

When viewing this Bill, we approach with an agricultural perspective as there will be those with other vested interests commenting on issues such as single use plastic items and carrier bags etc which impact on whole communities. However, NIAPA wish to concentrate on impact on and by agricultural production. Farmers and their families strive to obtain a living from their land and their workplace is in the natural environment. Human activity in this environment can have both negative and positive impacts and those labouring in such surroundings endeavour to prevent negative outcomes or to mitigate against these with positive action. Maintenance, restoration and enhancement of the natural environment is a non-remunerative activity provided by those farming in the countryside and in many cases is a non-quantifiable exercise.

Water quality is an issue we have been dealing with for some time and producers are working continuously to improve the standards of water, although they are by no means the sole cause of pollution occurrences yet due to the imposition of financial penalties imposed on Single Farm Payments the penalties are often multiples of those imposed by civil proceedings.

Climate change is obviously topical in future discussions as is the situation regarding emissions from whatever source and once again mitigation measures must be encouraged. In relation to agriculture there must be discussion with all parties to develop solutions with immediate imposition of regulations not an answer. Given the present state of farming income with a 26% drop in real terms in the past year there is not an abundance of capital to invest from an agricultural perspective.

The Bill presented is a regulatory instrument to be extended to NI for Assembly legislative consent. The overarching body will be the Office of Environmental Protection (OEP). Here in Northern Ireland we have the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). In addition, we have Shared Environmental Services (SES) which is a body established by local authorities yet answerable to whom?

We all have a vested interest in protecting air quality, water quality and bio-diversity yet the needs of those who utilise our natural environment to produce food for the population must not be forgotten. It must also be remembered that we have a land border with an EU member state and that emissions do not respect such borders.