



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Please use this form to submit written submissions in relation to the Rural Needs Bill.

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Organisation: (if applicable) DCAL

Date: November 2015

DCAL ARTS BRANCH

Arts Branch already takes in to account rural needs as per the current rural proofing requirements when developing new policy, so the statutory requirement to do so will have minimum impact.

ARTS COUNCIL NI

Clause 1 (Duty of Public Authorities to consider rural needs)

As a matter of course, the Arts Council reflects the needs of rural communities as part of its policy development processes. These needs are considered informally and within the context of the strategy or policy being developed. The rationale for engagement is based on evidence demonstrating lower levels of arts engagement, by people living in rural areas compared to those living in urban areas.

This approach was adopted when developing key programmes including the Arts and Older People Programme and Building Peace through the Arts.

The Arts Councils strategic Five Year Plan reflects this inconsistency and aims to increase the proportion of arts activities in rural areas by creating greater opportunities for marginalised rural communities to engage in the arts, particularly through participation based planning.

There is an underlying need to ensure that any requirements placed on ALBs reflect the resources available to them to deliver additional duties. Available budgets for stakeholder engagement exercises, required to establish need are limited and reflect the more constrained financial times we are operating in.

Similarly, the capacity of rural stakeholders to engage in consultation exercises must be recognised and reflected in terms of both the methods used to consult and frequency of consultations.

An over reliance on statistical evidence to quantify the extent and nature of need runs the risk of over simplifying associated issues. For example, the Noble Indices of Deprivation (2010) has been demonstrated to be less effective at identifying deprivation within a rural context. Ultimately, a balanced approach is required which reflects the need for both qualitative and quantitative evidence gathered through networks, some of which, are unique to the arts and have taken many years to establish.

Subsection (2)(c) and Clause 1, Subsection (3) and

No comment

Potential implications of the statutory duty to consider rural needs being extended to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

As described above, the primary concern would relate to the availability of resources to fulfil the necessary requirements within a policy development context. Requirements would need to be proportionate to available resources and avoid being too prescriptive; we already have established methods for engaging with stakeholders within rural areas.

NI SCREEN

NI Screen already takes into consideration the needs of those living in rural areas when designing funding programmes. All education programmes currently delivered directly by NI Screen (i.e. Digital Film Archive Outreach) and those funded by NI Screen (e.g. Into Film; Creative Learning Centre activities) must include rural groups as part of their target audience. This fulfils their 'Targeting Social Needs' obligation.

All of NI Screen's funding programmes and sector activity are open to all, and they advertise the availability of these programmes and funding opportunities as widely as possible to ensure that everyone, including those living in rural areas have equal opportunity to partake.

DCAL SPORTS BRANCH

While subsection 2c allows for 'any other person specified in an order made by the Department', consideration could be given to specifying 'Arms length Bodies' and Non Departmental Public Bodies as a specific section under Section 2.

The Branch recognises that there will be a potential for impact on existing and future policies. While the current Sport Matters Strategy includes rural communities indirectly, rural communities and areas are not specifically mentioned within the Strategy. It will be necessary to review this Strategy at an appropriate time to take account of the Rural Needs Bill.

SPORT NI

The Rural Needs Bill requires Public authorities to consider rural needs. However, Sport NI notes that the Rural Needs Bill does not provide any parameters by which these considerations are to be acted upon. It does give the Department (new DERA) the power to issue guidance and advice on the same.

Sport NI also notes that Arms Length Bodies are not included in the definition of Public Authorities but believe this is addressed in Subsection 2c.

At this time Sport NI feels there may be a potential for impact upon Sport NI's existing and future policies and as such Sport NI may have to carry out a review of all policies taking the Rural Needs Bill into consideration or include this in the planning process for new policies

LIBRARIES NI

Libraries NI will be making a submission response as well as sending this information to DCAL.

Libraries NI has produced Rural Impact Assessments, as well as EQUIAs, as part of the consultation process for e.g. the new opening hours policy and proposals, the Strategic Review (Stage 2) of library provision etc. This has proved beneficial.

Our strong view is that all public bodies should be required to rural proof not simply Government departments and councils.

NATIONAL MUSEUMS NI

Clause 1: Duty of public authorities to consider rural needs

2 (c)

- National Museums Northern Ireland (NMNI) welcomes the commitment to a fair and inclusive rural society where rural dwellers enjoy the same quality of life as all others in the region. NMNI accepts the need to be part of this process as a Non-Departmental Public Body and believes that consideration of rural needs is intrinsic to the ambition of being a fair and inclusive society.

Clause 2: Guidance, advice and information, etc.

- Environmental Data sets relating to NI are collated, managed and disseminate by CEDaR.

Clause 3: Monitoring and reporting

- NMNI hosts the Centre for Environmental Data Recording (CEDaR), funded by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. CEDaR now has a more definable role within the planning process and will, with the joining together of DoE and DARD, be the mechanism through which information on priority species and habitats of Northern Ireland will be disseminated for policy purposes, e.g., when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans and so forth.
- Environmental Data, if required, for monitoring and reporting is available through the Information Request Form on the CEDaR website.

Clause 4: Co-operation with other bodies

- CEDaR currently co-operates and exchanges information with other public bodies.

Financial Effects of the Bill

- NMNI would be concerned about the financial effects of the Bill. Additional administrative requirements will place a further burden on the organisation which is a concern in the current economic environment.

GENERAL COMMENTS

- Whilst NMNI is supportive of the commitments and aspirations of the Bill, we would wish to see further clarification in relation to the detailed requirements of Clause 1.

ARMAGH OBSERVATORY

- The Observatory currently has only limited direct engagement with issues associated with rural needs, and so there is bound to be an additional cost on the organization (and hence DCAL) if such engagement is to become a statutory duty.
- Costs (mostly associated with the Observatory's programme of Science in the Community) might include:
- Costs of access to the Observatory (e.g. through visits and guided tours) by members of Rural Communities) so they are able to access the Armagh Observatory's services and facilities in the same way as other organizations and/or members of the public, for example, by:
 - arranging transport and a special guided tour/visit of the Observatory and/or its Grounds, Astropark and Human Orrery;
 - paying for the time and T&S of a member of staff to travel into the rural community to deliver a public talk and/or other public presentation on astronomy or some other topic related to the

Observatory, its history and/or the scientific heritage of Northern Ireland.

- The Observatory already does this as part of its programme of Science in the Community, though the programme is likely to be increasingly constrained owing to further funding cuts if these materialise next year.
- Two important areas that may overlap with the interests and objectives of those promoting the bill are (A) the Observatory's desire to promote further knowledge and understanding of the impact (on flora and fauna, and on human health and well-being) of unnecessary outdoor lighting (light pollution), especially in rural areas; and (B) the promotion of dark-sky parks in NI, for example the area around Oxford Island (Lough Neagh) and the Beaghmore Stone Circles and Davagh Forest (Co. Tyrone). In particular,
 - Strenuous efforts should be made to avoid increasing light pollution in rural areas of Northern Ireland. Levels of background artificial light in the country are currently very good, and on clear nights it is still easily possible to see faint stars and the Milky Way.
 - The view of a really dark sky is an inspirational experience that helps to attract people towards science and to a scientific way of thinking; indeed, different communities and societies at all times and in all countries of the world have used their shared view of the night sky to provide a grounding for the cosmological context in which they view themselves. We were able to develop this quite recently as part of our "Beyond Limits" (Leverhulme Trust funded Artist in Residence project) when we had a range of events last month associated with the visit of an Aboriginal Artist to the Observatory.
 - The ability to view an unpolluted, dark night sky is also one of the most important aspects of life in the countryside, one of the many positive features of the natural environment that help to attract people to Northern Ireland, whether as passing visitors or tourists staying for weeks at a time, and so helps to contribute to a growing and more dynamic rural economy. Dark Skies can lead to significant economic growth in rural areas through eco-tourism.
 - There may be a push as a consequence of the Rural Needs bill to "devolve" certain activities outside of Belfast wherever possible, so bringing them more closely within the reach of the otherwise isolated individuals, farmers and rural communities that are the main focus of support in the Rural Needs bill.
 - This may be illustrated by a question that is asked of us from time to time, that is, whether we are planning to exhibit the Observatory at the Balmoral Show. Why, I wonder, should one exhibit only at the Belfast-centred Balmoral show, when there are so many other excellent one-day agricultural shows around Northern Ireland, for example the Armagh Show (Co. Armagh) and the Clogher Valley Show (Co. Tyrone), and no doubt others as well!

- Again, improvements to the rural communities these shows serve could easily be made, but at some cost (not large) to the Observatory as an ongoing strand of its programme of Science in the Community.

In summary, the Rural Needs bill may provide positive benefits for those living in rural communities, but only if the full costs of such engagement are committed to and funded through programmatic support for ALBs such as the Armagh Observatory.

WATERWAYS IRELAND

Clause 1: Subsection 2(c) and 3

Prescribed statutory duty imposed on public authorities to consider rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans and designing and delivering public services.

The Bill as drafted does not currently impose a requirement on Waterways Ireland to consider rural needs without the introduction of an Order laid before the Assembly. Notwithstanding this legal position, Waterways Ireland will continue to work proactively to ensure its work programmes and policies consider rural needs, and to assess the delivery of these needs on a periodic basis in accordance with issued guidance on rural proofing.

Any future statutory duty imposed on Waterways Ireland to consider rural needs is unlikely to change the way in which the body currently develops, adopts, implements or revises policies, strategies and plans nor is it to impact upon how we design and deliver public services.

The 1000 km reach and geographic spread of the navigational network, associated linear land corridors and regional offices and depots means that rural communities and their needs are central to the body's interests in terms of promoting access and development opportunities to benefit from the inland waterways. Waterways Ireland will continue to engage rural populations to ensure their needs are considered in future policies and programmes, and additionally work in partnership with local authorities and other bodies to pool resources and expertise and in doing so, realise share aspirations to meet rural needs.

Waterways Ireland currently reports on policies matters and work programmes in its Annual Report, and herewith undertakes to examine future departmental requests for specific reporting on rural needs as required.

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