



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and Committee for Infrastructure

Concurrent Meeting

Minutes of Proceedings

03 June 2025

Parliament Buildings, The Senate Chamber

AERA Committee

Present: Robbie Butler MLA (Chairperson)
Declan McAleer MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
John Blair MLA
Tom Buchanan MLA
Patsy McGlone MLA
Michelle McIlveen MLA

Apologies: Aoife Finnegan MLA
William Irwin MLA
Áine Murphy MLA

Infrastructure Committee:

Present: Deborah Erskine MLA (Chairperson)
Keith Buchanan (MLA)
Stephen Dunne (MLA)

Mark Durkan (MLA)

Andrew McMurray (MLA)

Apologies: John Stewart MLA (Deputy Chairperson)
Cathal Boylan (MLA)
Nicola Brogan MLA
Peter McReynolds (MLA)

In Attendance: Dr Janice Thompson, Assembly Clerk
Dr Michael Potter, Assembly Clerk
Mr Nick Faulkner, Assistant Assembly Clerk
Mr Michael Greer, Clerical Supervisor

The concurrent meeting opened in public session at 9.40am.

The concurrent meeting was recorded by Hansard.

Officials from the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) joined the meeting at 9.41am.

The meeting was Chaired by Robbie Butler MLA and the Deputy Chair was Deborah Erskine MLA.

The Chairperson reminded Members of the 'Declaration of Interests' and asked if there are any new interests to declare, relevant to the items under consideration at this meeting, which had not already been declared.

Mrs Deborah Erskine MLA declared in interest in relation to a relative of her husband who resides along the A5 route.

1. Apologies

Aoife Finnegan MLA

William Irwin MLA

Áine Murphy MLA

John Stewart MLA (Infrastructure Committee Deputy Chairperson)

Cathal Boylan (MLA)

Nicola Brogan MLA

Peter McReynolds (MLA)

2. DAERA Oral Evidence Session – A5 development

The Committee noted DAERA's written evidence briefing paper - Issues Relating to the A5 Development and also a series of papers considered at the previous concurrent meeting.

The following officials briefed the Committee:

- Dr Mark Hammond, Head of Natural Operations Unit within Natural Environment Division;
- Mr Keith Finegan, Head of Air Quality & Biodiversity Unit within Natural Environment Division; and
- Anna Campbell, Director (Acting), Agricultural and Environmental Schemes Division.

Members noted that at present the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) is only aware of one building that will be demolished and may require replacement livestock housing and this will be subject to the normal planning process.

Officials advised Members that there was regular engagement between government departments involved in the A5 project.

There then followed a question and answer session.

Members queried DAERA's powers in relation to planning policy and were advised that its role, through NIEA, is advisory giving technical conservation and environmental advice, where needed, on a case-by-case basis.

Members heard that so far in 2025, out of 104 agricultural planning applications received, only one demonstrated that the development would provide a reduction in pollution.

Members expressed a range of concerns including:

- 15 years of uncertainty involving 3000 acres and 315 farmers affected;
- land-locked farmers with difficulties in moving animals for milking, for silage etc;

- the departments seemed to be working in silos; and
- a lack of communication with farmers who in some cases are losing 3rd and 4th generation land.

Also highlighted by Members was the total range of issues facing farmers and was anyone in DfI or DAERA looking at the overall impact on the farmers affected by the A5.

The Chair thanked the officials for their attendance.

The departmental Officials left the meeting at 10.28am

Representatives from the Ulster Farmers' Union (UFU) joined the meeting at 10:30am

3. Ulster Farmers' Union Oral Evidence Session– A5 development

The Committee noted the following paper:

- UFU Briefing Paper: A5 Road Developments.

The Committee welcomed the following representatives to the meeting:

- James McCluggage - Policy, Communications, and Technical Manager, UFU;
- Leslie Craig - Technical Officer, UFU
- John Robinson – Farmer (A5 route).

The Ulster Farmers' Union briefed the Members on their issues of concern.

Members heard that the primary failure has been the lack of communication with farmers from the departments and contractors involved in the project.

UFU also shared concerns regarding a lack of transparency in the vesting process and are calling for fair and timely compensation for landowners affected.

Members heard that the UFU are calling for dedicated departmental liaison officers to improve communication, offer advice and respond to farmers queries on the ground.

Members also heard evidence from a farmer affected by the development who is unable to plan ahead due to the outstanding legal decision on the A5. He raised concerns about the effect of vesting on single farm payments and the land vested along the proposed route falling into a poor state in the meantime.

There then followed a question and answer session.

Members noted the additional pressures already facing the farming community including changes to inheritance tax, the NAP consultation, and Bovine TB.

Members were keen to receive further information on examples of cases where there has been poor communication with farmers and also information on gaps in advice from Departments that farmers required.

Andrew McMurray MLA left the meeting at 10.45am.

John Blair MLA left the meeting at 10.52am.

Keith Buchanan MLA left the meeting at 10:52am.

Deborah Erskine MLA (Chairperson) left the meeting at 10:57am.

Mark Durkan MLA left the meeting at 10:57am.

The Chair thanked the UFU representatives for their attendance.

The Ulster Farmers' Union representatives left the meeting at 11.03am

4. Any Other Business

None

5. Adjournment

The Meeting adjourned at 11.03 am

Signature:

Robbie Butler MLA, AERA Chairperson

Dated

Signature:

**Deborah Erskine MLA,
Infrastructure Chairperson**

Dated: