the timelines against which these actions will be delivered. I have set out in the attached Annex, key actions currently underway to secure the protection of our environment in respect of water quality.

I would also highlight that since Katrina's letter of 9th August, in response to the emerging issues at Lough Neagh DAERA has established a cross departmental Water Quality Steering Group at a very senior level. This includes senior officials from both DAERA and DfI. It is also supported by a Review Team and an Independent Science Working Group. This group will produce a report by the end of November, providing key recommendations and actions to secure improvements in water quality. One of these actions will include progressing the NAP Review at pace.

I want to provide you with assurance that improving water quality is high on the agenda for DAERA and I recognize that it does require urgent and ambitious action.

I look forward to our next meeting and would be happy to take the opportunity to go into more detail on the actions and timelines that have been outlined in the Annex to this letter.

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Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Reid". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "R".

**DAVID REID
DEPUTY SECRETARY
ENVIRONMENT MARINE AND FISHERIES GROUP**

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Annex A: Actions and Timelines

- Address the statutory requirements of the NAP Regulations Art 34 and 35 by progressing the NAP Review at pace. Work on the review is ongoing and will continue in 2024. It is envisaged that a revised NAP, and associated Regulations, could be available for introduction in early 2025, subject to there being a route to introduce new policy and legislation and the views of an incoming minister.
- The ongoing work of the Water Quality Steering Group which will help to inform the NAP Review, work for which will continue in tandem with the work of the Water Quality Steering Group.
- The inclusion of additional measures following the last review which include requirements for larger farms and contractors to use Low Emission Slurry Spreading Equipment (LESSE) and further controls on the use of chemical fertilisers containing phosphorus, and manures with a high phosphorus content. These measures will result in greater nutrient efficiency on farms and help reduce run-off to watercourses.
- The Department's Soil Nutrient Health Scheme (SNHS) will provide soil sampling, analysis, run off risk maps and nutrient management training for farmers throughout NI and will help to reduce phosphorus losses from agricultural sources and soils which are a key cause of poor water quality. Funding of £37m is being provided over a four-year period and will conclude in 2026. It will also be a condition of future payments under the scheme that will replace the current Basic Payments Scheme.
- The continued roll-out of the Environmental Farming Scheme, a key element of which has been the funding of fencing and riparian margins to protect water courses from livestock and to reduce run off risk.
- The Sustainable Catchment Programme (SCP) provides independent advice and grant support to farmers to address agricultural pressures on water quality in priority catchments. This will also deliver £2.7 million of capital grant support for water protection and nutrient pollution prevention measures across 4 catchments.
- Later this year DAERA will launch a Livestock Emissions Challenge Fund. Working in partnership with key actors along the food supply chain, we will develop and test the ability to reduce the phosphorus and protein contents of animal feedstuffs without compromising animal performance or welfare. Dairy cow research at AFBI suggests that reducing phosphorus excretion by reducing the phosphorus content of feedstuffs could reduce farm phosphorus surplus by up to 23%.

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- Slurry processing solutions offer an opportunity to break the link between animal feeding practices, land spreading of animal manures and water quality. Therefore, we are progressing the Sustainable Use of Livestock Slurry (SULS) initiative, with the Small Business Research Initiative (SBRI), Phase One projects having recently concluded in September with £600,000 awarded to NI companies to identify sustainable solutions for livestock slurry. Planning for Phase Two is currently underway.
- Going forward we also intend to provide up to £4.5m of capital grant support for investments in separation and processing technologies to extract nutrients from livestock manures and anaerobic digestate. Through SULS we aim to increase sustainable processing of livestock slurry to separate excess phosphorus and generate renewable energy. Although the structure of Phase Two is being developed, it is likely that its implementation will be over the next 3 years.

These examples help to demonstrate our desire to be innovative and ambitious within the available resources and policy direction set by previous ministers. We do however recognize the need for further ambition as we prepare new proposals for an incoming minister and look forward to updating you in due course.

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