

For the attention of Committee for the Economy

C/O Peter McCallion, Clerk to the Committee for the Economy

Northern Ireland Assembly

NILGA Response: Call for Evidence - Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill

June 2026

NILGA welcomes and supports the draft Utility Regulator (Support for Decarbonisation Preparation) Bill, recognising its importance in providing a clear statutory basis for the Utility Regulator to advise the Department for the Economy on the decarbonisation of the energy sector. While this matter sits principally within the energy and regulatory sphere, NILGA recognises its broader relevance to place-based decarbonisation outcomes and therefore offers this input. Establishing this legal footing is a critical step in ensuring that regulatory expertise can be effectively harnessed to support Northern Ireland's transition to a lowcarbon energy system, aligned with the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 and wider Executive ambitions.

Clause 1 (1) allows the Utility Regulator to provide advice, information or assistance to support the Department for the Economy development of proposals, policies, strategies or plans needed in relation to the energy sector. *In response to the question attributed to Clause 1 (1), NILGA agrees “Yes”; Clause 1 (1) does give the Utility Regulator sufficient power and responsibility in order to help decarbonise the energy sector in Northern Ireland.*

Clause 1 (2) provides a qualified duty that the Utility Regulator must comply with any reasonable request from the Department for Economy; and only the Department for Economy. In response to the question attributed to Clause 1 (2) on whether the Utility Regulator's support for decarbonisation be restricted to the provision of advice to the Department for the Economy; NILGA considers that progressing this legislation at pace is essential to enable timely and coordinated action on energy decarbonisation. While there is merit in considering, in the medium term, whether the scope of advisory functions could extend to other government departments and relevant public bodies, the immediate priority should be to secure passage of the Bill as drafted. This will ensure that the necessary framework is in place without delay, allowing the Utility Regulator to begin supporting decarbonisation efforts in a focused and effective manner.

In response to the question attributed to Clause 2; NILGA agrees that the relevant provisions be commenced immediately after Royal Assent.

Looking ahead, NILGA would support a future review of the legislation to assess opportunities for broadening its application, particularly in recognition of the cross-

cutting nature of decarbonisation. However, at this stage, a pragmatic and timely approach, focused on establishing the core advisory role between the Utility Regulator and DfE, will best serve the urgent need to progress Northern Ireland's energy transition.