

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Publication and laying in the Assembly of the Third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP3)

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Mr Andrew Muir (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): I wish to inform members that in accordance with section 60 the Climate Change Act 2008 (the Act) that the Third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP3) will be laid in the Assembly and published later today.

The Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme sets out the actions that will be taken to adapt to and build our resilience to the impacts of climate change over the next 5-year period.

Background

Section 56 of the Climate Change Act 2008 (the Act) requires that a Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) is undertaken by the UK Government on a 5-yearly basis. This assessment considers the risks presented by climate change to the UK and assigns a risk urgency rating score. The CCRA is informed by an earlier independent assessment of climate risk undertaken by the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) as required by section 57 of the Act.

In response to the latest CCRA, section 60 of the Act requires that each relevant Northern Ireland department lays programmes before the Assembly setting out their objectives in relation to addressing the impacts of climate change, their proposals and policies for meeting those objectives, and the timescales for introducing those proposals and policies to address the risks identified in the latest CCRA.

In line with the requirements of section 60 of the Act, departments through NICCAP3 have set out details of their policies, plans and proposals in response to the third Climate Change Risk Assessment.

Programme development

Whilst it is not a legal requirement placed on my Department by the Act, in recognition of the cross-cutting nature of the impacts of climate change and to provide a coordinated and joined up approach, my Department has led on the development of a single adaptation programme with the input of all departments.

This co-ordinated framework provides for a much more coherent approach than each department producing their own individual adaptation programmes. It also reflects the reality that many climate related risks, such as severe weather events and flooding, will cut across and impact upon the functions and responsibilities of several departments.

The development of the programme has had significant engagement and input from across all departments with over 150 departmental actions being included in the Adaptation Delivery Plan within the programme. Additionally, whilst not required by the Act, the programme also contains over 120 actions provided from local government, academia, Non-Government Organisations, and the voluntary and private sectors. The programme demonstrates the positive collaboration taking place across all government departments, as well as in partnership with a range of key external stakeholders, who recognise that building resilience to the current and future projected impacts of climate needs action from across our whole society. This whole society approach to the development of our Adaptation Programme is unique across these islands.

This approach follows on from the previous programme (NICCAP2) for which the inclusion of external actions was welcomed by the CCC. The CCC subsequently recommended that future programmes continue this approach as it acknowledges and recognises the important role many of these key stakeholders play in creating a climate resilient Northern Ireland.

As such the total number of actions within the Adaptation Delivery Plan, including those from external stakeholders, is in excess of 280 which represents a significant increase on NICCAP2 with nearly three times the number of actions and reflects the increased need to address the impacts of climate change which we are experiencing today and which are now locked in.

In developing the programme, it has been structured to align to the CCC's Adaptation Monitoring Framework which covers 13 thematic areas. This approach, to align the structure, will assist the CCC in undertaking their future statutory assessment of the programme as required by Section 48 of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022.

The themes covered by NICCAP3 which align to the CCC's monitoring framework are as follows:

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| 1. | Natural Capital | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature • Working land & seas |
| 2. | Food Security | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food security |
| 3. | Infrastructure Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water • Energy • Telecoms & ICT • Transport |
| 4. | People and the Built Environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Towns & Cities • Buildings • Health • Community |
| 5. | Disruption to Business and supply chains | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business • Finance |

Consultation outcome

Whilst the 2008 Act does not specify a requirement for departments to undertake a public consultation on adaptation programmes, in recognition of the public interest in climate change my Department undertook an 8-week public consultation on a draft of the Programme between June and August 2025.

The consultation sought views on aspects of an advanced draft of the programme such as the draft vision, the content/structure of the programme and views from respondents if they felt the actions proposed would help to create well adapted and climate resilient thematic areas.

The consultation received 59 responses for which the majority conveyed broad support for the actions included in the programme with an average of 72.4% support from respondents across the 13 thematic areas to the actions proposed helping to create a well-adapted sectors, as well as providing a number of new actions. There was also strong support shown for the 'whole society' approach through the inclusion of actions from central government and wider society with 89% of respondents welcoming their inclusion as a means of bringing together actions and activity in one place through the single overarching co-ordinated programme. The approach to structure the programme to align it to the CCC's Adaptation Monitoring Framework, to future proof it for assessments, was supported by 83% of respondents.

Our changing climate

The publication of the Third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme, whilst it fulfils a legal obligation, also marks an important milestone in setting out our actions to adapt to and to build our resilience to the impacts of climate change – both current and projected.

In recent years, we have seen record breaking heatwaves, an increased frequency and severity of storm events, severe flooding and prolonged wildfires all of which are impacting upon our public services, businesses, environment and communities. Taking effective adaptation action is crucial in building our resilience to these events to protect our businesses, environment and communities and to relieve the stress they place on our public services and general public. The need to work collaboratively to build our resilience to the impacts of climate change has been recognised in our Programme for Government 2024-2027.

Interest in these impacts, and the actions being taken to respond to them, is growing with the increasing frequency and severity of events. We are taking action, as demonstrated by all departments and a range of stakeholders who have contributed actions to the programme.

It is important that we send a strong signal that we are taking the impacts of climate change seriously, and that we are genuinely working together to protect our communities, infrastructure, farmland, businesses and environment. Publishing the NICCAP3 goes a significant way to demonstrating that, showing our commitment to taking preventative action and working in partnership to strengthen our resilience. It is, however important that we remain realistic in our expectations. We cannot address all risks from climate change in a single programme. This programme, which is the third iteration, seeks to build on the progress made to date and to further improve our resilience. We are also taking steps to better understand and predict the impacts of climate change, including through research programmes with the Met Office, research bodies and our local Universities which will help us to develop more robust evidence and inform future decision-making.

I am grateful to my Ministerial colleagues, their officials and the wide range of stakeholders for their cooperation in identifying policies and proposals for inclusion in the programme. Today is another important step forward for Northern Ireland in addressing the impacts of climate change.