**Call for Proposals**

**Environmental Farming Scheme Group Facilitation – Pilot Projects**

The Environmental Farming Scheme (EFS) is DAERA’s agri-environment scheme within the NI Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

The EFS has three levels:-

* A Higher Level, primarily for environmentally designated sites;
* A Wider Level, to create green infrastructure to deliver benefits across the countryside, outside of environmentally designated sites;
* A Group Level, to support co-operative action by farmers in specific areas such as a river catchment.

The EFS has been designed to address specific environmental needs, primarily related to biodiversity and water quality. It is targeted and prioritised to deliver maximum environmental benefit and value for money.

 EFS Tranche 1 opened for applications in March 2017. It received 926 Higher Level and 1,435 Wider Level applications.

Further details on the EFS are available at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/environmental-farming-scheme-efs>

**Group Facilitation – Pilot Projects**

This open call is seeking proposals for facilitation of co-operative Group projects for farmers who have applied to EFS, or that will apply in future.

Group projects are to promote co-ordinated activity among farmers participating in the EFS to enhance environmental outcomes in certain areas, such as an environmentally designated site, priority habitat or river catchment.

EFS Group projects are a new measure within Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and will initially be introduced on a pilot basis in 2017.

Therefore, DAERA is seeking proposals from individuals or organisations from the environmental, farming or other land management sectors, or service providers with environmental land management experience and suitable facilitation skills. DAERA intends to initiate a small number of pilot projects this year.

Proposals are invited for pilot projects on:-

* Environmentally designated sites;
* Priority species;
* Specific river catchments: Donore, Co Antrim; Upper Lagan, Co Down; Blackstaff and Carrigs, Dundrum, Co Down.

For the river catchments of Blackstaff and Carrigs, Dundrum, Co Down, DAERA is seeking one project covering both catchments. In addition, proposals which cover one or both of the other catchments or all four catchments in a single project are welcome.

**Objectives**

Projects on environmentally designated sites or priority species should aim to put favourable management in place to achieve favourable condition status.

Projects in river catchments should aim to reduce agricultural pressures which are causing Water Framework Directive (WFD) failures and achieve at least WFD Good ecological status.

Details of the WFD status of the river catchments, along with the reasons for the classification, can be accessed by using the interactive map at:

<https://appsd.daera-ni.gov.uk/RiverBasinViewer/>

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/wmu-digital-dataset-downloads>

Further information on the catchments can also be requested by contacting

efsgroupinfo@daera-ni.gov.uk

**Scope of pilot projects**

Please note this call for Group pilot projects is for potential facilitators only.  Farmers / Landowners who wish to participate in the EFS should apply as individual applicants when the EFS next opens for applications.

Following introduction of the Group pilot projects in 2017 it is envisaged that there will be a call for further Group projects in 2018.

For the pilot, DAERA is seeking proposals for projects which can start by mid-2017. Projects on Environmentally designated sites or priority species should involve a maximum of 60 farmers.

Key activities that it is envisaged the facilitator will carry out in a pilot project include:

* Manage and deliver an overall group project for the area.
* Provide EFS planning services or arrange the provision of EFS planning services for farmers in the project areas who have applied to EFS Tranche 1.
* Encourage co-ordinated action among farmers in the project area.
* Provide ongoing support, advice and training for those farmers.
* Encourage other farmers in the area to apply to join EFS.
* Carry out monitoring and reporting on the project.

Details of requirements for EFS planning services are at Annex A

Further details of the EFS Group Facilitation measure are contained in the EFS Group Facilitation guidance document which applicants should read fully before preparing an application.

**Eligible Costs**

The EFS Group Facilitation guidance includes details on eligible costs. Costs for Group Facilitators will be paid at a daily rate, up to a maximum of £300 per day including travel and subsistence expenses.

For EFS planning services, the rates and thresholds for EFS planning services apply. The maximum daily rate is £382 per day.

**Application Process**

To apply you must complete an application form and submit it by email to efsgroupinfo@daera-ni.gov.uk . The closing date for applications is 3pm on Friday 5 May 2017.

**Assessment of Applications**

The call is competitive and applications will be assessed against selection criteria which are detailed at Annex B.

Following assessment of applications, successful applicants will then be invited to agree a project specification and contract for its delivery with DAERA.

Further details of this Group pilot project call, including an application form and Guidance document is available at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/agri-environment>

EFS and EFS Group facilitation projects are part-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD).

**Annex A**

**EFS Planner Requirements**

* EFS Higher Level is targeted at designated sites of environmental importance. Participation in this level of the EFS requires the submission and approval of a site specific Remedial Management Plan or ssRMP, drawn up after a detailed site assessment.
* A Planner will use judgement and experience to select appropriate management strategies for the site. Implementation of the ssRMP should ensure that the site is “under favourable management”.
* It is essential that the management plan produced is within the capability of the farmer to deliver.
* The sensitivity and complexity of these sites and the fact that the ssRMP must be practical and implementable by the farmer requires that planners undertaking this role must have a particular skill set.

**Skills and Qualifications Required**

1. Possess a suitable qualification such as a Bachelors degree in Environmental Science, Ecology or Biological Science, or an equivalent deemed suitable by DAERA, and / or be a member of a recognised environmental professional body or a Chartered Environmentalist as specified by the Society of the Environment.
2. Evidence of previous experience of developing habitat management plans.
3. Evidence of previous experience of providing environmental advice and support to agricultural businesses in relation to land management.

**Annex B**

**ENVIRONMENTAL FARMING SCHEME (EFS)**

**GROUP PROJECTS – SCORING FRAMEWORK**

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| **Criteria**  | **Weighting** |
| 1. Facilitator has clearly defined the aim of the project and identified the pressures/issues in the proposed project area.  | 15% |
| 2. Facilitator has set out a framework for measuring the outcomes of the project which includes initial site assessments.  | 10% |
| 3. Facilitator has demonstrated ability to deliver environmental benefits at the designated site or the catchment scale. | 15% |
| 4. Facilitator has demonstrated that they have the necessary experience to undertake the project, including experience of co-operative processes. | 15% |
| 5. Facilitator has demonstrated ability to provide environmental planning services for the farmers and ability to monitor the project.  | 15% |
| 6. Extent to which the proposed project demonstrates value for money. | 10% |
| 7. Is the proposed project timescale and scope appropriate and feasible. | 20% |