



**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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The Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS) is supportive of the need for change in line with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's aspirations. We strongly endorse the decision taken on behalf of the Department to put rural proofing on a statutory footing.

CCBS considers this proposed legislation to be a constructive development towards ensuring the effective implementation of rural proofing across all Executive Departments, district councils and other public authorities. Evidence provided by rural stakeholders points to a growing concern that existing practices of rural proofing have consistently failed to deliver for rural communities. We maintain that existing rural proofing practices have proven unsuccessful due to a lack of due attention given by policy makers within other Departments and a failure on the part of other Departments, local councils and non-departmental public bodies to recognise that rural issues extend beyond the remit of DARD.

CCBS further welcomes any legislation which helps address the needs of rural communities, particularly rural populations in the border region, who face unique challenges as regards to access to public services, infrastructure provision, rural and urban connectivity, business growth and unemployment. Tackling these challenges and delivering outcomes for rural communities requires fundamentally effective rural proofing to ensure that their specific needs are considered during policy-making processes and to provide that any adverse impacts upon rural areas are effectively mitigated, thereby improving the quality of life for rural citizens.

While CCBS supports the need for a statutory duty to be placed on all government departments, we also maintain that the wording of the statutory duty should explicitly require the relevant duty holders to mitigate any adverse impacts should they be identified when developing new or existing policies or strategies.

Clause 1 of the Rural Needs Bill notes the duty of public authorities to "consider rural needs" when adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies, plans and designing and delivering public services. CCBS contends that the statutory duty should oblige duty holders to mitigate adverse impacts, where those are identified. Our concern here is that the statutory duty, currently worded as "to consider rural needs" (1.1) risks the prospect of having the needs of rural communities considered but without compelling any action to mitigate adverse impacts identified.

CCBS strongly endorses the position that DARD should have a statutory role to promote and encourage other bodies to undertake rural proofing. When other bodies are developing new or existing policies, strategies or plans and designing or changing public services, DARD's duty to promote and encourage rural proofing should take the form of being a first point of contact for these policy makers. DARD must also ensure policy makers are provided with the necessary resources to implement rural proofing, including the development of rural proofing training programmes.

CCBS welcomes the proposed monitoring and reporting arrangements for DARD to produce and publish regular rural proofing reports to be laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly. We believe such measures would help improve the transparency of information on rural proofing, which will in turn facilitate and encourage the effective implementation of this process across departments, local councils and NDPBs.

CCBS strongly endorses the view that increased co-operation and collaboration between DARD, other Executive Departments and NDPBs is essential for ensuring that rural proofing leads to developing real outcomes for rural communities.

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