



Department of  
**Agriculture and  
Rural Development**

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AN ROINN

**Talmhaíochta agus  
Forbartha Tuaithe**

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MÄNNYSTRIE O

**Fairms an  
Kintra Fordèrin**

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**Public Consultation**  
**on**  
**Policy Proposals**  
**for a**  
**Rural Proofing Bill**

**February 2015**

**CLOSING DATE FOR RESPONSES: MONDAY 16 MARCH 2015, 5PM**

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## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The NI Executive acknowledges that no single Department has exclusive responsibility for rural areas and it is important that all government Departments acknowledge their responsibilities in rural areas. Most strategies and policies developed and implemented across government have a rural dimension or impact upon people living in rural areas.
- 1.2 It is important that the social and economic needs of people living in rural areas are considered when developing or implementing government policies and strategies, including spending plans, to ensure resources are targeted effectively and efficiently; a policy intervention that works well in urban areas may not be effective in a rural setting. For this reason, it is important that the potential impacts of a policy on people living in rural areas are identified, assessed and addressed appropriately, to ensure that rural dwellers are not unfairly disadvantaged.
- 1.3 The current process used by government departments to assess the impacts of policies on people living in rural areas is known as rural proofing. In 2002, the Executive signed up to undertake rural proofing of its policies and reaffirmed this commitment in 2009. The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has lead responsibility in the North for rural proofing policy. In 2014, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development made a commitment to strengthen rural proofing across government and she has decided that introducing primary legislation, subject to Executive agreement, is the most effective way of achieving this aim.
- 1.4 DARD is committed to enhancing rural proofing so that:
  - rural issues would be embedded in the development and delivery of all government strategies and policies (including spending plans);
  - rural needs and impacts would be identified and addressed appropriately as a matter of course across government;
  - there would be transparency and availability of information on rural proofing; and

- government would establish and maintain a joined-up and collaborative approach to considering and taking account of rural needs when designing all services.
- 1.5 The proposed Bill would build upon the existing government commitment to undertake rural proofing. It will support the equitable treatment of rural dwellers by helping to ensure that their needs are appropriately addressed when developing policies and strategies, including spending plans and those which govern how public services are delivered. This will assist in delivering better outcomes for rural communities alongside other communities and more efficient and effective service delivery.
- 1.6 The policy objectives of the proposed Bill are:
- to require the effective implementation of rural proofing across government;
  - to establish DARD's role in promoting and encouraging rural proofing across government and providing advice and guidance;
  - to require information and data on rural proofing to be made available in a transparent way in a report to be laid before the Assembly; and
  - to put in place effective arrangements for co-operation between public authorities and sharing best practice.
- 1.7 The Bill is being progressed within this Assembly mandate (2011-2016) and it is proposed that the Bill will complete the legislative process by March 2016, subject to Executive agreement and its successful passage through the Assembly stages.
- 1.8 This Bill will form part of a package of measures to strengthen rural proofing across government and ensure that consideration of the needs of rural dwellers, and the impact of policies and public services on rural communities, is firmly embedded across government. The Bill will be supported by a number of non-legislative measures including reviewing the need for, and role of, a rural champion and reviewing provision of training and guidance on rural proofing.

## **2. Introduction and Background**

2.1 In NI, 670,000 people live in a rural area, which represents 37% of the population (2011 census). In the Rural White Paper Action Plan<sup>1</sup>, the Executive recognised the importance of rural communities and the contribution they make to the region as a whole. The Executive also committed to seeking to address poverty, disadvantage, social exclusion and inequality in rural areas and to aspire to a better quality of life for rural dwellers.

### **What is Rural Proofing?**

2.2 Rural proofing is a key tool to help deliver the Executive's commitment set out in the Rural White Paper Action Plan. The aim of rural proofing is to ensure the fair and equitable treatment of rural dwellers by addressing their needs as an integral part of the development of government policy and public services; and by evaluating the impact of government policy and public services on rural communities.

2.3 At this time of unprecedented financial constraint, rural proofing is a tool that can help ensure that future public resources, interventions and services are targeted to address the identified need in rural areas in an effective and equitable manner.

### **The Policy-Making Process**

2.4 Rural proofing is part of the government policy-making process in the North and is designed to rigorously scrutinise proposed policies. The Executive has been committed to undertaking rural proofing since 2002 and renewed this commitment in 2009. Whilst lead responsibility for rural proofing policy lies with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), it is the responsibility and commitment of each NI Department to ensure that its policies and programmes are rural proofed, their impacts understood and any impacts which disadvantage rural dwellers are appropriately mitigated.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/rural-white-paper-action-plan.pdf>

2.5 The key principles for the policy-making process within government departments in the North are set out in “A Practical Guide to Policymaking in Northern Ireland”<sup>2</sup>. This guide is supported by the Policy Toolkit<sup>3</sup> which includes a suite of impact assessments which are used to identify and assess any potential impacts of the proposed policy. One of these impact assessments is rural proofing.

### The Definition of Rural

2.6 The current definition of rural is drawn from a 2005 report (Report of the Interdepartmental Urban–Rural Definition Group<sup>4</sup>) produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), and is based on the findings of the Interdepartmental Urban–Rural Definition Group. Having looked at how government departments defined rural and urban, the group recommended a default urban–rural definition. Table 1 below sets out the various settlement bands identified by the group. Settlements with a population of over 4,500 (Bands A-E) are deemed urban and those with a population under 4,500 (Bands F-H) are deemed rural. However, it should be noted that a review of the classification of settlements is currently being undertaken which will include looking at the current definition of rural in line with the commitment made in the Rural White Paper Action Plan<sup>5</sup>.

**Table 1: Statistical Classification of Settlements**

| Label  | Name                                       | Settlement population size (2001 Census)  |
|--------|--|---|
| Band A | Belfast Metropolitan Urban Area (BMUA)     | c580,000  |
| Band B | Derry Urban Area (DUA)                     | c90,000   |
| Band C | Large Town                                 | 18,000 or more and under 75,000 (outside BMUA and DUA)                            |
| Band D | Medium Town                                | 10,000 or more and under 18,000 (outside BMUA and DUA)                            |
| Band E | Small Town                                 | 4,500 or more and under 10,000 (outside BMUA and DUA)                             |
| Band F | Intermediate settlement                    | 2,250 or more and under 4,500 (outside BMUA and DUA)                              |
| Band G | Village                                    | 1,000 or more and under 2,250 (outside BMUA and DUA)                              |
| Band H | Small village, hamlet and open countryside | Settlements of less than 1,000 people and open countryside (outside BMUA and DUA) |

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/policylink-a-practical-guide-to-policy-making>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/policy-toolkit>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/publications/urban\\_rural/ur\\_report.pdf](http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/publications/urban_rural/ur_report.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/rural-white-paper-action-plan.pdf> (action 5, page 18)

2.7 The Group also recognised that different definitions of urban and rural might be appropriate on different occasions and in response to different policy objectives. Therefore, policy makers, depending on their individual policy objective, may have a different definition of rural from the default definition. In such cases, and as part of the rural proofing process, the policy maker should justify their move away from the default position by means of supporting evidence.

## **DARD-led Rural Initiatives**

### **Rural White Paper Action Plan**

2.8 The Rural White Paper Action Plan is an Executive initiative aimed at addressing key issues and challenges facing rural communities. It provides an important mechanism for the Executive to demonstrate its commitment to rural areas and to collaborative working to improve the quality of life for rural dwellers.

2.9 The Rural White Paper Action Plan contains commitments by all Departments and covers a wide range of rural issues including rural broadband, healthcare, rural tourism, poverty and social inclusion, housing, rural transport and planning.

### **Tackling Poverty and Social Isolation**

2.10 The Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework is a DARD initiative which aims to help tackle poverty and social isolation in rural areas through the delivery of a range of measures in partnership with other statutory bodies targeted at reducing poverty and social isolation.

2.11 The TRPSI Framework covers the period 2011-15 and builds on a previous package of measures provided under DARD's Anti-Poverty and Social Inclusion Framework which operated during the period 2008-11. In the current budget period £16 million has been secured under the Framework.

## **Rural Champion**

2.12 The purpose of the Rural Champion is to address the specific needs of rural communities primarily through the championing of rural issues inside and outside government. In 2009, the Executive agreed that championing of rural issues would be most effective as a shared responsibility by organisations at all levels inside and outside government, rather than having a single individual or organisation responsible for championing rural issues.

## **Rural Development Programme**

2.13 The Rural Development Programme is supported through the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy. The European Union has three objectives for the development of our rural areas.

- Improving the competitiveness of the agriculture, forest and food industries;
- The sustainable management of the regions natural resources; and
- The development of rural areas.

2.14 Each region, within a Member State, can design their rural development programmes from a selection of the measures set out in the EU Rural Development Regulation. The North of Ireland, as a region must develop a programme of support taking into account the problems and needs identified for our rural areas.

### **3. The Current Situation**

- 3.1 This section sets out the current position, including that in other jurisdictions in relation to assessing the impact of policy on rural areas.

#### **Current position in the North**

##### **The Rural Proofing Process**

- 3.2 All government departments have been required to rural proof since 2002. At that time rural proofing guidance was produced and this was further supported, in 2010, by the introduction of a rural proofing training course, “Think Rural”, to be delivered to Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) policy makers.
- 3.3 This requirement to rural proof makes it incumbent on policy makers to begin the process of rural proofing at the outset of their policy development or policy review.
- 3.4 In order to support policy makers through this process, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has developed a Rural Issues Statement pro-forma<sup>6</sup> for them to follow.
- 3.5 Where it is considered that, at the outset, the policy development/review is likely to have a direct or indirect impact on rural areas, then the policy maker must gather evidence to further explore or quantify the impact that their policy could have on rural areas. In order that any potential rural disparities are identified early in the process, policy makers are strongly recommended to contact rural stakeholders to discuss their initial policy ideas.
- 3.6 If at the outset of any policy development or review it is considered that there will be no direct or indirect impacts on rural areas, the subsequent rural impact statement must be accompanied with a statement that the rural proofing of the policy has been screened out. This screening out statement must in turn be supported with appropriate reasons for the screening out and be included with the public consultation of the new/reviewed policy.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/guide-to-rural-proofing.pdf>

### **Uptake of Rural Proofing across Government Departments**

- 3.7 In 2005, DARD commissioned a “Study of Rural Policy”, which looked at the issue of rural proofing alongside other rural policy issues. This report concluded that there had been disappointment with the application of rural proofing, in particular the extent to which it has been able to effectively influence decision making, as well as concerns about perceived difficulties about the mechanics of undertaking rural proofing. This led to a reconsideration of the rural proofing process within the NICS led by DARD. The objective of the new rural proofing process was to ensure a more robust application of rural proofing, hence better consideration and integration of rural issues at the outset of the policy making process.
- 3.8 In 2009, DARD commissioned the Central Survey Unit of NISRA to carry out a rural proofing awareness survey in order to develop a baseline of the current level of knowledge about the aim, process and outcomes within each of the then 11 government departments. The survey’s findings showed significant short comings in both the areas of training and using rural proofing as part of policy development. It also indicated that there was a need for specific targeted training and support to help policy makers with undertaking rural proofing as part of their policy role.

### **How many civil servants have completed training across NI Departments?**

- 3.9 In recognition of these shortcomings, DARD engaged the services of the Centre for Applied Learning (CAL) to arrange for the delivery of a series of half day training seminars (Think Rural) to begin during 2010/11. The training is provided by the Rural Development Council in conjunction with CAL. The initial courses were targeted at civil servants in policy roles and there is continuing provision to make training available to all civil servants via CAL’s training course catalogue.
- 3.10 Statistics compiled by CAL show that from April 2010 to September 2014, 242 NI civil servants have attended the Think Rural course.

## Rural Statistics

3.11 In December 2014, DARD launched a rural statistics webpage<sup>7</sup>, which provides 2011 census data broken down by rural/urban split. This information is publicly available on DARD's website and provides a useful information source for policy-makers considering potential impacts in rural areas.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/statistics.htm>

## Position in other jurisdictions

### South of Ireland

3.12 In 1999 the Irish Government produced a White Paper on Rural Development (Ensuring the Future – A Strategy for Rural Development in Ireland a White Paper on Rural Development). Within the strategic policy framework section of this document, as an overriding principle, the Government committed to the “rural proofing” of all national policies so as to ensure that policy makers are aware of the likely impact of policy proposals on the economic, social, cultural and environmental well-being of rural communities. By introducing rural proofing across all government departments, as a mechanism for ensuring that all policies are examined for their impact on rural communities, it was envisaged that this would, over time, represent a critical element of the Government’s commitment to the development of rural areas.

### England

3.13 In England, the Government launched its formal commitment to rural proof all domestic policies in the 2000 Rural White Paper with the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) being the designated responsible government department. Rural proofing was then reaffirmed as an explicit government commitment in the “Rural Statement 2012”.

3.14 DEFRA published refreshed advice for policy makers on rural proofing policies and programmes in July 2013. This assists policy officials across government to examine the rural context in which their policies will apply and the likely impacts that they will have in different types of rural area. DEFRA is also currently supporting Lord Cameron’s Independent Rural Proofing Implementation Review which commenced in September 2013. The review is gathering evidence through a series of Ministerial level meetings with government departments.

### Scotland

3.15 The Scottish Government mainstreams the needs of the rural population within all of its policies.

## Wales

- 3.16 The Welsh Government gave a commitment to rural proofing in their Programme for Government and rural proofing is included as part of the impact assessments procedures for policy makers.
- 3.17 In January 2014, the Welsh Government commissioned a piece of work for rural proofing across priority areas. Following the report that was produced from this a new approach to rural proofing has now been adopted. Titled, the Welsh Lens approach, it was launched in June 2014. Policy makers across Welsh Government have now adopted the new screening tool, rural proofing guidance and checklist as part of the Welsh Government's impact assessments procedures.

## Further afield

- 3.18 Internationally, the concepts of rural proofing and a rural champion are used in a few countries in slightly different ways and under different titles. The key countries include Finland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

## 4. Why is Change Needed?

### Vision

- 4.1 As part of the Rural White Paper Action Plan, the Executive agreed its Rural Vision:

*“Our vision is of a fair and inclusive rural society where rural dwellers enjoy the same quality of life as all others in the region. We envisage vibrant, strong rural communities, resilient and receptive to global trends through strong inter-linkages with urban areas and market towns.*

*Our vision is for rural economies adapting to global trends and improved infrastructure and transport systems to ensure rural dwellers can avail of employment opportunities and key services.*

*Our vision is for rural areas that maintain their distinctive features as places of agricultural production, areas of outstanding beauty, places of social, historic and cultural uniqueness and places with a strong community infrastructure which can avail of economic, social and cultural opportunities.*

*Our vision is for the continuing development of linkages between rural and urban areas so that everyone can enjoy the beauty and uniqueness of rural places and the facilities and services of larger towns and cities.”*

### Aim

- 4.2 In order to achieve the Executive’s Rural Vision and to support vibrant, thriving and sustainable rural communities, where people choose to live, work, learn and play, rural dwellers must be able to access the opportunities, amenities and public services they require. While there are areas of common need across urban and rural communities, people living in rural communities often have additional or different needs compared with people living in urban areas. Perhaps the most distinguishing characteristic between urban and rural is the issue of access to services in rural areas, for example due to remoteness of dwellings or sparse public transport links.
- 4.3 The Executive has been committed to undertaking rural proofing since 2002, and reaffirmed this commitment in 2009. DARD currently carries out its rural

proofing role on a voluntary basis and there is currently no statutory obligation on government organisations to undertake rural proofing. It is recognised that there is scope to improve the effectiveness of rural proofing within government to ensure that it can help deliver better outcomes for rural dwellers. In particular, it is recognised that there is a need for rural proofing to become more firmly embedded in the government policy making process and to be implemented more widely and effectively across government. It is also recognised that there is a need for greater transparency of the extent to which rural proofing is carried out within government.

#### **Why primary legislation is required**

- 4.4 A number of non-legislative and legislative options have been explored by DARD with the aim of improving the effectiveness of rural proofing to ensure that rural needs and circumstances are routinely considered as part of the government policy making process. DARD held a series of individual discussions with a range of stakeholders throughout November 2014 and subsequently established a stakeholder forum which met for the first time in December 2014. There was widespread support across the stakeholder organisations for a Rural Proofing Bill and emerging themes were the need for consistency across government, greater transparency and a clear evidence base in the rural proofing process. Stakeholders have indicated that providing a statutory basis for rural proofing would help increase awareness of the need to rural proof and help encourage the wider and more effective application of rural proofing by government, leading to better outcomes for rural dwellers. It is also recognised that legislation could help ensure greater transparency on the extent to which rural proofing is undertaken within government through the provision of better quality information. DARD recognises that providing a statutory basis for its rural proofing role would also strengthen its ability to promote rural proofing more effectively to other government organisations.
- 4.5 It is considered therefore that that there is merit in bringing forward legislation on rural proofing as part of a package of legislative and non-legislative measures aimed at improving the effectiveness of rural proofing within government. A draft Bill is therefore being developed in consultation with rural stakeholder representatives, NICS Departments and other non-departmental

government organisations which will provide a statutory framework to support rural proofing.

- 4.6 This Bill aims to secure the fair and equitable treatment of rural dwellers by requiring their needs to be considered when developing policies and strategies, including those which govern how public services are delivered. This will assist with delivering better outcomes for rural communities and more efficient and effective service delivery.

### **What is meant by equitable?**

- 4.7 “Equitable” means policies should treat rural areas in a fair or reasonable way and that policies should address the needs of rural areas in a proportionate way, taking into account their unique characteristics.

### **Enhancing Rural Proofing**

- 4.8 DARD is committed to enhancing rural proofing so that:
- rural issues would be embedded in the development and delivery of all government strategies and policies (including spending plans);
  - rural needs and impacts would be identified and addressed appropriately as a matter of course across government;
  - there would be transparency and availability of information on rural proofing; and
  - government would establish and maintain a joined-up and collaborative approach to considering and taking account of rural needs when designing all services.
- 4.9 Achievement of these principles will help to ensure that public resources are targeted effectively and used efficiently across the North.

### ***Consultation Question 1:***

***Do you support the need for change in line with DARD's aspirations outlined at paragraph 4.8?***

## 5. Policy Proposals for Primary Legislation

### Policy Objectives of the Bill

5.1 It is proposed that the Bill will contain provisions designed to meet the following policy objectives:

- to require the effective implementation of rural proofing across government;
- to establish DARD's role in promoting and encouraging rural proofing across government and providing advice and guidance;
- to require information and data on rural proofing to be made available in a transparent way in a report to be laid before the Assembly; and
- to put in place effective arrangements are in place for co-operation between public authorities and sharing best practice.

### Duty to Consider the Needs of People Living in Rural Areas

5.2 It is proposed that the Bill will introduce a statutory duty on government departments, local councils and, potentially, other public bodies to consider the needs of people living in rural areas when:

- developing new policies, strategies and plans (eg area or community plans) or revising existing ones; and
- designing and delivering public services or making changes to the way public services are delivered.

### *Consultation Question 2:*

*Do you think that placing a statutory duty on all government departments and local councils would help to ensure that the needs of rural dwellers are appropriately considered when policies and public services are being developed and delivered?*

### *Consultation Question 3:*

*Do you think that such a duty should extend to non-departmental public bodies in addition to government departments and councils? If so, which bodies?*

### **Promotion and Encouraging Rural Proofing Bill**

5.3 DARD's role will be to promote and encourage the need for public authorities (Departments, District Councils and other Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs)) to consider the needs of people living in rural areas when:

- developing new policies, strategies, plans (eg area or community plans) and legislation or revising existing ones; and
- designing and delivering public services or making changes to the way public services are delivered

### *Consultation Question 4:*

*Do you think that DARD should have a statutory role to promote and encourage other bodies to undertake rural proofing?*

### **Monitoring Report**

5.4 DARD would be required to produce and publish regular reports on rural proofing to be laid before the Assembly. It is envisaged that government departments would be required: to gather and collate information and statistics on how they have considered the social and economic needs of people living in rural areas; and share this information with DARD who would compile this information into a report which would be laid before the Assembly as a way of providing transparency and accountability around the rural proofing process.

5.5 The report will provide information as to what DARD has done in furtherance of its duty to encourage or promote rural proofing and will also give a factual account of what other Departments have done, based on information provided by other Departments. The production of such a report would improve the availability of information on the application of rural proofing and allow DARD

to identify and target areas where further promotion and encouragement is required.

- 5.6 By taking this approach the Department will also be able to assess its own approach in promoting and encouraging rural proofing across government. It will also provide the Assembly with the opportunity to scrutinise how DARD has exercised its role and how all Departments have applied rural proofing.

#### ***Consultation Question 5:***

***Do you think that the proposed monitoring and reporting arrangements will help to improve the availability and transparency of information available about rural proofing?***

#### **Co-operation and Collaboration**

- 5.7 It is proposed that the Bill will contain provision for co-operation and collaboration between DARD, other government Departments and public bodies. This will assist DARD in the exercise of its duty to promote and encourage rural proofing to consider the needs of people living in rural areas. It will also help to ensure a more consistent and cohesive approach to addressing the needs of rural dwellers.

#### ***Consultation Question 6:***

***Do you think that increased co-operation and collaboration between DARD, other government departments and public bodies is desirable?***

#### **Provision of Support, Advice, Guidance and Information**

- 5.8 To further strengthen DARD's role it is proposed that the Bill will contain powers for the Department to provide support for rural proofing through the provision of training, advice, guidance and information.

***Consultation Question 7:***

***Do you agree with the strengthening of DARD's role in providing support for rural proofing?***

***Consultation Question 8:***

***Is there any other aspect of the proposals you wish to comment on?***

## 6. Impact Assessments

6.1 DARD has carried out the following screening exercises on the policy proposals for a Rural Proofing Bill:

- Equality screening – to assess the potential impacts on section 75 groups, human rights implications and opportunities for promoting good relations;
- Regulatory impact screening – to assess the potential impacts of regulation on businesses, voluntary bodies and charities; and
- Rural Issues Statement – to assess the potential impacts of a policy on people living in rural areas.

6.2 The screening documents are available to download at [www.dardni.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.dardni.gov.uk/consultations).

6.3 Based on the evidence considered in these screening exercises, DARD has concluded that further assessments of impacts are not required (ie the policy has been screened out).

***Consultation Question 9: Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD to screen out from further assessment the impacts of a Rural Proofing Bill in respect of:***

- (a) Equality Impact Assessment;***
- (b) Regulatory Impact Assessment; and***
- (c) Rural Proofing?***

## **7. Proposals for Implementation**

7.1 In conjunction with bringing forward this Bill, DARD will also take forward a number of complementary measures to help ensure that the needs of people living in rural areas are appropriately considered.

### **Reviewing current Rural Proofing Process**

7.2 DARD will review the operation of the current rural proofing process to identify where other improvements could be made. For example, refreshing the guidance and training provided to staff.

### **Community Planning**

7.3 Local councils will be required to undertake community planning from April 2015. There is a clear link between rural proofing and ensuring that the needs of rural communities are considered and reflected in community plans. DARD will work with local government and other government departments to ensure a collaborative and joined-up approach, including arrangements for monitoring and reporting.

### **Reviewing Rural Champion approach**

7.4 DARD is planning a review of the rural champion approach which will include examining the effectiveness of the current rural champion model. It is proposed that the review will identify potential new models for championing rural issues and help inform the future approach to rural champion.

### **Rural White Paper Action Plan**

7.5 The Rural White Paper Action Plan is an Executive initiative led by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development which aims to address the key issues and challenges facing rural communities. The initiative provides a framework for the Executive to work together in identifying measures to help ensure the future sustainability of rural areas. The Action Plan contains commitments by all government Departments covering a wide range of rural issues across five broad themes - urban-rural linkages, rural communities, access to services, rural economies and the countryside.

- 7.6 DARD is required to monitor implementation of the Action Plan and to report annually on progress made by Departments on implementing their commitments. The Annual Progress Report 2014 was published on the DARD website in December and details progress made by Departments in implementing their commitments in the period between June 2012, when the Action Plan was formally launched, and 30th June 2014.
- 7.7 The Minister recently asked her Executive Colleagues to identify new and challenging actions by their Departments for inclusion in a refreshed Rural White Paper Action Plan to be published during 2015.

### **Review and Evaluation**

- 7.8 DARD will review and evaluate the implementation of these policy proposals and this proposed legislation, in line with best practice, to assess whether the policy is meeting the stated objectives.
- 7.9 Responsibility for rural issues spans all departments. In view of this, an Inter-departmental Committee on Rural Policy has been established, which comprises representatives of all government departments.
- 7.10 It is envisaged that this Committee will have a role in monitoring the implementation of these policy proposals and the Bill.

## 8. Consultation Response Template

- 8.1 Please use this template for submitting your responses and comments. The template should be read in conjunction with the proposals which can be viewed at [www.dardni.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.dardni.gov.uk/consultations).
- 8.2 To request a hard copy of the consultation papers please write, or email, as detailed below or telephone 028 9052 4106. The deadline for responses to this consultation is 16 March 2015. All responses should be received by then to ensure they can be fully considered.
- 8.3 DARD welcomes any comments you wish to make on all of the proposals or just on those issues that are of particular interest to you in the consultation.
- 8.4 If you are completing an electronic version of this form, it should be emailed to: [rural.proofing@dardni.gov.uk](mailto:rural.proofing@dardni.gov.uk).
- 8.5 Alternatively you can post a hard copy of the completed form to:
- Rural Proofing Bill Team  
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development  
Room 654 Dundonald House  
Ballymiscaw  
Belfast BT4 3SB
- 8.6 All responses should be received by 16 March 2015 to ensure they can be fully considered.

## Freedom of Information

- 8.7 In line with the Department's policy of openness at the end of the consultation period, copies of the responses we receive may be made publicly available. The information they contain may also be published in a summary of responses, which will be placed on the internet at <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/index/consultations/current-consultations.htm>.
- 8.8 This summary will include a list of names of organisations or sectors that responded but not personal names, addresses or other contact details.
- 8.9 If you do not consent to this, you must explicitly request that your response be treated confidentially. Any confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system in e-mail responses will not be treated as such a request.
- 8.10 You should also be aware that there might be circumstances in which we will be required to communicate information to third parties on request, in order to comply with our obligations under Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. For further information about confidentiality of responses, please contact the Information Commissioner's Office, or visit their website at [www.ico.org.uk](http://www.ico.org.uk).

## RESPONDENT INFORMATION

**Please Note** this form **must** be returned with your response to ensure that we handle your response appropriately.

### 1. Name / Organisation

Organisation Name (If applicable).

Title Mr  Ms  Mrs  Miss  Dr  Please tick as appropriate

Surname

Forename

### 2. Postal Address

|                      |              |              |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|
| <input type="text"/> |              |              |
| <b>Postcode</b>      | <b>Phone</b> | <b>Email</b> |

## Consultation Questions

1) Do you support the need for change in line with DARD's aspirations (as outlined at paragraph 4.8):

- rural issues would be embedded in the development and delivery of all government strategies and policies (including spending plans);
- rural needs and impacts would be identified and addressed appropriately as a matter of course across government;
- there would be transparency and availability of information on rural proofing; and
- government would establish and maintain a joined-up and collaborative approach to considering and taking account of rural needs when designing all services.

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

**2) Do you think that placing a statutory duty on all government departments and local councils would help to ensure that the needs of rural dwellers are appropriately considered when policies and public services are being developed and delivered?**

- Yes**
- No**
- Don't Know**

**3) Do you think that such a duty should extend to non-departmental public bodies in addition to government departments and councils? If so, which bodies?**

**Yes**

**No**

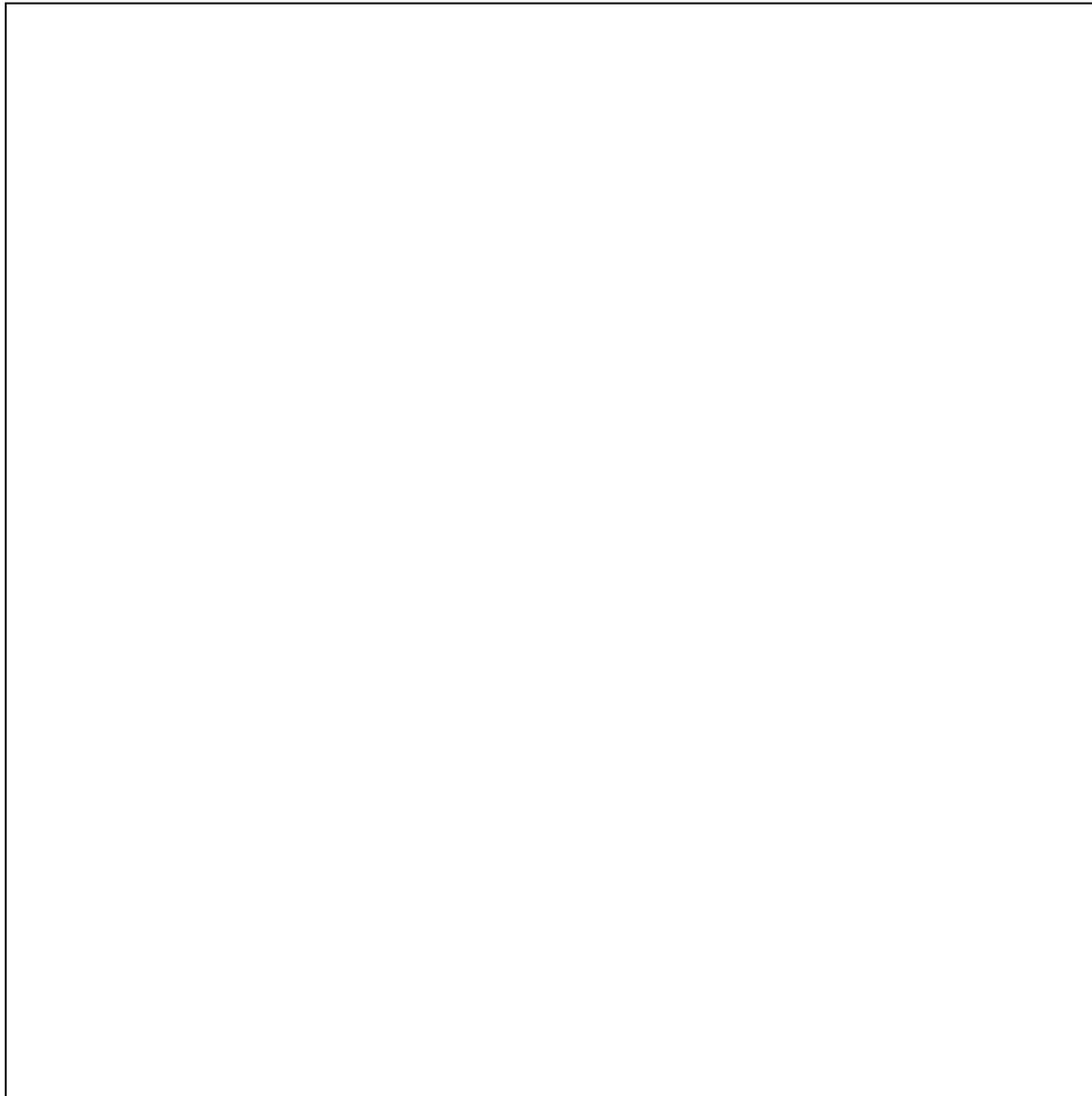
**Don't Know**

4) Do you think that DARD should have a statutory role to promote and encourage other bodies to undertake rural proofing?

Yes

No

Don't Know



**5) Do you think that the proposed monitoring and reporting arrangements will help to improve the availability and transparency of information available about rural proofing?**

**Yes**

**No**

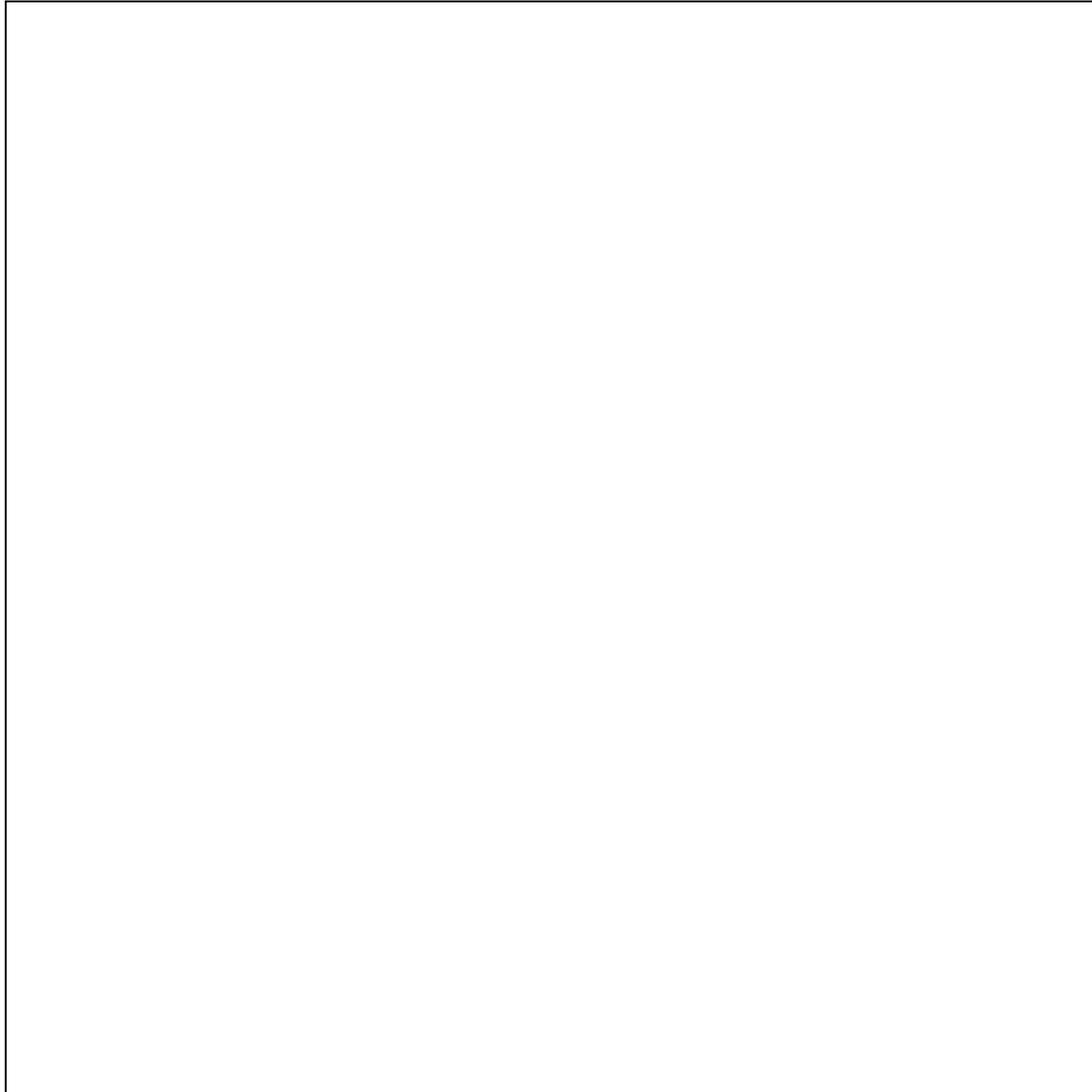
**Don't Know**

**6) Do you think that increased co-operation and collaboration between DARD, other government departments and public bodies is desirable?**

**Yes**

**No**

**Don't Know**

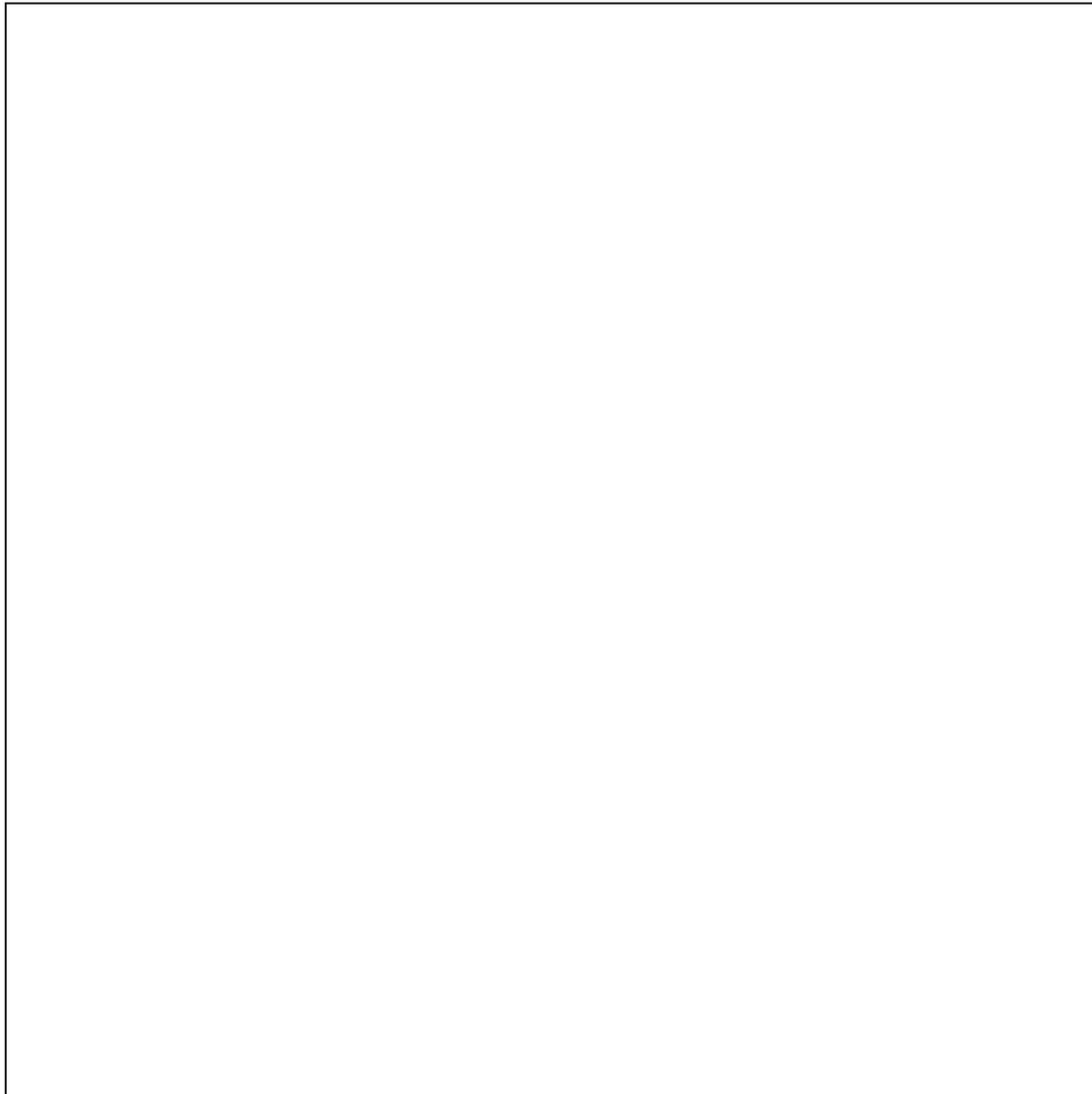


7) Do you agree with the strengthening of DARD's role in providing support for rural proofing?

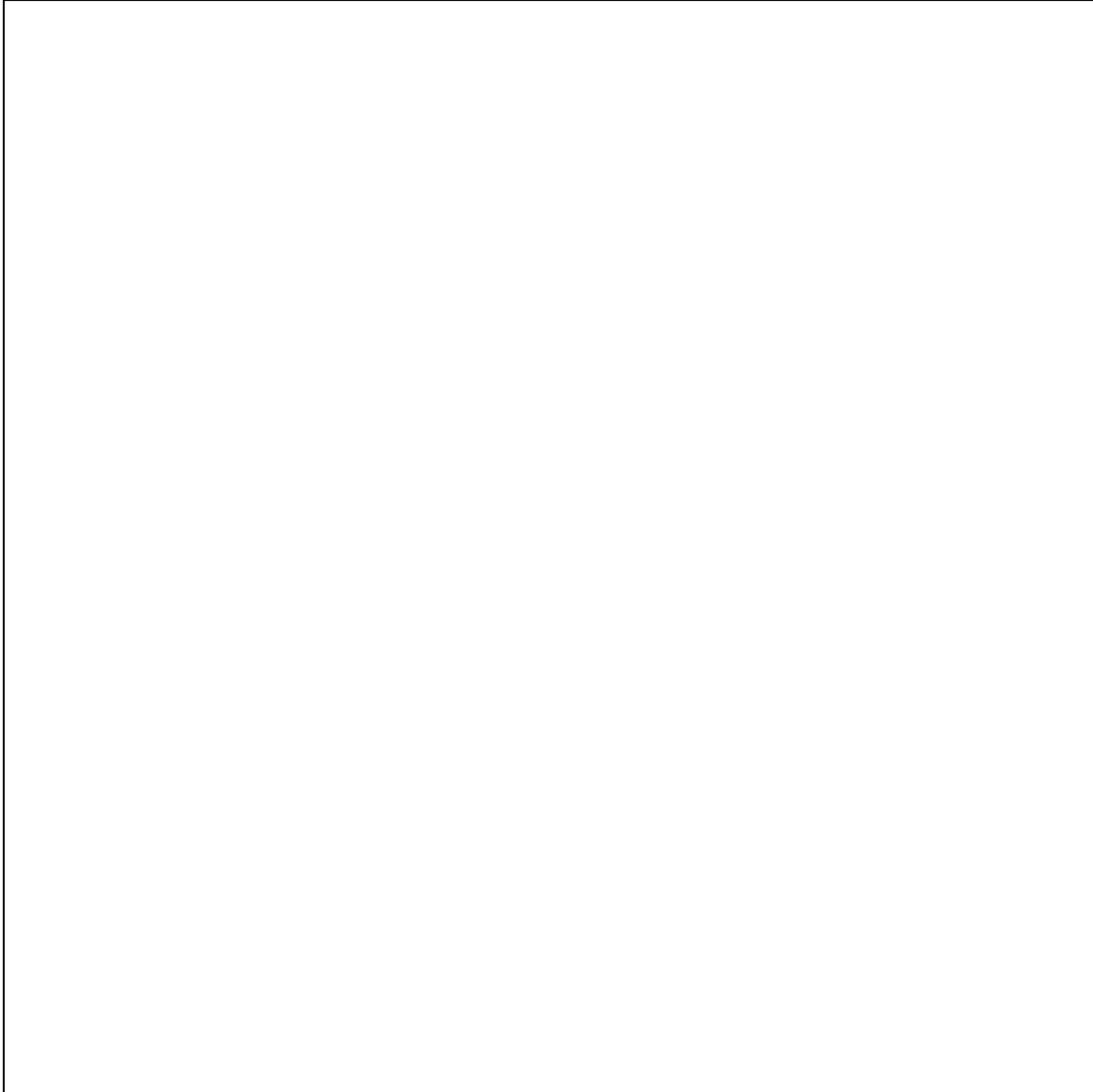
Yes

No

Don't Know



**8) Is there any other aspect of the proposals you wish to comment on?**

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the respondent to provide comments on the proposals.

**9) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DARD to screen out from further assessment the impacts of a Rural Proofing Bill in respect of:**

- (i) Equality Impact Assessment;**
- (ii) Regulatory Impact Assessment; and**
- (iii) Rural Proofing?**

