

The First Minister and deputy First Minister
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3TA

18th January 2022

Dear First Minister and deputy First Minister,

Re: Raising ambition in the Environment Strategy

We are facing a nature and public health crisis. Northern Ireland is 12th worst in the world for biodiversity loss, and dangerous levels of pollution are harming public health. The Environment Strategy provides an opportunity to coordinate decision-making, policy setting and funding across the Executive and government departments to improve the natural environment and subsequently create socio-economic benefits. However, the draft Strategy is unambitious, lacking specificity and as such we do not believe it will adequately address the nature and climate emergency. We, the undersigned, call on the Executive to:

Support commencement of the Environment Act 2021: the Environment Act 2021 creates an important framework for environmental governance in Northern Ireland including the Office for Environmental Protection. The Executive should support commencement and full implementation of the Act.

Legislate for nature's restoration: non-statutory targets have so far failed to protect and restore nature. To reverse nature's decline the Executive must bring forward legally-binding interim and long-term targets for nature's restoration. The Executive must also rapidly scale up the implementation, monitoring, and enforcement of environmental protections by delivering on the commitment to establish an independent Environmental Protection Agency.

Increase ambition and specificity of the Environment Strategy: of the 225 actions and targets within the strategy, 76% (172) have no timeframe, and 78% (177) are either partly or completely unmeasurable. To be effective the Strategy must have clear long-term vision; specific actions to deliver this vision; credible and measurable milestones; and robust governance to oversee implementation. The acid test for the Strategy is whether these building blocks are put in place and fit for purpose. Whilst there are welcome commitments, we do not believe the Strategy will effectively tackle the nature crisis. The Executive must bolster the ambition and specificity of the Strategy.

Adequately resource ongoing implementation and monitoring of the Strategy: to be effective the Environment Strategy must have dedicated and long-term resourcing. An expert team should be established within DAERA to drive ambition and action across the Executive, and develop and carry out robust and transparent monitoring, review, and any necessary revisions.

Incentivise nature's restoration: The Strategy must be supported by adequate investment. The Executive should recognise the positive socio-economic and public health potential of nature's recovery including the restoration of habitats, creation of jobs, quality of outdoor space, and mitigation and adaptation to climate change. The Strategy must be associated with incentives to support sustainable approaches to planning, energy, transport, farming (Nature Friendly Farming), and commercial fishing.

The Environment Strategy provides the Executive with the opportunity to create a new normal: a climate-safe, nature-rich, healthy world for all. We call on the Executive to respond to our asks above and would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss nature's recovery further.

Yours sincerely,



RSPB Northern Ireland: Joanne Sherwood, Director for Northern Ireland
 Action Renewables: Caroline Winder, Senior Project Manager
 Asthma UK & British Lung Foundation: Joseph Carter, Head of Devolved Nations
 Belfast Food Network: Kerry Melville, Coordinator
 Business in the Community: Kieran Harding, Managing Director
 Brexit & Environment: Dr Viviane Gravey, Network co-chair
 British Heart Foundation: Ferghal McKinney, Head of Northern Ireland
 Christian Aid Ireland: Rosamond Bennett, Chief Executive

Environmental Justice Network Ireland: Dr. Ciara Brennan, Director & Academic Lead
Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful: Ian Humphreys, Chief Executive
Friends of the Earth Northern Ireland: James Orr, Director for Northern Ireland
Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment: Sarah Mukherjee MBE, Chief Executive
National Trust: Heather McLachlan, Director for Northern Ireland
Nature Friendly Farming Network: Michael Meharg, Chair for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Environment Link: Craig McGuicken, Chief Executive
Northern Ireland Marine Task Force: Donal Griffin, Task Force Officer
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action: Seamus McAleavey, Chief Executive
Northern Ireland Youth Forum: Chris Quinn, Director
Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland: Caro-Lynne Ferris, Executive Director
Surfers Against Sewage: Hugo Tagholm, Chief Executive
Sustainable NI: Nichola Hughes, Director for Northern Ireland
Sustrans: Caroline Bloomfield, Director for Northern Ireland
Ulster Wildlife: Jennifer Fulton, Chief Executive
Woodland Trust: Ian McCurley, Director for Northern Ireland
Dakota Reid, Youth campaigner
Dara McNulty, Youth campaigner and author
Judith Annett, Environmental specialist
Professor Geraint Ellis, Queen's University Belfast
Professor John Barry, Queen's University Belfast
Professor Mark Emmerson, Queen's University Belfast
Dr. Amanda Slevin, Co-Director of the Centre for Sustainability, Equality and Climate Action, Queen's University Belfast, and Chair of Climate Coalition Northern Ireland.
Dr. Karen Kerr, Queen's University Belfast
Dr. Mary Dobbs, Maynooth University
Dr. Wesley Flannery, Queen's University Belfast