

# Written Ministerial Statement

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## Department for the Economy

### Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment

*Published at 5pm on Wednesday 24 September 2025*

**Dr Archibald (The Minister for the Economy):** My Department is responsible for mineral licensing, with the exception of gold and silver which are under the remit of the Crown Estate. The legal framework for mineral licences is contained within the 1969 Mineral Development Act.

It is important that the licensing framework for minerals provides the highest level of environmental protection, ensures that local communities benefit appropriately, and commands public confidence.

With these objectives in mind, a comprehensive review of the existing licensing regime is underway. Today I can announce a major milestone in the review. The contract for a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and a Habitats Regulation Assessment (HRA) of mineral licensing has been awarded. The SEA will ensure that significant environmental effects arising from new mineral licensing policy are identified, assessed and mitigated. The HRA will identify and evaluate impacts of the proposed policy upon designated sites under the Habitats Directive.

Tetra Tech RPS, a leading environmental and engineering consultancy based in Belfast with over 250 staff, has been appointed to carry out both assessments. The company has extensive experience in supporting Government to develop and deliver sustainable plans, through robust SEA and HRA processes.

Upon taking office, it was the intention of my predecessor, Minister Murphy, to introduce a moratorium on the granting of new licences while the review was carried out. However, it was not legally feasible to do so given that the review was at an early stage.

These assessments will allow my Department to publish its new minerals policy by April 2027. At this point it will be legally possible for me to introduce a moratorium. I can therefore confirm that once these two environmental assessments are complete, I will introduce a moratorium for new mineral licences. A new policy framework will then be legislated for in the next Assembly mandate.