

# Written Ministerial Statement

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It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.***

## Regional Development

Narrow Water Bridge Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 and Newry River (Diversion of Navigable Watercourse and Extinguishment of Public Rights of Navigation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013: Decision to Proceed to Make Bridge Orders

*Published at 4.00 pm on Tuesday 9 July 2013*

**Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):** A project to construct a bridge at Narrow Water in Warrenpoint is being taken forward by Louth County Council in partnership with Newry and Mourne District Council. My Department's role is exclusively in relation to the Bridge Orders and it has no direct involvement in delivering this scheme.

The draft Narrow Water Bridge Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 and the draft Newry River (Diversion of Navigable Watercourse and Extinguishment of Public Rights of Navigation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013, are required to deal with the impact of the Narrow Water Bridge proposal on the Newry River, which is a public navigable waterway, as far as it relates to Northern Ireland. These orders will detail the position, dimensions and operating procedures for the bridge and the reasonable requirements for and amendments to navigation rights that need to be put in place to ensure the safety of the travelling public.

Notice of the draft Orders was published in the local Press during weeks commencing 22 and 29 April 2013 and the consultation period ended on 4 June 2013, with a total of 17 letters of objection being received. The majority of the objections were from the local mussel fishermen or those representing or supporting the fishermen.

The main reasons for objections from the mussel fishermen were the loss of navigation rights and the loss of some fishing grounds, arising from the construction of the proposed bridge in navigable waters, the proposed vessel protection systems and proposed extinguishment and diversion of navigation rights; and the restriction of fishing activities resulting from the proposed bridge operating procedures.

Following the submission of objections, Louth County Council has had a series of meetings with some of the objectors, aimed at finding an agreed resolution to the objections. My officials have been fully engaged with the Council throughout this process.

A key issue for me in this process has been the question of whether or not a public inquiry is necessary before I move to a decision on the Bridge Orders. I should emphasise that such a step is only required where I conclude that such a process might add greater substance or clarity to the information available to inform my final decision. In the context of the fact that the original objections were clearly outlined and well articulated, and the additional dialogue between Louth Council and objectors, I concluded that such a step was not necessary.

In addition, I have disclosed the objections to both the Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development and consulted with them on issues that could be said to fall within their competence. Neither Minister has indicated any reason why I should not proceed to make the Orders. The Agriculture Minister also specifically indicated her view that there was no need for a public inquiry.

After carefully considering all objections, the further engagement with Louth Council (following their further meetings with objectors), and the input of my two Executive colleagues, I feel that there are no outstanding issues from my Department's perspective, which would indicate that the orders should not be made. On this basis, it is now my intention to make the necessary Bridge Orders in relation to the Narrow Water Bridge project.