

# Written Ministerial Statement

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## Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

### Laying in the Assembly the draft Regulations to establish the Just Transition Commission and consideration of advice received from the Climate Change Committee

*Published at 1.30pm on Friday 27 March 2026*

**Mr Andrew Muir (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs):** In accordance with the requirements of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 ('the Act'), I am laying before the Assembly the draft 'The Climate Change (Just Transition Commission) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2026' for debate and approval together with this statement, which sets out my Department's consideration of the advice received from the Climate Change Committee.

#### Background

Under Section 37 of the Act my department is required, by regulations, to establish an independent Just Transition Commission for Northern Ireland. The Commission will play a key advisory and oversight role across all departments which will help to ensure that what we do to reduce emissions, and how we do it, is fair and inclusive and does not leave anyone behind. To ensure broad representation, the Act mandates that the Commission include members from seven sectors: Academia, Agricultural, Civic Society, Environmental groups, Fisheries, Trade Unions and Youth groups.

In developing the Regulations, the Department undertook a well received 10 week public consultation—marked by strong engagement across sectors and overwhelming support for the proposals.

As required by section 56(2) of the Act my Department also requested the advice of the Climate Change Committee (CCC). The CCC published their advice to my Department on 2 June 2025 and as required by section 56(6) of the Act that advice has been published on the DAERA website.

Further to this and in compliance with section 56(8) of the Act, this statement sets out any differences between the Regulations and the CCC's suggestions.

The CCC welcomed and supported the NI Executive setting up the Commission and also offered four suggestions which could be reflected in the draft Regulations, supporting documentation or in the implementation of the Commission and these have been accepted. The CCC's four key messages were:

- Make clear that the Commission's goal is to support government in delivering Net Zero in line with the Just Transition principle and should not lead to the risk of delivery being unnecessarily delayed;
- Focus the Commission's advice on a limited number of economic sectors, whichever are the most relevant to decarbonising the Northern Irish economy in a just way;
- Limit the core Commission membership to around 10 members. Establish that members act as independent experts (not solely representatives of different industries or social groups). This will avoid conflicts of interest, and ensure the Commission is an effective advice-making body; and
- Ensure the Commission or the Chair has an established role to make formal recommendations to government.

My department has taken full account of the Climate Change Committee's advice, which has been reflected in the draft Regulations and supporting documentation, with remaining matters to be addressed through governance arrangements and the public appointments process.

Having considered the statutory requirements of the Act, consultation feedback, stakeholder views and the CCC's advice I have decided that the draft regulations I am laying in the Assembly, should

provide for a Commission comprising a Chair and a minimum of 15 members drawn from 12 sectors, including those seven sectors mandated by the Act and the additional sectors that were strongly supported through the consultation.

The consultation responses strongly supported expanding sectoral representation on the Commission to include a representative from the transport, energy, green finance, and the built environment sectors and a dedicated rural voice. The consultation and stakeholder engagement throughout also provided clear evidence for increasing membership on the Commission for large and diverse sectors such as the environmental and agricultural sectors.

I acknowledge that this differs from the Climate Change Committee's recommendation to limit core membership to around 10 members. However, I am satisfied that a larger Commission provides the necessary balance of effectiveness, inclusivity and sectoral coverage, consistent with consultation feedback and the objective of delivering Net Zero in a fair and just way. The draft Regulations therefore allow for a maximum membership of 20, including the Chair, in line with comparable Commissions in Scotland and Ireland.

The establishment of the Just Transition Commission marks a significant step forward in supporting the delivery of climate action that is fair, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of our society and economy. The Regulations reflect the statutory obligations of the Act, the outcomes of the very positive public consultation, stakeholder feedback from engagement events and the CCC's recommendations.

I am committed to ensuring the Commission has the independence, expertise, and broad sectoral representativeness required to provide robust advice and effective oversight as we progress towards our climate targets.

The draft Regulations I am laying before the Assembly reflect that commitment and provide a strong foundation for a Commission that will work collaboratively with government, stakeholders, and communities to achieve a just and equitable transition to Net Zero.