



**Northern Ireland  
Assembly**

**COMMITTEE FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Please use this form to submit written submissions in relation to the Rural Needs Bill. Return to [committee.agriculture@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:committee.agriculture@niassembly.gov.uk)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation: (if applicable) DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

It is important that guidance, advice and training is provided at the introduction of the legislation and that appropriate reporting mechanisms are in place. It would be helpful if a mechanism was in place to share best practice and signpost key information, such as that provided by NISRA.

**Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (OPONI)**

In an organisation of this size, attempting to logistically deal with human rights proofing, equality impact assessments, regulatory impact assessments, as well as common law requirements (and Trade Union consultation) when considering amending one of over one hundred policies is difficult.

Whilst the introduction of a rural impact assessment may be of assistance in certain instances (particularly in central government), I would have some concerns over the need for OPONI to be specified as an appropriate body. In times when we are being warned to prepare for further cuts, the introduction of a further layer of 'assessment' for each policy, the need to train staff how to use it and the cost of such training should be factored in. On a more fundamental level, the Executive itself should consider an assessment tool which would operate as a 'one-stop-shop' for policy persons when considering policies. Whilst there may be government departments with staff responsible for 'policy', OPONI was forced due to cuts to remove its Policy Directorate altogether. This makes us all the more susceptible to challenge regarding policies (whether from within or outside the organisation).

With regards to the specific query on clause 1(2)(c) and 1(3), I do not believe that OPONI would be an appropriate body. Having read the Explanatory Memorandum, it appears that the policy focus is on those bodies which deal with 'major policies and strategies'. Any changes to OPONI legislation are determined by the Department. Any changes to OPONI finances are determined by the Department. It is not appropriate for OPONI, given its size and specific role in NI, to be required to statutorily rural proof all of its policies. Whilst we will continue to consider the needs of rural NI in appropriate circumstances (as advised in the OFMDFM policy toolkit), the limitations outlined above would cause some concern to OPONI being mandated to consider rural-proofing on every occasion.

### **PROBATION BOARD FOR NORTHERN IRELAND (PBNI)**

PBNI is supportive of the intent behind the Rural Needs Bill and as a community based organisation are aware of perceived disadvantages in rural communities in relation to access to services delivered to the public such as transport and health. Our concern is that rural proofing should not be applied to all policies within an organisation, we would prefer to see targeted rural proofing in areas such as the design and delivery of services delivered directly to the public. The majority of PBNI's organisational policies concern the use of IT, application of Health and Safety legislation and Human Resource policies/procedures (based on good practice and employment law). These policies will apply regardless of location and therefore requiring rural proofing will have little or no benefit.

Policies that affect delivery of services in the community would appear to benefit most from rural proofing. We suggest the following amendment:

- 1.—(1) A public authority must consider rural needs when—**  
(a) developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, that affect the  
(b) design and delivery of public services.'

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