

Environment Marine and Fisheries Group
Natural Environment Policy Division



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Depairtment o'

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

The Library
NI Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Belfast
BT4 3XX

By email:

Library.IssueDesk@niassembly.gov.uk
neil.sedgewick@niassembly.gov.uk

10 June 2025

Dear Sir / Madam,

**Minister's Letter to Ulster Farmers Union (UFU) and Northern Ireland Environment
Link (NIEL)**

Minister Muir has requested that the attached Letter to the UFU and NIEL be deposited in the Assembly Library, as noted in his speech during the Debate at the Assembly today.

Grateful if you can progress.

Yours faithfully,

Brian Ervine
Head of Branch
Environmental Farming Branch

Environmental Farming Branch
Clare House
303 Airport Road West
Sydenham Intake
Belfast BT3 9ED

Email:

NutrientsActionProgramme@daera-ni.gov.uk

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

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.

**From the Office of the
Minister of Agriculture,
Environment and Rural Affairs**



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuithe**

Depairtment o'

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

William Irvine
President
Ulster Farmers' Union
mmcardle@ufuhq.com

Max Bryant CEO
NI Environment Link
max@nienvironmentlink.org

DAERA Private Office
First Floor, Clare House
303 Airport Road West
Sydenham Intake
Belfast, BT3 9ED
Telephone: 028 9052 4140
Email: private.office@daera-ni.gov.uk

Our Ref: INV-0443-2025
Date: 3 June 2025

Dear William and Max

NUTRIENTS ACTION PROGRAMME CONSULTATION

I would like to thank you and your colleagues for your challenging but constructive engagement today on the proposals contained within the Nutrients Action Programme consultation.

I am heartened by our shared acknowledgement of the serious water quality issues we are facing, including in Lough Neagh and other waterways, and our shared commitment to work together to address this challenge, whilst ensuring we maintain a productive and sustainable agri-food sector. I also recognise the hard work that farmers and others have undertaken to date to address water quality.

As outlined at the meeting, Northern Ireland is facing significant challenges regarding water quality as evidenced most recently by the Office for Environmental Protection and the serious concerns relating to the impacts of nutrients on our natural environment.

However, I acknowledge the genuine concerns that the NAP proposals have generated within the farming community. I want to reassure you that I am listening to the concerns, committed to ongoing engagement and determined that we chart a way forward together. This is an open consultation on draft proposals, and I encourage everyone to feed in their views, as no final decisions have been taken. As I have stated previously, the final NAP Regulations will be presented to the Executive for approval, following consideration of all of the consultation responses.

I very much welcomed our constructive discussions about establishing a small stakeholder group consisting of agri-food and environmental stakeholders to consider

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

the responses to the NAP consultation and help inform my decisions on the measures in the regulations and the timeframes for their implementation.

Any decisions around timeframes would be informed by the feedback from the consultation and considerations provided by the proposed stakeholder group, whilst being cognisant of the legal framework in which we must operate.

We all agree that it is vitally important that, in making improvements to address our water quality, we develop solutions, as well as meeting legislative requirements, that are evidence based and workable at farm level with realistic timeframes for delivery.

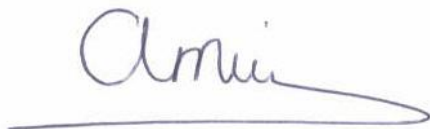
In terms of the science and evidence, I provided reassurance about the processes in place to ensure decisions on any of the draft proposals are informed by robust scientific evidence. If specific areas of concern regarding the scientific evidence underpinning any proposals emerge through the consultation, there are processes in place to resolve any points of scientific contention. For example, independent expert advice can be sought and external peer review commissioned on specific scientific issues.

In addition to the initial Regulatory Impact Assessment already undertaken, a final Regulatory Impact Assessment will be completed, informed by the consultation and complemented by a full economic impact assessment to ensure any decisions on the draft proposals are informed by a full understanding of the potential impact.

Finally, I offered reassurance that my efforts to address water quality do not focus solely on agriculture. I have been consistent and unambiguous in citing the negative impact of wastewater infrastructure on our waterways. It is not acceptable that NI Water is treated differently as a polluter compared with everyone else. Changes in terms of regulation and enforcement of NI Water, including the special arrangements as part of SORPI, are currently under consideration.

I look forward to hearing from you and would welcome further ongoing engagement, particularly around the establishment of a proposed stakeholder group.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A Muir', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

ANDREW MUIR MLA
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs