



Minister's Office  
Clare House  
303 Airport Road West  
Sydenham Intake  
Belfast BT3 9ED  
Telephone: 028 774 45117  
Email: [paul.mcgranaghan@daera-ni.gov.uk](mailto:paul.mcgranaghan@daera-ni.gov.uk)

**FROM: PAUL MCGRANAGHAN  
DAERA DALO**

**DATE: 17 SEPTEMBER 2026**

**TO: DR. JANICE THOMPSON  
AERA COMMITTEE CLERK**

## **SL1 The Shellfish Gathering (Conservation) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**

**Summary:** The Department is bringing forward subordinate legislation to introduce a closed period each year to prohibit the taking of periwinkles from Strangford Lough.

**Business Area:** Marine and Fisheries Division

**Issue:** To invite the AERA Committee to consider the proposal to make the Shellfish Gathering (Conservation) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026 which would prohibit the taking of periwinkles (*Littorina littorea*) by any means from Strangford Lough during the period 1st January to 30th April, both dates inclusive, in any year.

In accordance with the Red Book on Subordinate Legislation, this SL1 advises the AERA Committee of the proposal for the Statutory Rule, its purpose, background and implications.

**Restrictions:** None

**Action Required:** That you note and consider the contents of this SL1.

**Officials Attending:** Gareth Dillon (Deputy Director, Marine and Fisheries Division), Fiona Taylor (Head of Sea Fisheries Policy Branch) and Patrick Smith (Sea Fisheries Policy Branch).

## **Background**

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs proposes to make the above-named Statutory Rule under powers conferred on it by sections section 124(1) and (2) of the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966. These powers provide that the Department may make such regulations as appear to it to be expedient for the management, conservation, protection, improvement or increase of sea-fisheries.

The Statutory Rule is subject to the Assembly's negative resolution procedure.

## **Purpose of legislation/policy background**

The policy objective of the regulations is to safeguard periwinkle stocks by prohibiting the taking of periwinkles by any means from Strangford Lough during the peak spawning period each year.

In March 2022 the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute published "Strangford Lough Periwinkle Study" which recommended a closed season during the months of January to April to best protect the spawning stock.

## **Previous Engagement with the Committee**

The Department introduced legislative proposals for a closed season for periwinkle harvesting from the inter-tidal area in Northern Ireland. The AERA Committee endorsed this approach on 11 December 2025, and the Statutory Rule [The Shellfish Gathering \(Conservation\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2026](#) was made and laid on 6 January 2026, coming into operation on 6 February 2026.

Following industry concerns about the immediate impact on businesses, the AERA Committee considered a prayer of annulment. In response, the Department revoked the Rule under [The Shellfish Gathering \(Conservation\) \(Revocation\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2026](#) and is considering a revised, more targeted measure applying initially to Strangford Lough.

Evidence given at the AERA Committee on 2 February 2026 from the industry representative who raised the concern on [The Shellfish Gathering \(Conservation\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2026](#) stated that a ban on harvesting periwinkles in Strangford Lough would have a lesser financial impact on them than a total ban on harvesting periwinkles throughout Northern Ireland. They also stated that the short notice provided by the Department prior to the original ban was inadequate and left no time to prepare for the potential impact. The Department has

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®**  
We invest in people Standard

addressed this matter by giving processors 10 months' notice before introducing new regulations targeted specifically at Strangford Lough in January 2027.

## **Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications for DAERA in implementing these regulations.

## **Consultation**

The Department carried out a public consultation, "Inter-tidal Hand Gathering of Shellfish in Northern Ireland, a Call for Evidence" during the period June-September 2022. This consultation outlined a range of potential management measures designed to protect inter-tidal shellfish stocks from unsustainable exploitation and to provide protection for any habitats and species that could be damaged or disturbed by inter-tidal shellfish gathering. For the consultation question for a proposed closed season from January to April each year, 86% of the responses were supportive.

The Department conducted a further public consultation titled "Intertidal Hand Gathering of Shellfish – Baseline Survey" between June and July 2026. This survey was designed to help DAERA get an understanding of habits of those who participate in the hand-gathering of shellfish, with particular emphasis on periwinkles. There were 17 total respondents to the baseline survey. This survey included a specific question on a proposed closed season for periwinkle gathering in Strangford Lough from January to April each year, as recommended in the AFBI report.

Of the 17 total responses to the survey, 4 (23.43%) either Strongly Supported or Tended to Support the introduction of a closed season, 1 (5.88%) neither supported nor opposed the proposal, 7 (41.17%) either Strongly Opposed or Tended to Oppose the proposal, 3 (17.65%) were unsure or didn't know, while the remaining 2 (11.76%) respondents to the survey did not answer this question.

The Department also held a public meeting in July 2026 to raise awareness of the proposals to manage the intertidal shellfish fisheries in Strangford Lough. At the conclusion of the meeting, attendees were invited to complete a short survey on the intertidal gathering of shellfish in Strangford Lough. The Department received 2 responses to this survey. Both respondents were in favour of a closed season.

## **Compliance with Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**

The draft Statutory Rule is compliant with section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

You will wish to bring this matter to the attention of Committee members.

This SL1 is being copied to the Human Rights Commission and Legislative Programme Secretariat.

## **Consideration by the Executive**

Not applicable.

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®**  
We invest in people Standard

## **Equality Impact**

The proposals set out in the public consultation document, “Inter-tidal Hand Gathering of Shellfish in Northern Ireland, a Call for Evidence” were screened out from an equality impact assessment and no rural needs implications were identified.

## **Regulatory Impact**

A regulatory impact assessment (RIA) was carried out for the public consultation, “Intertidal Hand Gathering of Shellfish in Northern Ireland, a Call for Evidence”. Of the three options (which included a “do nothing” and a complete prohibition) the preferred option from that RIA was to introduce management measures that allow shellfish gathering to continue in a sustainable way, based on evidence and taking into account the views of stakeholders. Potential measures included a closed season, minimum landing size, night-time curfew, registration system for commercial gatherers and a bag limit for recreational gatherers.

## **Rural Needs Impact**

No rural needs implications were identified in the Rural Needs Impact Assessment.

## **Data Protection Impact**

N/A

## **Child Rights Impact**

N/A

## **Position in Great Britain (if appropriate).**

In England, The North Western Inshore Fisheries and Conservative Authority (IFCA) Cockle Closed Season Byelaw imposes an annual prohibition on **all** cockle fishing within the North Western IFCA district from 1 May to 31 August each year to protect spawning and juvenile cockle stocks.

The Southern IFCA Oysters Close Season Byelaw imposes an annual prohibition for taking oysters, including hand-gathering, throughout the Southern IFCA district from 1 March to 31 October inclusive.

There is currently no closed season for periwinkle harvesting in Wales, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland.

## **Any other information**

N/A

## **Proposed timing of consideration of the SL1**

I can confirm that the SL1 has been submitted to the AERA Committee in accordance with the minimum four-week timeframe for consideration at the AERA Committee meeting on 22 October 2026.

If you are deaf or have a hearing difficulty you can contact the Department via the Next Generation Text Relay Service by dialling 18001 + telephone number.

**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE®**  
We invest in people Standard

## **Proposed Operational Date**

It is proposed that the rule will come into operation on 1 January 2027.

The draft of the proposed Statutory Rule and Explanatory Memorandum are attached, and you will wish to bring this matter to the attention of the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

This SL1 is being copied to the Human Rights Commission and the Equality Commission.

Yours sincerely,



**Paul McGranaghan**  
**Departmental Assembly Liaison Officer**

**Enc.**

**Annex A: Draft SR - The Shellfish Gathering (Conservation) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**

**Annex B: Draft Explanatory Memorandum to The Shellfish Gathering (Conservation) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026**

**Cc: Human Rights Commission**  
**Equality Commission**