



DAERA Business Plan 2024-25



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**
www.daera-ni.gov.uk

An Roinn
**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department o'
**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matters**

Sustainability at the heart of a
living, working, active landscape
valued by everyone.

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Minister's Foreword

I am delighted to present the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) 2024-25 Business Plan, my first as Minister, which sets out the key commitments that DAERA will deliver in 2024-25. The plan is also supported by business plans from my Department's two agencies, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Forest Service.



DAERA has an extensive and diverse portfolio, which impacts the daily lives of everyone in Northern Ireland. I have been impressed by the commitment and passion displayed by all those I have met since taking up post. I know that there are many challenges but there are also significant and important opportunities to improve our environment and support rural communities while also supporting the sustainability of our food and farming sector. I am determined to seize those opportunities and have set out for my Department a new set of priorities that will shape the work of officials for the years ahead.

These are:

- tackling climate change together;
- protecting our natural environment;
- strengthening environmental governance;
- supporting sustainable, resilient and productive agri-food and fishing sectors;

- safeguarding animal health and welfare; and
- building strong, sustainable and diverse rural communities.

I am, of course, conscious of the exceptionally difficult budgetary context in which all Executive departments are operating. While the realities of public spending may limit the pace of progress that it is possible for us to make in my first year as Minister, they do not limit either my ambition or my determination to deliver improvement across all the priority areas I have set for my Department. I will therefore shortly set out in a new DAERA Corporate Plan for 2024-2027 my longer term plans for this Assembly mandate and the progress I want to make in the years ahead.

As we work to build progress, I also want to give my commitment that we will work collaboratively. We cannot tackle climate change or drive the progress I want us to make without the support and engagement of other departments or of our partners and stakeholders.

I also want to recognise the professionalism, dedication and commitment of staff across the Department and its agencies. They have provided great support since I took up office and I look forward to working with them in the year ahead to progress the commitments set out in this plan and deliver the improvements we all want to see.

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

Andrew Muir MLA

Minister of Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs

Message from the Permanent Secretary



Our 2024-25 business plan provides an important insight into the work that DAERA and its agencies will do and the actions we plan to deliver during the current financial year.

The plan reflects the full range of departmental functions, both those that sit within the competence of the Assembly and the DAERA Minister and those that rest with UK Government ministers.

Our business plan is also an important accountability tool and we will report openly to our ministers and to the public on our progress in delivering the actions it contains. It also helps frame our own performance objectives at every level within the Department.

I look forward to working with staff across the Department and its two agencies as we harness our energies, expertise and commitment to support our ministers in delivering their priorities in the months ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katrina Godfrey".

Katrina Godfrey

Permanent Secretary
Department of Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs



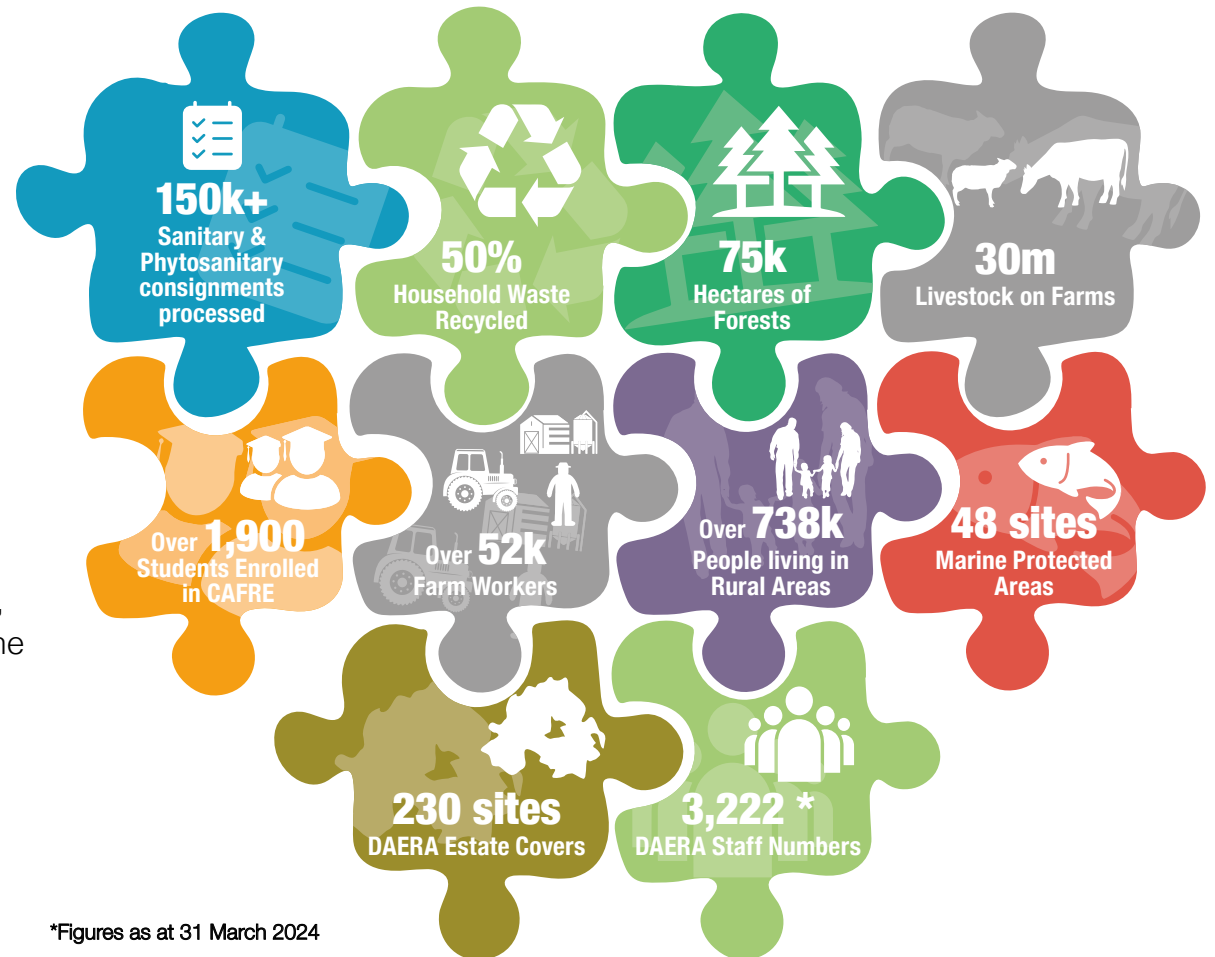
1. Our Purpose

DAERA's purpose is:

'Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone'

1.1 Our Responsibilities

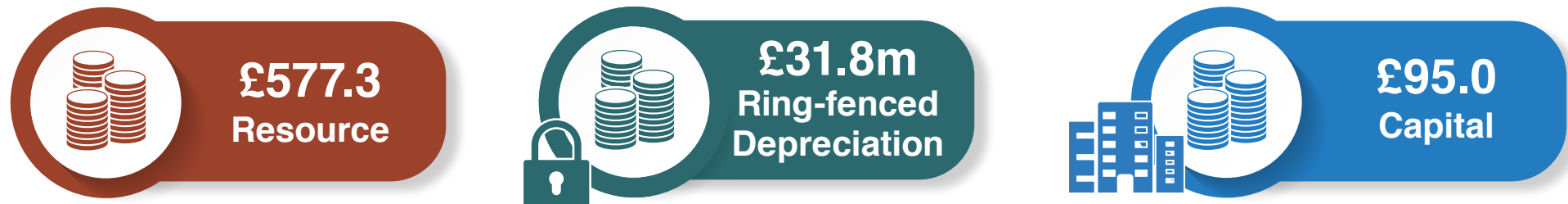
DAERA and its agencies carry responsibility for environment, climate change and sustainability, food, farming, fisheries, forestry, and the development of the rural sector in Northern Ireland.



*Figures as at 31 March 2024

2. Our Budget

Through good financial planning, we will make the best use of our budgets, targeting our funding where it will deliver most and prioritising our work to deliver on agreed outcomes.



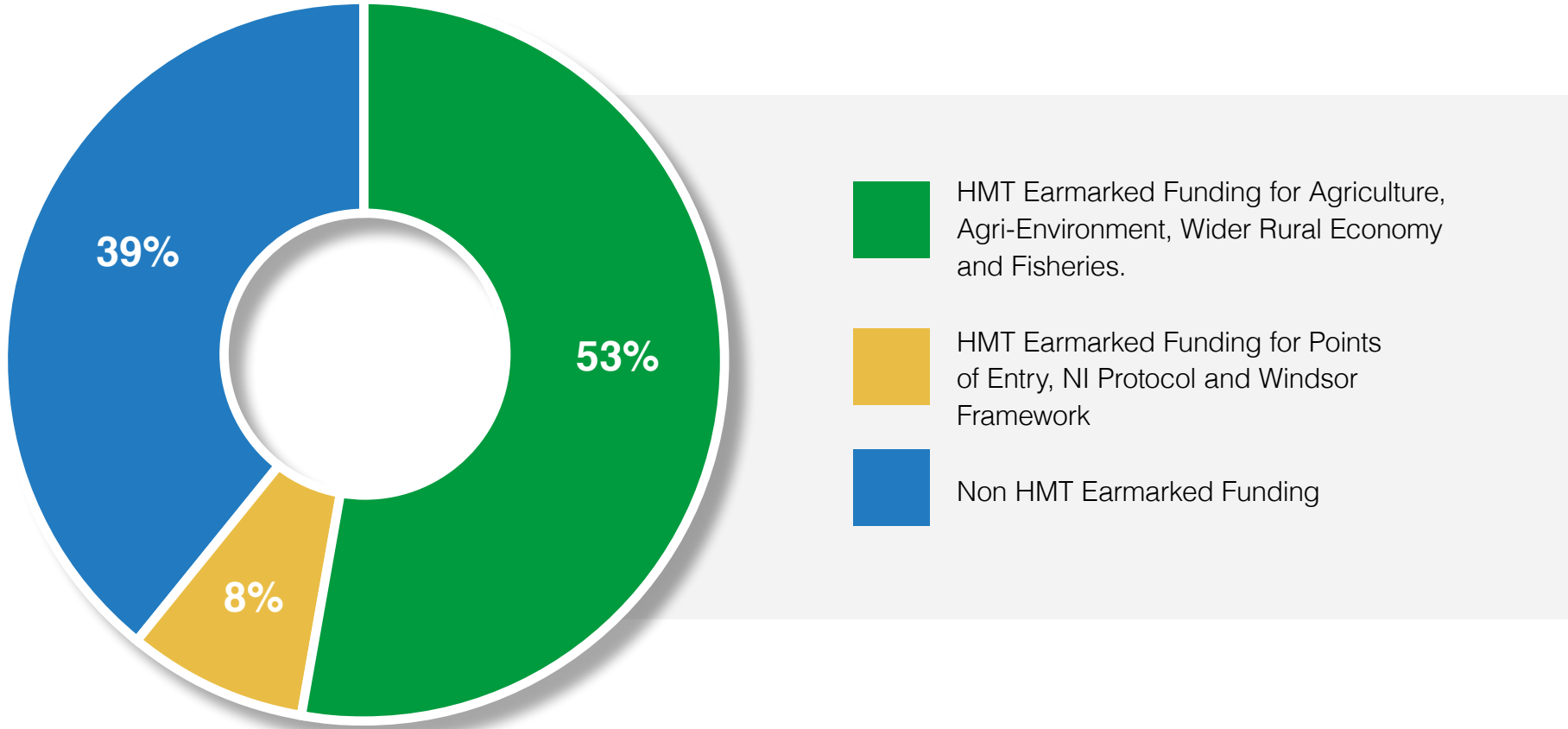
On 25 April 2024 the Executive agreed a Budget for the 2024-25 financial year. Departments were advised that, despite the additional funding provided by the financial package, this has been a very challenging Budget with funding requests from departments outweighing the funding available for allocation three times over for Resource DEL and one and a half times for Capital DEL.

The outcome from Budget 2024-25 for DAERA was a Non Ringfenced Resource DEL allocation of £577.3m and a Capital DEL allocation of £95.0m. Although the proposed Resource DEL allocation includes £332.5m HM Treasury Earmarked funding for agriculture, agri-environment, the wider rural economy and fisheries, £32.3m for bovine TB compensation and £146.1m for staff costs to take forward the proposed actions in this business plan, it is significantly less than the level of funding the Department needs to deliver its statutory obligations and ministerial priorities effectively. It is a requirement that departments live within their allocated budgets; accordingly, difficult choices have been, and continue to be, needed. A further £49.2m of HM Treasury Earmarked funding for Points of Entry, NI Protocol and Windsor Framework was subsequently confirmed in May.

On Capital DEL the budget available does allow for all inescapable capital requirements to be funded. The Executive has also agreed to allocate a further £1.6m Capital DEL for Lough Neagh at June Monitoring. The business plan therefore reflects what it is possible to deliver within the overall capital budget, including progress on climate change; research & development; estates transformation and IT systems and support for City & Growth Deals.

The following pie chart sets out the composition of DAERA’s Resource DEL opening budget.







Composition of DAERA Resource DEL Opening Budget (including HMT Earmarked Funding for Points of Entry, NI Protocol and Windsor Framework which was confirmed in May)



3. Our People

The core Department is organised into five groups. The Department also has two executive agencies: the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and Forest Service.

An organisation chart showing the department's senior structure is provided.

DAERA Permanent Secretary - Katrina Godfrey					
 Climate Change, Science & Innovation	 Environment, Marine & Fisheries	 Food, Farming & Rural Affairs	 Veterinary Service & Animal Health	 Strategic Planning & Corporate Services	 Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA)
Head of Group Tracey Teague	Acting Head of Group Liz Loughran	Head of Group Norman Fulton	CVO and Head of Group Brian Doohar	Joint Heads of Group Brian Doherty & Fiona McCandless	Chief Executive David Reid
Chief Scientific Adviser's Office CSA: Alistair Carson	Natural Environment Policy Director: Neelia Lloyd	CAFRE Director: Martin McKendry	Windsor Framework SPS Delivery & Trade Acting DCVO: Philip Johnston	Digital Services Director: Paul McGurnaghan	Resource Efficiency Division Director: Dr Richard Crowe
Climate Change & Green Growth Policy Director: Jane Corderoy	Environmental Resources Policy Director: Shane Doris	Policy, Economics & Statistics Director: Seamus McErlean	Animal Health & Welfare Policy Director: Neal Gartland	NIFAIS Project Director: Nigel Trimble	Natural Environment Division Acting Director: Larissa Strutt
Green Growth & Climate Action Delivery Director: Claire Cockerill	Marine & Fisheries Director: Owen Lyttle	Sustainable Agri-food Development Director: Alison Chambers	Veterinary Medicines, SPS Policy, Group Renewal Director: Patricia Quinn-Duffy	Strategic Support Director: Sharon McFlynn	
Innovation & Science Transformation Director: Pauline Rooney	Environmental Governance Director: Pauline Keegan	Agricultural Policy Director: Rosemary Agnew	Enzootic Disease Control & Field Delivery DCVO: Gemma Daly	Estates Transformation Director: Alison Caldwell	
	Forest Service Chief Executive: John Joe O'Boyle	Area Based Schemes Director: Jason Foy	Epizootic Disease Control & Public Health Delivery DCVO: David Kyle	Corporate Planning & Governance Director: David Simpson (A)	
		Rural Affairs Acting Director: Teresa O'Neill		Finance Director: Roger Downey	
				Windsor Framework Implementation Directorate Director: Catherine Fisher*	

Structure as of August 2024.

*Reports directly to Katrina Godfrey

DAERA is committed to investing in its people and their performance. We want our department to be a great place to work, one where diversity and inclusion is valued and where everyone can feel proud of the contribution they make as public servants.

This means that we are committed to taking action to support our staff, enhancing our capability and our capacity to respond to new policy challenges, new technologies and new ways of working. We will work with our colleagues in the Department of Finance to deliver the new NICS People Plan 2024-25 within DAERA and to assist in the development of a new 5-year people strategy for the NICS.

On diversity and inclusion, we are committed to making our full contribution to wider NICS initiatives and programmes designed to ensure that everyone feels valued in work for who they are and the talents they bring. We will also support particular the work of our Gender, Race and Ethnicity, LGBTQ+ and Disability Networks, with our support being led by our Departmental Diversity & Inclusion Champion.



3.1 Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations

As a public authority, DAERA has due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of categories outlined in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in carrying out its functions. Further information on the Department's equality scheme is available on its website [Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs](#).

During 2023-24 the Department promoted the importance of equality among staff with two bespoke training videos on equality legislation/requirements and how our equality scheme operates in action.

These were followed up with further training video on age equality, with the final video in the series on gender equality being released in 2024-25. The Department will also be reviewing its Disability Action Plan to ensure it continues to remain effective in promoting positive attitudes for those with a disability.



4. What we will Deliver

Careful consideration has been given to the budget allocated to DAERA for 2024-25 and what it will mean for the work of the Department. These considerations have resulted in the following key departmental priorities for 2024-25.

4.1 DAERA Key Priorities



4.2 Business Plan Commitments

This section sets out the key actions the Department will deliver during the period, the strategic priorities these will contribute towards and timescales for delivery. We have prioritised those functions and services that the law requires us to deliver, followed by work that can further advance our strategic priorities. Where target date of 31 March 2025 is detailed this illustrates planned delivery within 2024-25 financial year, no later than 31 March 2025 and in many instances much earlier. It is important to note work on matters is on-going in a timely and planned manner with phased delivery envisaged through the financial year.



Ministerial Priority 1: Tackling climate change together

Number	What we are going to do	Why we are doing this	Target Date
1	Working with all departments and, following Executive approval, we will legislate to set NI’s first three carbon budgets covering the period 2023-2037 and set 2030 and 2040 Emissions Reduction Targets.	To ensure that Northern Ireland (NI) has an environment, society and economy which are resilient to the current and future projected impacts of climate change.	31 March 2025
2	Working with all departments and, following Executive approval, we will consult on a draft Climate Action Plan and publish the third NI Climate Change Adaptation Programme.	To ensure that NI has an environment, society and economy which are resilient to the current and future projected impacts of climate change.	31 March 2025
3	We will undertake a public consultation exercise and, with Executive approval, make regulations that establishes an independent Just Transition Commission in NI.	Just transition seeks to centre the interests of those that are most affected by the low-carbon transition, advocating that no-one is left behind.	31 March 2025

Number	What we are going to do	Why we are doing this	Target Date
4	We will prepare a new, evidence-informed Peatland Strategy and develop an implementation plan to take forward the strategic objectives.	To protect and restore our (NI) Peatlands to become healthy functioning ecosystems by 2040, which through natural carbon sinking help to reduce emissions in line with the Climate Change Act (NI) 2022.	31 December 2024
5	Forest Service will plant 600 hectares of new woodland by grant aiding landowners and on new land acquired on the Forest Estate.	To contribute to the Forests for Our Future programme to plant 9,000 hectares new woodland from 2020 to 2030, and to Climate Change Committee recommendations.	31 March 2025
6	We will publish a Blue Carbon Action Plan informed by science which is capable of improving our marine environment.	To deliver evidence-based nature-based solutions to climate change, restoring our natural capital, and protecting biodiversity.	31 March 2025
7	We will deliver a new Beef Carbon Reduction Scheme and a new Carbon Footprinting Project.	Introduction of new schemes will help drive down the carbon footprint of the agriculture sector and ensure that Northern Ireland (NI) has an environment, society and economy which are resilient to the current and future projected impacts of climate change.	31 March 2025
8	We will bring forward an updated Green Growth Strategy for Executive consideration.	A new, multi-decade strategy with Executive approval will set a long-term vision for tackling the climate crisis by balancing climate action with the need for a clean, resilient environment and economy.	31 March 2025



Ministerial Priority 2: Protecting our natural environment

Number	What we are going to do	Why we are doing this	Target Date
9	We will establish a Lough Neagh focused task force to, deliver the DAERA actions in the Lough Neagh Report and Action Plan, including regulation, enforcement and nature recovery.	To support and improve the water quality in Lough Neagh.	31 March 2025
10	We will continue to take action to safeguard water quality and the environment at Mobuoy site.	Protecting the environment and to maintain and safeguard water quality.	31 March 2025
11	Following Executive approval, we will publish a new Environmental Improvement Plan for Northern Ireland and establish robust accountability mechanisms to allow monitoring and reporting of progress.	To protect, enhance and improve the environment in NI connecting people with nature.	31 March 2025
12	Informed by the outcomes from a public consultation exercise and following Executive approval, we will publish a new Nature Recovery (Biodiversity) Strategy.	To support biodiversity restoration and help meet targets in the UK National Biodiversity Action Plan.	31 March 2025
13	Working in consultation with stakeholders we will bring forward a new, science-led Ammonia Strategy for Executive approval.	To set the direction for reducing ammonia emissions from agriculture which have an adverse effect on the natural environment.	31 March 2025
14	Following Executive and Secretary of State approval we will publish a new Marine Plan for NI.	To inform and guide the regulation, management, use and protection of our marine area.	31 December 2024



Ministerial Priority 3: Strengthening environmental governance

Number	What we are going to do	Why we are doing this	Target Date
15	We will reverse the changes made to the Cross-compliance Penalty regime in 2022.	To strengthen the deterrent against farm businesses which repeatedly breach the Cross-Compliance standards.	31 December 2024
16	We will legislate to prohibit the sale and supply of disposable vapes in NI.	To provide environmental protection from this frequently littered item and support public health.	31 March 2025
17	We will bring forward a report with evidence to inform decisions on the creation of an independent environmental protection agency.	To further strengthen the environmental governance and help protect and improve the environment.	31 March 2025
18	Working with the Department of Justice, we will carry out a review of the penalties and fines for Environmental Crimes and identify improvements that can be made to ensure a streamlined and more effective penalty regime.	We want to ensure that our penalty regime is effective in the protections it offers for our environment and can drive compliance with the new Farm Sustainability Standards.	31 March 2025



Ministerial Priority 4: Supporting sustainable resilient and productive, agri-food and fishing sectors

Number	What we are going to do	Why we are doing this	Target Date
19	We will deliver transition to a more sustainable farming sector through the Farm Support and Development Programme.	To deliver reductions in carbon emissions from agriculture, improved environmental sustainability on farms, improved productivity and better long-term resilience.	31 March 2025
20	We will accurately deliver 95% of Basic Payment Scheme payments to eligible applicants.	These payments help ensure the resilience of farm businesses and represents commitment to farming families and sustainability for the rural economy right across Northern Ireland.	30 November 2024
21	We will deliver a new Marine Environment and Fisheries Funding scheme.	Supporting the NI fishing industry with a focus on sustainability, climate action, protecting and restoring the marine environment, economic resilience and safety.	31 August 2024
22	Working collaboratively with other departments, we will bring forward for Executive consideration a new Food Strategy Framework.	A new food strategy has the potential to make a positive contribution to addressing many of today's societal challenges, for example, health and wellbeing, the environment and food poverty, as well as regional economic prosperity, with education being a key tool in delivering societal change.	31 December 2024



Ministerial Priority 5: Safeguarding animal health and welfare and plant health

Number	What we are going to do	Why we are doing this	Target Date
23	In collaboration with stakeholders, we will bring forward proposals capable of delivering reductions in the incidence of Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) on farms across Northern Ireland.	To ensure that our approach to reducing bTB incidence is evidence-based and capable of driving reductions in disease incidence, lessening the impact on farmers and the public purse and supporting trade.	31 March 2025
24	We will bring forward legislation and implement schemes that give effect to safeguarding measures for XL Bully type dogs.	To reduce the potential for an attack by an XL Bully type dog on a member of the public, livestock or any other animal.	31 December 2024
25	We will take action to ban the third party sale of pups and kittens in NI by bringing forward a version of Lucy’s Law for consideration by the Executive and the Assembly.	To address potential instances of low welfare and illegal breeding.	31 March 2025
26	We will bring forward legislation to make camera surveillance (CCTV) in abattoirs compulsory.	To support welfare policies for all animals in NI, and further public and industry confidence in the high standards throughout our food chain.	31 March 2025
27	We will bring forward legislation to implement bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) herd restrictions in NI.	BVD places a substantial financial burden on NI industry. Introduction of herd restrictions is the next step in our efforts to eradicate this disease from NI.	31 March 2025

Number	What we are going to do	Why we are doing this	Target Date
28	We will implement an effective Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Regime across NI to protect public health, animal health & welfare, plant health, support trade and agri-food supply chain continuity.	To ensure access to EU trading markets and unfettered access to the GB market which both support our agri-food supply chain. Compliance will also serve to protect our high animal health and welfare and plant health standards and thus contribute to protecting public health.	31 March 2025
29	We will implement Official Controls on behalf of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) across approved slaughterhouses, cutting plants and game handling establishments in accordance with Service Level Agreement.	To ensure compliance with high standards of animal health, animal welfare and public health and production of safe food.	31 March 2025
30	We will undertake an exercise to test developed contingency plans in respect of the threat of disease incursion (African Swine Fever) and to participate in exercises of joint interest across the UK and Republic of Ireland.	Contingency exercises are a critical component in ensuring Departmental and industry preparedness and responsiveness for such incursions and supporting overall recovery.	31 March 2025
31	In collaboration with Department of Health (DoH), we will bring forward a new Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR) Implementation Plan for 2024-2029.	To ensure antimicrobials are used wisely and appropriately and address the global threat of AMR.	31 March 2025



Ministerial Priority 6: Building strong, sustainable and diverse rural communities

Number	What we are going to do	Why we are doing this	Target Date
32	We will implement the 2024-25 Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation (TRPSI) Action Plan (including the Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme).	To tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas through organisations working in partnership to design and implement measures which target the need of vulnerable people.	31 March 2025
33	We will deliver better outcomes for rural communities by developing for consultation a new, evidence-based rural policy.	To help create a rural community where people want to live, work and be active in a sustainable and environmentally responsible way.	31 March 2025
34	As accountable Department for 3 projects within the Causeway Coast and Glens Growth Deal and 1 project within the Complementary Fund we will partner with the local councils to complete the business cases and allocate contract for funding to enable the delivery of the projects to commence.	To help create new jobs and accelerate inclusive economic growth.	31 March 2025

To support the delivery of the business plan priorities we have also agreed a further area of focus which is:



We will build our capacity to deliver, by investing in science and research and development and in our people, while also safeguarding our resources

Number	What we are going to do	Why we are doing this	Target Date
35	We will transform DAERA's Science system to enable us to enhance its use for policy and programme development.	Science and innovation are key enablers to support delivery of core departmental priorities. Championing and investing in science, innovation and knowledge transfer as the means of addressing the climate challenge and unlocking new economic opportunities.	31 March 2025
36	We will ensure our staff resources are aligned to meeting our priorities and deliver our commitments in the Departmental Capacity and Capability Plan.	This supports the delivery of DAERAs priorities by having the right people in the right place with the right skills, at the right time.	31 March 2025
37	We will promote and play our part in delivery of the NICS Diversity Action Plan 2024-25 by embedding the three pillars of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equality • Diversity and inclusion • Health and wellbeing 	Equality Diversity and inclusion remains a strategic priority for the Civil Service.	31 March 2025

Number	What we are going to do	Why we are doing this	Target Date
38	We will live within the budgets allocated to us, ensuring that we manage public expenditure in line with the principles of regularity, propriety, and value for money.	We have a responsibility to be effective stewards of taxpayers' money, ensuring high standards of financial management and accountability and living within the legal budget ceiling for DAERA set out in the Budget Act.	31 March 2025
39	We will encourage people to raise concerns and respond appropriately when we receive concerns or complaints, correcting failures and learning lessons.	To provide reassurance people that concerns or complaints are taken seriously and handled fairly, properly and consistently.	31 March 2025
40	We will ensure that the Department discharges effectively its responsibilities and obligations as required by the Windsor Framework.	To ensure the Department is compliant with its statutory obligations under the Windsor Framework.	31 March 2025

5. How we will deliver

5.1 Collaboration

Our pathway to success relies on partnership, mutual understanding and shared goals that can only come about through effective stakeholder engagement and collaborative working which DAERA has a strong history of. In 2024-25 we will strive to work collaboratively with our internal and external partners to ensure we are delivering value for money by making the best use of our resources. We will continue to improve our policies and services by adopting an outward looking approach and learning from good practice across the world, building on their successes and learning from their experiences.

We will continue to develop our relationships with stakeholders, including, but not limited to:

- Ministers and the Assembly
- Other government departments
- Our arm's length bodies
- Local government
- Agri-industries
- Our communities
- International trade bodies
- Environmental Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)
- Private Sector
- Voluntary Community Sector

5.2 Monitoring and Reporting Arrangements

The Department has established monitoring and reporting arrangements in place in relation to its Business Plan targets. In the first instance, each target is assigned to a Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) who will have responsibility for monitoring progress on a day-to-day basis. During the course of the financial year, detailed progress against each Business Plan target will be reported to the Departmental Board for the periods ending, 30 September, 31 December and 31 March.

Progress will be reported on a Red / Amber / Green (RAG) basis as follows:



Green

- achieved or on track for delivery.



Amber

- rate of progress is less than planned.



Green/Amber

- level of progress is broadly on track with easily redeemable deviations from plans.



Red

- not achieved or not expected to be achieved.

Following the end of the 2024-25 financial year the DAERA 2024-25 Annual Reports and Accounts will be published and placed on the DAERA website. The Annual report will include a Performance section showing the extent to which the targets in this Plan were achieved.

DAERA Business Plan 2024-25



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