

**From the Office of the  
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Department of  
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and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil  
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department of

**Fairmin, Environment  
an' Kintra Matthers**

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Our Ref: COR-0480-2025  
Date: 20 August 2025

Dear Barry,

## **NOTICE OF MOTION – NITRATES ACTION PLAN**

Thank you for your correspondence of 2 July 2025 advising of a motion adopted by the Council's Standards and Business Committee at its meeting of 24 June 2025.

In the motion, a number of issues are raised, and I welcome the opportunity to respond.

On the issue of inadequate engagement with stakeholders prior to consultation launch, I listened to these concerns and extended the consultation period by four weeks, as I recognise the complex and scientific nature of many of the proposals. This public consultation on proposed updates to the Nutrients Action Programme (NAP) has provided all stakeholders and the wider public an opportunity to comment. It needed to continue to give everyone an opportunity to have their say as part of the policy development process to support changes to the regulations, in line with the legislative process

In addition, I have recently announced the following further update to the consultation process which I am sure the committee will be aware of. Now that the current consultation has closed, it is my intention, to set up a timebound stakeholder task and finish group with an external facilitator and representatives from farming, agri-food, environmental groups and the Department.

Working collaboratively and taking into account the consultation responses, plus any other potential solutions, the group will be asked to propose measures and actions, that are evidence based and workable at farm level within realistic timeframes, as well as meeting legislative requirements. During this process, consideration will be given to the

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economic impact of these revised proposals and a draft Economic Impact Assessment will also be prepared on the revised proposals.

When its work is completed, I will then undertake a further, statutory compliant, eight-week consultation to give the public and wider stakeholders an opportunity to provide views on any updated proposals, before taking my final decisions on the updated NAP to the Executive for agreement.

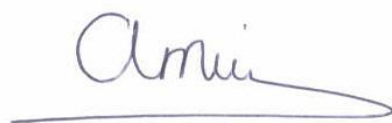
The Nutrients Action Programme is not a policy to reduce livestock numbers. This is demonstrated through DAERA's investment of over £12 million in the Sustainable Use of Livestock Slurry research initiative and the proposal to retain the NAP derogation for grassland farms at the upper limit of 250 kg Nitrogen per hectare per year.

I fully acknowledge that some of the proposed measures in the NAP consultation will of course require investment and officials within my department will consider how we can help meet that funding need in the time ahead. I am firmly committed to a Just Transition not just in relation to climate change but also about other environmental issues. I recently met the Finance Minister to discuss the support we can provide, building upon the £12m plus already secured as part of the Just Transition Fund for Agriculture.

On the issue of wastewater and sewage pollution, I have previously been on the record and wish to repeat my clear view that agriculture is not the only contributor to what has been happening at Lough Neagh and many other water bodies across Northern Ireland. I have consistently stated that the separate regulatory regime with NI Water on wastewater known as SORPI needs to change and I will be bringing proposals to my Executive colleagues on the matter over the time ahead. Everyone must play their part in improving water quality.

The Nutrients Action Programme is concerned with managing excess nutrients from agriculture that are contributing to water pollution and damage to natural habitats. Improving water quality in Northern Ireland is important to everyone. Finding workable solutions is in all our interests, and I believe the level of engagement we have had recently on the NAP will help ensure a positive outcome for all.

Yours sincerely

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

**ANDREW MUIR MLA**  
**Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs**