

AERA Committee Meeting Update – Thursday 28 May 2020

Food & Farming Group Input

Covid-19 update

Single Application

- On 30 March 2020, the Minister confirmed that the closing date for the 2020 Single Application would remain as 15 May 2020. Northern Ireland is the only region in the United Kingdom which makes direct payments in October. Any extension to the application period could have delayed payments in October 2020. However, the period during which farmers can amend claims without penalty has been extended to 09 June 2020.
- The Direct Payments to Farmers Amendment Date (Amendment) (Coronavirus) Regulations (NI) 2020 will provide for this extension. They are made under the negative resolution procedure and come into operation on 31 May.
- The deadline for the Single Application has now passed. By midnight on 15 May, 24,494 applications had been received compared with 24,432 in 2019. An additional 170 late applications were received in 2019. It is considered unlikely that the same number of late applications will be received this year. To 19 May, 33 late applications had been received.
- A total of 1,186 Farm Businesses availed of the enhanced digital assistance service. This service will remain in place to assist farmers and agents to amend applications.
- On 4 May, the deadline for the transfer of BPS entitlements expired. By that stage, 5,994 entitlements transfers had been completed, compared to 4,745 in 2019. Farmers were able to submit applications to DAERA staff over the telephone and no difficulties have been reported.
- A derogation has been announced to remove the Greening crop diversification requirement for 2020 because of adverse weather conditions earlier in the year. This is in line with action taken by England, Scotland and Wales. Other Greening requirements remain.
- The Direct Payments to Farmers (Crop Diversification Derogation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2020 will provide for this derogation. They were made under the confirmatory procedure and were approved by the Assembly on 19 May 2020.
- All inspections have been paused until at least mid-May. Consideration is being given to how these can begin again on a phased basis whilst minimising any potential risk to staff or customers. Whistleblower inspections have recommenced in relation to potential breaches of cross compliance, site visits are considered on a case by case basis.
- The fourth Tranche of the Environmental Farming Scheme Higher level, opened for applications on 24 April 2020 for 3 weeks. 966 applications were received by the deadline on 15 May. Applications are being prioritised.
- The Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS), the DAERA farm mapping system, continues to be updated as normal and changes requested by farmers are being applied to facilitate more accurate claims.

Covid-19 – Current key issues for Agri-food sector

1. NI Executive allocation of £25m for market interventions to support Farm and Horticultural Businesses.

Position – On Friday 22 May 2020 the AERA Committee received an update from Minister Poots on the £25m funding for market interventions to support Farm and Horticultural Businesses.

2. While supply chains are still working effectively there still remains concerns across all stakeholders that staff availability for work could decline quickly as fear of contracting the virus remains within workforce.

Position – Output from the sector remains at 100% of demand, with levels of absenteeism reported as remaining relatively low. Following commencement of Covid-19 testing for key workers, this has been used successfully by staff within the meat and dairy processing sectors. However industry representatives have raised concerns that the response time has increased.

3. Agriculture price fall or product flow disruption - Large and sudden fall in incomes is a significant threat to otherwise viable farm businesses. Farm incomes could fall due to Covid-19 related fall in market prices, or if farmers can't get product to market. No problems with flow of product from or to (non-horticultural) farms has arisen yet. The most likely source of disruption to flow of produce from farms is food processing production lines having to close due to high levels of absenteeism. This risk seems to be abating. The latest market statistics showed beef prices have been stable since the beginning of the year but started to fall during March with the average steer price reaching a low point of £3.15/kg for the week ending 25 April (down 16p/kg on March prices). Since then prices have increased to £3.22/kg and it is expected that forthcoming statistics will show further increases as weekly quotes have been improving and are now back to early March levels. Lamb prices fell by 40p/kg six weeks ago but have since recovered to prior levels. The latest GDT auction (19 May) for milk products showed an increase of 1.0% from the previous auction (skim milk powder up 6.7%, cheddar down 6.0%, butter down 1.9%). There are concerns over future NI milk prices but currently no reports of any disruptions to milk collections from NI farms. Lakeland dairies has announced a base price of 23p/litre for April milk (down 0.75p/litre on March and 2.25p/litre on February cumulatively). Dale Farm have also announced a base price of 23p/litre for April milk (down 1p/litre on March and 2p/litre on February cumulatively). Other firms that have announced price drops include Glanbia Cheese (0.5p/litre for April milk), Glanbia Ireland (0.5p/litre for April milk) and Aurivo (1.25p/litre for March milk).

Position – DAERA is continuing to monitor market conditions, liaise with DEFRA and other DA's, and work is ongoing to develop support schemes for farmers.

4. Financial pressures continue to impact across supply chains as markets adapt to the changing trading environment. For example, loss of food service markets, certain export markets, reduced productivity in processing plants and increases in some input costs like animal feed. Industry has called for financial support measures including grants, rates relief, loans and EU (CMO) schemes.

Position – DAERA continues to work closely with industry to assess the potential impacts on the supply chain, and to explore mitigation measures if required. DAERA are also in regular contact with the other Devolved Administrations and have written to DEFRA seeking a commitment from UKG to provide enhanced funding to address the challenges that lie ahead.

5. Many horticulture businesses producing and selling spring bedding plants, cut flowers and ornamentals rely on sales at this time of year. There is a narrow window for sales and a short shelf life for the product with 60% of annual sales occurring in spring. These businesses face huge financial loss.

Position - Enabling people to visit garden centres while remaining safe, will provide a much needed injection of cash to these businesses and their suppliers and will go some way towards helping the sector recoup some of its losses. DAERA Officials will continue to monitor the impacts of COVID-19 on the horticulture sector over the next few weeks to assess the level of financial support required.

6. As with private sector workers, there is concern that a shortage of workers in key roles within Government/Agencies with statutory inspection roles to protect public health, could lead to a slow down or halt in food processing capacity. This would limit not only the amount of product available but also have knock on effects at farm level.

Position – DAERA are reprioritising workstreams in light of the pressures created by Covid-19 to maintain key services.

7. NI livestock markets took the decision to shut (initially for 2 weeks) in an attempt to raise the importance of social distancing among farmers. This followed continued high numbers of farmers attending markets despite warnings and pleas from farming unions.

On the 27th April, Livestock Markets started to reopen on a gradual basis, in line with robust operational protocols, developed by the Marts in conjunction with the Health and Safety Executive NI and stakeholders. The protocols have enabled the Marts to conduct business in a manner that is safe for staff, farmers and buyers. As part of the ongoing review of these protocols, sales of breeding stock are now permitted.

Sales that would normally create large gatherings and require sellers to be in attendance, such as Pedigree Livestock sales, are still not permitted under this review of protocols. However, Livestock Markets can submit proposals to the Livestock Market Industry Stakeholder group for these sales to take place on a case by case basis.

The operational protocols agreed by the Livestock Market Industry Stakeholder Group make it clear that only Mart staff and a limited number of pre-registered buyers are allowed on Mart premises during sales.

College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE)

- Education programmes at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) are continuing with remote delivery of learning materials and currently students are in the final stages of completing their studies and online assessments / examinations. During the COVID-19 restrictions college lecturing staff have been actively engaging with students to ensure the academic year is completed and students achieve their qualifications.
- CAFRE Knowledge Advisory Service Advisers and Technologists are available to provide advisory support to the Northern Ireland Agri-Food industry to assist farmers and food businesses with technical, business and environmental advice during the COVID-19 crisis. Technical articles, videos and webinars have been made available online and promoted through social media channels to support those sectors of the agri-food industry most impacted by COVID-19.
- CAFRE are progressing the development of recovery plans, in line with the Executive's five stage plan on the lifting of the COVID-19 restrictions, for the future delivery of education

programmes during the next academic year and the enhanced provision of knowledge advisory programmes to the agri-food industry.

- CAFRE's residential facilities continue to be used by the Department of Health as part of their contingency planning with health workers using Enniskillen and Greenmount Campuses for overnight accommodation.
- CAFRE have made available over 20,000 coveralls and other Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to the Health and Social Care Trusts and colleagues in Veterinary Service Animal Health Group.

Update on Essential Legislation

- The Agriculture Bill's Report Stage and Third Reading took place in the House of Commons on 13 May. Defra expects Second Reading in the House of Lords to be in week commencing 1 June.

Veterinary Service & Animal Health Group

Covid-19 Update

Delivery of Official Controls

- The delivery of official controls, that is, ante mortem and post mortem inspections, verification of food business operators' compliance with hygiene, animal health and welfare requirements continues in all slaughterhouses. All slaughterhouses are working normally with full throughput maintained.
- Following the reported development of Covid-19 clusters in meat establishments, VSAHG officials continue to actively engage with the Public Health Agency, Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI) and the industry to ensure adherence with PHA advice and guidance in all food processing establishments.
- **Current Position**
- Risk based sampling of third country imports of feed ingredients for undesirable substances has recommenced.
- In conjunction with FSANI, AFIB feed inspectorate are developing a protocol for remote delivery of official controls on farm primary production hygiene inspections.
- A number of remote checks have commenced to verify aspects of carcass classification in both bovine and porcine slaughtering plants. These include the remote viewing of data and selected beef carcass images to verify accuracy of carcass classification, cold carcass weight calculation and deadweight price reporting data.

- To date applications for Private Storage Aid in Northern Ireland have been approved for 1568t of cheese and 455t of butter. AFIB Inspectors are carrying out the required physical checks on behalf of the Rural Payments Agency (RPA).

Bovine TB Programme

- From the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, revised temporary measures for bovine TB (bTB) testing have been introduced, based upon the principles that:
 - (i) testing should not take place except in exceptional circumstances; and
 - (ii) the primacy of public health requirements.
- The new measures are designed to safeguard the health and well-being of farmers, veterinary practitioners and staff, maintain animal and public health controls and ease the burden on farmers.
- **Current Position**
- Following implementation of temporary measures announced by the Minister on 30/4/20, the number of herds and animals receiving a bovine TB test is improving. As a result more bTB tests can now take place safely and the risk of increased animal and herd bTB incidence levels is reduced.
- At the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, in week commencing 13th April 2020, only 44% of herds and 41% of animals were tested, compared with the equivalent week in 2019.
- In week commencing 4th May 2020, TB tests were completed for 81% of herds and 78% of animals were tested when compared to the equivalent week in May 2019.
- VSAHG officials continue to monitor the implementation of the new bTB testing measures.

Trade Export Certification

- From the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, a number of easements in relation to export health certificates for exports of live animals and products of animal origin to Australia, Gibraltar and the United States of America have been introduced. In addition, all commodities from the United Kingdom (UK) to China will be accepted on the basis of a digitally transmitted copy of the Export Health Certificate (EHC) issued in advance of the arrival of the consignment.
- Such arrangements help to minimise the need for face-to-face interaction between private veterinary practitioners, exporters and DAERA staff.
- **Current Position**
- The first consignments of fish exported to China under the new easements have arrived successfully in that country.
- With effect from 27th May 2020, further third country easements for exports to Myanmar will be implemented. The easements will allow the issue of an Export Health Certificate on white paper

instead of crown vellum and will assist in providing more flexibility for the administrative processes, thus helping to keep trade moving.

- International trade is a reserved matter. DAERA veterinary officials work closely with DEFRA colleagues within technical fora to progress the development and agreement of export health certificates (EHCs) with countries outside the EU. The NI red meat industry are keen to leverage opportunities in the US & Chinese markets. This week, Minister Poots engaged with the DEFRA Secretary of State to press for progress in relation to the global export aspirations of the Northern Ireland beef and lamb industries.

Import Controls

- The staff resource in Larne and Belfast Ports has been increased to deliver a wider range of biosecurity inspections. Front line inspectors who have been forced to self-isolate are now assisting with other high priority work from home.

Animal Welfare

- Work is continuing to quantify the need for funding to support Northern Ireland zoo establishments and to inform considerations on the development and administration of a scheme in Northern Ireland similar to that launched recently by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
- The Department has also received correspondence from the British Horse Society, as well as horse riding establishments, seeking guidance on how the recent changes to the Coronavirus Regulations impact on the operation of these establishments. Officials are analysing the recent amendments and expect to respond to the correspondence received in the coming days.

Update on Essential Legislation

- Work on essential legislation continues but at a slower pace given the diversion of resource to COVID related work. This diversion, alongside the potential for additional COVID related absences, means that there is a risk that legislation may not be completed within the required timescales and/or to standard.

**Northern Ireland Environment Agency and
Environment, Marine & Fisheries Group**

ENVIRONMENT UPDATE

Covid 19 Update

Waste Management Collection, Storage and Processing

- DAERA continues to deliver the key public health and environmental protection messages around waste management during the pandemic including bin hygiene, respect for key workers, the importance of recycling and warning against fly-tipping.
- The communications campaign devised alongside the DAERA Press Office around littering, with particular focus on littered PPE, has been continuing and will do so over the next few weeks.
- Following on from last week's announcement by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, as of 22nd May, there are 55 Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs) open across Northern Ireland with further sites expected to re-open in a phased manner over the coming weeks.
- The WRAP NI Covid-19 communications strategy is ongoing.

Maintaining Drinking Water Quality

- NI Water's ongoing provision of safe drinking water and effective waste water treatment continues to be prioritised and regulated by NIEA and its Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI).
- NI Water continues to maintain the required drinking water standards and wastewater discharge standards. DWI and NIEA are working NI Water, as they move to implement their Analytical Services Roll Back Plan reintroducing some regulatory monitoring, to ensure effective prioritisation of higher risk areas and continued public health protection.
- The Drinking Water Inspectorate, in the absence of monitoring due to social distancing and site access restrictions have provided specific advice and guidance to priority sites based on the analysis of information from risk assessments.
- DWI continue to work with health professionals and local council Environmental Health Departments to establish the vulnerability and health based needs of individuals where private water supplies are insufficient and have run dry. Through agreement with DWI, NI Water continue to provide mutual aid through the provision of bottled water.
- An interview was conducted with BBC's Farm Gate programme with DWI in relation to guidance for businesses making plans to reopen and the steps they need to take to ensure water quality is maintained.

Future Viability of Environmental NGOs

- The Department has continued to engage with eNGOs regarding the impact of the COVID-19 and a further meeting between eNGO representatives and senior officials has been held.
- The Department is working with Northern Ireland Environment Link to issue a second survey to get an update of the impact of COVID-19 on the eNGO sector.

Country Parks and Nature Reserves

- The Department are making the necessary arrangements for DAERA-owned forests and country parks to gradually lift restrictions on a phased basis, starting with the re-opening of car parks on Wednesday 27 May. Other on-site DAERA facilities such as toilets, visitor centres, cafes and playparks will remain closed and their re-opening will be considered at a later stage

- Following discussions facilitated by the Department, many other organisations including councils, have now indicated that they too, will begin to reopen the car parks at many of their outdoor properties on 27 May.

Air Quality

- The Northern Ireland Air app, which was launched on 7 May 2020, was downloaded 252 times within the first week of launch. Officials continue to publicise the App through a number of channels.

Update on Essential Legislation: Environment Bill

- The Public Bill Committee scrutinising the Bill at Westminster has suspended all activity until further notice. The [UK Parliament website](#) states that: *“The Committee is now scheduled to report by 25 June 2020.”* A further delay beyond this date is possible.

Update on Essential Finance or Budget information

- Following a bid from the Department, the Executive has allocated funding of £3.8m to local government in Northern Ireland to meet the additional cost of waste management during the COVID-19 crisis. This funding will help cover the costs of the treatment, disposal and collection of waste including the additional costs arising from flytipping.

Environment, Marine & Fisheries Group

FISHERIES UPDATE

Covid 19 Update

Fisheries - Sea Fishing Sector

- On 3 April 2020 the Minister announced that the Department would proceed with a scheme of financial support for the sea fish catching sector. This required secondary legislation made under section 15 of the Fisheries Act 1981.
- The Statutory Rule was made and laid at the Assembly on Monday 4 May 2020 and came into operation on 5 May 2020. The Scheme is known as the Sea Fish Industry (Coronavirus) (Fixed Costs) Scheme (NI) 2020.
- A motion to confirm the Scheme by the Assembly must be debated within 3 months of making the Scheme, which in effect is by summer recess. The date for the motion will be determined by the Business Committee, at some date subsequent to the report on the SR by the Examiner of Statutory Rule, and then consideration by the AERA Committee.
- Letters of Invitation to apply for the scheme were issued to 162 vessel owners and 81 letters of ineligibility were issued during April. To date, 145 applications have been returned and 47 appeals have also been received.

- 145 Letters of Offer and Claim Forms have been issued, with 126 returned by 19th May. As of 21st May, the Department has made payments to vessel owners totalling £740,000.

Aquaculture Sector

- The Minister has agreed to fund a scheme to support the aquaculture industry of up to £360k, covering the months of March through to May, which will draw on the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund.
- Preparations for launching the scheme are in progress, including finalising the Business Case, letters of invite and the application process. The Minister plans to announce the scheme during the week beginning 25 May.

Public Angling Estate

- The Public Angling Estate (PAE) opened on 18 May with anglers advised to stay local and observe social distancing measures. No issues have been highlighted to date regarding the opening of the estate.
- The carparks will open up on 27 May. Inland Fisheries staff will be prioritising the checking of any infrastructure in place to make sure no damage has been caused during the closed period.
- The Department has engaged with the Executive and the DoH to request that other private angling enterprises can open as soon as possible to complement the opening of the public estate.

Update on Essential Legislation: UK Fisheries Bill

- Nothing new to report.

Update on Essential Finance or Budget information

- Nothing new to report.

Rural Affairs, Forestry Service & Estate Transformations Group

RURAL AFFAIRS RESPONSE TO COVID-19

UPDATE POSITION 22/05/2020

Rural Affairs continues to focus on payments processing and supporting partners. Work continues on the draft Rural Policy Framework.

DAERA DIRECT OFFICES

UPDATE POSITION 22/05/2020

Admin staff continue to work in the DAERA Direct offices on essential services, whilst maintaining social distancing, on a rota basis. The remainder are working from home on PCs and laptops, with secure access to the relevant DAERA databases such as APHIS, NIFAIS, CIS etc.

TACKLING RURAL POVERTY AND SOCIAL ISOLATION (TRPSI)

UPDATE POSITION 22/05/2020

These TRPSI funded initiatives continue to proactively deliver support to rural dwellers. To date, under the Coronavirus Community Fund (CFNI) 123 rural organisations have been supported in total with £328,343 awarded. Some 74 of these have been funded from DAERA's £200k contribution agreed by the DAERA Minister. Also, 9 organisations (3 rural) deemed ineligible by CFNI have now been grant aided through a partnership arrangement between DAERA, DFC and the Rural Community Network, receiving £27,645 in total, an average of £3,071.

Rural Support

UPDATE POSITION 22/05/2020

Rural Support continue to deal with calls and offer support. An on-line resources hub is in development for the farming community and sectors that support the community.

Rural Support are currently adequately resourced to deal with the increase and DAERA officials continue to liaise with them on a very regular basis. The table below provides a comparison of calls to the Rural Support Helpline between 2019 and 2020.

	2019	2020
Jan	39	68
Feb	31	34
March	33	85
April	34	128
May	40	39 (1 st – 15 th May)

Role of Rural Community Transport Partnership (RCTP's)

UPDATE POSITION 22/05/2020

The RCTP's, working in tandem with local Councils and Health Trusts, in delivering services to rural dwellers. This work continues and is still a very effective partnership approach for delivering food, medicine and other services to vulnerable rural dwellers.

SPRING Social Prescribing Project

UPDATE POSITION 22/05/2020

Some 1,537 contacts have been made to vulnerable people and 228 of these people have received other forms of support such as food, medicines etc.

Farm Families Health Check Programme (FFHCP) - COVID-19 Response

UPDATE POSITION 22/05/2020

To date 90 contacts have been made to those 70+ with 82 of these people having received support and advice. As a result of the positive feedback and response to this pilot initiative, the service will now expand into the Western Trust area.

Rural Community Development Support Service

UPDATE POSITION 22/05/2020

The Rural Support Networks have been identified as delivery partners by Councils and all are involved in the community response. DAERA officials continue to meet with the Rural Support Networks on a weekly basis to provide support and advice.

In terms of practical activity on the ground, RSN's have been involved in a wide range of community initiatives including the following:

- 250 food parcels delivered
- 48,500 postcards delivered in local communities
- 700 community groups contacted to review baseline of covid19 impact
- 13,500 pairs of gloves distributed to community groups
- 100 litres of hands sanitiser delivered to 70 community groups
- 100 wellness packs delivered to vulnerable people who are shielded
- 748 flyers distributed
- 1100 E bulletins issued
- 50 groups completed risk assessments

Rural Community Network (RCN) and NI Rural Women's Network (NIRWN)

UPDATE POSITION 22/05/2020

No change from last update

EU LEADER PROGRAMME, TOURISM AND PROJECT STRATUM

LEADER

UPDATE POSITION 22/05/2020

RAD continue to monitor progress on the LEADER and Tourism measures. Issues on access for projects remain as previously advised.

Payments continue to be processed using the easements granted by the EU Commission.

DfE has established a Tourism Recovery Steering Group and Working Group to put in place the structures that will help support recovery and prepare the industry to respond when consumer demand ultimately returns. The Department has representatives sitting on both Groups. The Department is also establishing a Tourism Recovery Advisory Group which will inform and support the work of both the Steering and Working Groups. The Advisory Group will play a key role in contributing to the Tourism sector's recovery post Covid-19 particularly on the emerging issues facing the Department in relation to the rural tourism sector.

PROJECT STRATUM

UPDATE POSITION 22/05/2020

DfE lead on Project Stratum. The bids are being technically appraised and assessed. The project is still on target to issue a contract this financial year.

PROCESSING OF GRANT AID CLAIMS

UPDATE POSITION 22/05/2020

RAD continue to process claims and make payments relating to TRPSI and LEADER.

Rural Development Programme

Programme	March		April		May Paid up to 19/05/2020	
	No of Payees	Amount	No of Payees	Amount	No Payees	Amount
LEADER	59	£1,934,932.61	51	£1,599,568.68	41	£1,348,304.73
Running Costs to LAGS	6	£156,981.39	11	£404,268.06	1	£26,489.12
TOURISM	2	£255,944.91	3	£525,825.49	2	£359,569.55

There are an additional 11 LEADER payments valued at £361,378.92 being processed for payment.

Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation (TRPSI)

Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme 2019				Rural Business Development Grant Scheme			
No.	Claims Paid	Grant Amount Paid		No.	Claims Paid	Grant Amount Paid	
16/3/2020 - 15/5/2020		16/3/20 -15/5/2020		16/3/2020 - 15/5/2020		16/3/20 -15/5/2020	
346		£427,112.24		117		£385,652.16	

Local Community Development Support Service Programme:

£173,000 paid to Rural Support Networks to cover the period 1 April to 30 June 2020.

£70,000 paid in micro grant management fees for the 19/20 scheme.

RURAL POLICY – RECOVERY

UPDATE POSITION 22/05/2020

Work continues on a draft Rural Policy Framework. We still intend to go to consultation later this year.

Forest Service

With the introduction of the Covid-19 lockdown measures and the limiting of travel to essential journeys, access to DAERA forests has been restricted to pedestrians only since 16 March so as to lower the risk of the virus spreading. Forest Service recognise that the forest parks offer substantial scope and desirable outdoor space, which is especially valuable for public health and wellbeing; and with the Ministers announcement on 18 May, Forest Service are currently working towards a re-opening of the car parks from 27 May in line with the Executives 5 step plan to ease restrictions. Much of this work is preparatory and includes new signage and trails to protect the health and safety of staff and meet the Covid-19 guidance on social distancing. Additionally Forest Service staff are also engaging with delivery partners and other recreational providers, in coordinating plans for a wider reopening of car parks across NI on 27 May, to minimise the risk of excessive visitors seeking access to too few reopened parks.

With facilities such as toilets, visitor centres, cafes and playparks remaining closed; visitors are encouraged to take a sensible approach and consider the travel distance when planning their visit to the forests. It remains paramount that people follow any guidance and signage at the parks and continue to adhere to social distancing.

Central Services & Contingency Planning

AFBI Testing

- AFBI in collaboration with Queens University Belfast and Ulster University are supporting the Department of Health's efforts in respect of Covid-19 testing
- An SLA with the Belfast Trust has now been signed.
- Live testing commenced on 21 May 2020.
- Testing will be held at 200 samples per day, for 10 days, rising to 500 for 7 days and ultimately 1000 per day (full capacity) thereafter.
- The release of staff to work on Covid-19 testing is currently planned so as not to impact on the priority animal health and food safety testing programmes. This will, however, be kept under close review.

Update on IT/People

- Laptop configuration and distribution to allow almost all DAERA staff to work from home is nearing completion and will transition to 'normal' operations in the coming weeks. DAERA's digital delivery teams have moved into a recovery and renewal phase of the COVID 19 response providing digital solutions to meet priority Departmental IT needs.

Update on Communications/Engagement/Staff Well Being

- The Covid-19 communications team continues to co-ordinate communications and information flow for staff and stakeholders via a range of media. The team have ran another successful Webex event which had 242 staff in attendance at a Leadership event attended by the Minister. Due to the growing popularity of the Webex events across the Department the communications team have worked with DAERA's Digital Services Division to develop a range of informative "how to" guides to help enable groups within the Department and across the NICS to reach out and chat via video call to as many of their staff and stakeholders as possible. Feedback from this has been extremely positive.
- Alongside these events and updates the team continue to manage the enquiry mailbox and the maintenance of the intranet and internet Covid-19 hubs so that all stakeholders are informed of the latest updates in relation to the DAERA Department.
- The well-being of our staff remains a key priority for DAERA. A wellbeing and resilience session will be provided for all staff on Wednesday 27 May 2020.

Update on Finance

- A Resource DEL bid for a £105m support package was submitted to the Department of Finance (DoF) in March and has since been reviewed and refined. That bid is now classified as a “Marker bid” and a new substantive Support for Farming Sector - Market Intervention Resource DEL Bid of £107.5m was submitted to DoF on 6 May. At its meeting on 18 May, the Executive agreed to allocate £25m for market interventions in the Agri Food Sector. At that meeting, the Executive also agreed to allocate £3.8m to the revised Waste bid of £5.0m.
- Officials are currently in the process of identifying any further potential additional funding from within DAERA to enhance this £25m allocation. Officials are also monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 on the horticulture sector over the next few weeks to assess the level of financial support required.
- The £3.8m allocation from the Executive is to help cover higher waste collection, treatment and disposal costs in Councils. This funding will also help support the additional costs of implementing social distancing measures and ensure that staff across councils are able to fulfil these crucial waste management roles in a safe manner.