



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee

## Minutes of Proceedings

3 July 2025

Meeting Room, CAFRE Hill Farm

**Present:** Robbie Butler MLA (Chairperson)  
Declan McAleer MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Tom Buchanan MLA  
William Irwin MLA  
Patsy McGlone MLA  
Michelle McIlveen MLA  
Áine Murphy MLA

**Via Zoom:**

**Apologies:** John Blair MLA  
Aoife Finnegan MLA

**In Attendance:** Dr Janice Thompson, Assembly Clerk  
Mr Michael Greer, Clerical Supervisor  
Ms Sarah Preece, Clerical Officer

***The meeting opened in Public Session at 10.18 am with the following Members: Robbie Butler MLA, Declan McAleer MLA, Patsy McGlone MLA and Michelle McIlveen MLA. As the Committee was not quorate at that time, the session started at agenda item 5 and then returned to the planned order.***

**1. Apologies**

As noted above.

**2. Declaration of Interests**

The Chair reminded Members of their responsibility to declare any interests in any of the items under discussion.

William Irwin MLA declared an interest as a partner in a farm business.

**3. Chairperson's Business**

The Chair referred to a Research and Information Service Briefing Paper titled US Trade Tariffs: key changes & initial considerations for Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to revisit the paper following summer recess.

The Chair referred to a Departmental News Release on the Update on Public Consultation for the revised Nutrients Action Programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the draft press release.

The Chair also advised that the Clerk has held an initial meeting with the Assembly Engagement team and will meet with them again in August regarding planning for the event.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed with the way forward regarding planning for the event.

The Chair referred to a draft Media Release in relation to today's Committee Visit to CAFRE Hill Farm.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to issue the press release following the meeting.

The Chair referred to an email from Declan McAleer MLA formally advising the Committee that he intends to take forward a Members' Bill on Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC).

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note and looked forward to engaging further on the Bill in due course.

The Chair referred to correspondence from the Minister regarding his intention to lay the Department's response, by the 3<sup>rd</sup> July, to the OEP's Review of implementation of laws for terrestrial and freshwater protected sites in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note.

The Chair referred to a several procedural matters that required a decision, before the Committee enters summer recess.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to delegate authority regarding Freedom of Information requests during the recess period to the Chair and Deputy Chair.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to deal with any urgent matters during recess by correspondence.

#### **4. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2025 were agreed and signed by the Chair to be published.

**Agreed:** The Minutes were agreed.

#### **5. Matters Arising**

The Chair referred to a response from the Department in relation to Craigmole Road, Garvagh and the details of the NIEA officer's odour assessment visits to the site and the details of the methodology used.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to forward the response onto the individual who raised the complaint.

The Chair referred to a response from Solace NI regarding The Environmental Protection (Single-use Vapes) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Department to encourage Officials to meet with Solace NI as a matter of urgency to discuss the points raised in the letter.

The Chair referred to a response from the Department regarding ongoing odour concerns at Cabragh.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the response from the Department.

## **6. Briefing from the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) – Update on the work at Hill Farm**

The following officials briefed the Committee:

- Mr Mark Scott, Head of Sustainable Land Management Branch, CAFRE
- Mr Albert Johnston, Head of Knowledge Advisory Service, CAFRE

The Officials briefed on the work of CAFRE at the Hill Farm including the importance of Agriculture and NI Farmers to the Northern Ireland Economy; the work CAFRE are doing around the Carbon Strategy; its headline achievements in innovation; and the management of an upland farm, ensuring that commercial viability and sustainability go hand in hand.

CAFRE Officials highlighted that it was accredited with the ‘Leaf Mark’ for the past 18 years, which acknowledges the link between farming and the environment.

A question and answer session then followed and Members queries included the wildfire plan; the use of suitable cross-bred cows in the upland habitat and how they could be overwintered outside; and innovative solutions for peat-free horticulture.

The Chair thanked Officials for their attendance and for hosting the Committee in its Campus.

*Tom Buchanan MLA joined the meeting at 10.12am*

*Áine Murphy MLA joined the meeting at 10.21am*

*William Irwin MLA joined the meeting at 10.28am*

***The Officials left the meeting at 11.06 am***

## **7. Briefing from The Irish Grouse Conservation Trust (IGCT)**

The following witnesses briefed the Committee from the IGCT:

- Mr Ian Glendinning, Managing Director
- Mr Merlin Becker, Headkeeper
- Mr Shane O'Neill, Director
- Mr Jonathan Crawford, Director
- Mr Adrian Morrow, Former Director.

The witnesses briefed on the aim of the IGCT to conserve the grouse population in Northern Ireland and that vermin control was key to this; the Glenwherry Hills Nature Recovery Zone and history of the site at Glenwherry; the creation of a sustainable habitat for the grouse and to work with Government bodies to show best practices regarding upland management.

A question and answer session then followed and Members queries included the management of the vermin species; how Glenwherry fits in the Sustainable Agriculture Programme; the on-the-ground conservation by relevant sporting organisations; and their views on badger control and bTB.

The Chair thanked Officials for their attendance.

***The Officials left the meeting at 11.44 am/pm***

***The Committee suspended at 12.01pm***

***The Committee resumed at 12.08pm***

## **8. Departmental Oral Evidence Session – Update on Mobuoy Remediation**

The following Officials briefed the Committee:

- Mr Keith Bradley, Head of Water Regulation, DAERA
- Ms Claire O'Neill, Project Manager – Mobuoy Remediation Project, DAERA

The Officials briefed on the recent court case of the illegal waste dumping at Mobuoy land fill site; the impact on water safety within the area; the cost to the taxpayer of over £100m to clear the site; the ongoing legal proceedings and the Departmental draft strategy.

A question and answer session then followed and Members queries included, the investigations to determine what waste is buried on the site; sequencing of remediation works to minimise risks of leakage, ongoing monitoring; and the potential of cost sharing for the remediation works.

The Chair thanked Officials for their attendance.

***The Officials left the meeting at 12:23pm***

## **9. Dilapidation Bill**

The Committee considered and agreed the draft questions for the Citizen Space survey.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to that the Survey be published on Citizen Space and will run from the 7<sup>th</sup> July to 10<sup>th</sup> October 2025.

The Committee considered a draft Media Release on the Call for Evidence on the Dilapidation Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to publish the press release.

The Committee considered a list of potential stakeholders in relation to the Dilapidation Bill.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the Committee team to contact the stakeholders during summer recess to alert them to the Citizen Space Survey.

The Committee considered a letter from the Department regarding the Delegated Powers Memorandum.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to delegate responsibility for the scrutiny of the Bill to the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

#### **10. Departmental Written Briefing - Update on Recommendations from Review Group re the Review of the list of Bodies and Persons set out in the Schedule to the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016**

The Committee considered the briefing paper regarding its review of the list of bodies and persons set out in the Schedule to the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

The Committee was reminded that the Department is required to undertake this review every three years and that on 14 November 2024, it received a written briefing detailing the results of the public consultation and that Members proposed including the community and voluntary sector, particularly rural groups, for consideration by the Review Group.

The Committee noted that the Review Group's further deliberations has resulted in an expanded list of 107 proposed bodies for inclusion in the Schedule to the Act and that DAERA Officials will now engage with officials from other NICS departments to complete the final recommendations for Minister's consideration.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the written briefing.

## **11. Departmental Written Briefing – Farming for Sustainability – Innovation**

The Committee considered the briefing paper regarding the Department's Sustainable Agriculture Programme.

The Committee noted how considerable innovation will be needed at farm level to reach the ambitions of the programme and that in the previous NI Rural Development Programme, DAERA and CAFRE developed and delivered a range of schemes to foster innovation.

The Committee noted that the proposed new Innovation Schemes aim to build on the previous success and incorporate lessons learned and that the Schemes have been co-designed in consultation with a range of internal DAERA and external stakeholders, including the Agricultural Policy Stakeholder Group.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the written briefing.

## **12. Correspondence.**

The Committee considered the correspondence memo.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the proposed actions and then considered several items in more detail.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department, dated 24 June, regarding the publication of the UK Cetacean Conservation Strategy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Department, dated 24 June, regarding the Successful Clean Air Project Bid Under Investment Area 6.1 of the PEACEPLUS Programme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.



The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance, dated 24 June, regarding the NI Fiscal Council Bill.

A Committee response is requested by 9 October 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to reply the Committee for Finance indicating a Nil response from this Committee.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance, dated 24 June, regarding the Administrative Financial Provisions Bill with particular attention to Clause 16. A Committee response is requested by 30 October 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to return to this item in the Autumn and respond to the Committee for Finance by the end of October.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for Finance, dated 27 June, regarding the 2025-26 Public Expenditure Outturn and Forecast Outturn Information.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Committee for The Executive Office, dated 27 June, regarding the Inquiry (Mother and Baby Institutions, Magdalene Laundries and Workhouses) and Redress Scheme Bill.

A Committee response is requested by 3 October 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to reply the TEO Committee indicating a Nil response from this Committee.

The Committee considered correspondence from an individual, dated 27 June, regarding Craigmore Road, Garvagh.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

The Committee considered correspondence from Pivotal PPF, dated 23 June, regarding a new research report on Policy Delivery in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

The Committee considered the Forty-Second Report of the Examiner of Statutory Rules, dated 27 June, which includes scrutiny of SR 2025/102 The Scallop

Enhancement Sites (Prohibited Methods of Fishing) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025, which is subject to the negative resolution procedure.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

The Committee considered correspondence from Investment Strategy Northern Ireland (ISNI), dated 29 June, regarding the Investing Activity Report for the Department for June 2025.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

The Committee considered correspondence from James Osborne Farm Machinery Ltd, dated 29 June, regarding the Northern Ireland Plant Health Label Scheme.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to the Mr Osborne and ask for specific examples of the issues that he referred to in his correspondence.

The Committee considered a report from NI Audit Office, dated 3 July, titled Waste Crime in Northern Ireland.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to note the correspondence.

### **13. Any Other Business**

There were no other items of business.

### **14. Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee is on Thursday 11 September in Room 21, Parliament Buildings at 10:00am.

***The meeting was adjourned at 12.43 pm***

**Signature:** .....

**Robbie Butler MLA, Chairperson**

**Dated** .....