



**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)**

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**Date:** 19 November 15

TADA Rural Support Network fully supports the Rural Needs Bill and is willing the bill through Assembly. We believe that the Rural Needs Bill will ensure that policy decisions take account fully of rural areas and that decision makers should be held accountable.

In commenting here please note we are speaking without legal guidance and knowledge so these are our opinions:

Duty of public authorities to consider rural needs

- 1.1. A public authority must consider give due regard to rural needs when: we feel the word consider does not carry enough weight but we are will to run with this as this might bring public authority's on board.

a) developing, adopting, implementing, monitoring or revising policies, strategies and plans and budgets. Whilst monitoring might be implicit we wish it to be more explicit, likewise service delivery is dependent on budget allocation so we want to see rural areas receiving their fair share although this might be difficult to measure.

b) designing and delivering public services and consulting with rural people

1.2.c any other person specified in an order made by the Department

We appreciate that the Bill will start with Government Departments and Councils but we are keen to hear which organisations exactly will the bill extend to? We appreciate there will be further consultation on this and we will await this with interest but at this stage will Arms Length Bodies be included?

Guidance, advice and information, etc.

2 The Department may will take such steps as appear to it to be appropriate to-

a) provide any person with guidance, training, advice and information about issues connected with rural needs or ways of meeting those needs

3 Monitoring and reporting

We want to be sure that the Bill is being effective on an ongoing basis so can this section be strengthened in some way. We appreciate there are no sanctions envisaged for noncompliance but how can the committee ensure public bodies will take their responsibilities seriously. A copy of the report being laid before the Assembly – can this be more transparent? Add - the minister to provide an annual statement to the assembly on the impact of rural proofing so that there is a continual review and it is being aired/discussed as a live issue on the floor of the Assembly.

Co-operation with other bodies

4 The Department must make arrangements with public authorities with a view to securing co-operation and the exchange of information between public authorities to highlight good practice

#### 6 Interpretation

Rural needs means the social and economic needs of persons in rural areas – does this take account of needs such as: health, housing, education and environmental?

To date rural proofing has not been working consistently across government. It is left to the discretion of each Department because it is a voluntary commitment. To date rural proofing is like an add on to policy decision making – make the policy and check it out for rural proofing as an afterthought. This is not fair on rural dwellers who are one third of the population.

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Date received: 23/11/2015

Ref Number: RNB Sub11