

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS**

**DECLARATION OF AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST AT GORTYCAVAN, COUNTY LONDONDERRY. ARTICLE 28 OF THE ENVIRONMENT (NORTHERN IRELAND) ORDER 2002.**

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (the Department), having consulted the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside and being satisfied that the area described and delineated on the attached map (the area) is of special scientific interest by reason of the flora and fauna and accordingly needs to be specially protected, hereby declares the area to be an area of special scientific interest to be known as the 'Gortycavan Area of Special Scientific Interest'.

This area is of special scientific interest because of its species-rich lowland meadow. Species-rich grassland tends to occur only where land management is not intensive, in particular where traditional farming practices have been maintained. As a result it is not a widespread habitat in Northern Ireland and is often fragmented, consisting of individual fields, parts of fields or banks. Species-rich dry grassland such as that found at Gortycavan, is a particularly scarce resource in Northern Ireland.

The area is located approximately 5km west of Coleraine in the townland of Gortycavan, situated on the lower slopes of Ballystone Hill. The area's interest is associated with the unimproved grassland which borders the northern shore of Ballinrees reservoir. The underlying geology of Gortycavan is dominated by rocks of the Upper Basalt Formation. This igneous rock occupies large areas of Antrim and north-east Londonderry and is the parent material from which the soils have developed. The soils at Gortycavan are of varying depths and are a mixture of brown earths and mineral gleys.

The area is composed of a core section of hay meadow to the east, and two areas of shorter vegetation on sloping grassy banks. The vegetation at Gortycavan reflects the drier conditions with component grasses and sedges such as Common Bent *Agrostis capillaris*, Sweet Vernal-grass *Anthoxanthum odoratum*, Heath-grass *Danthonia decumbens*, Red Fescue *Festuca rubra*, Crested Dog's-tail *Cynosurus cristatus*, Spring-sedge *Carex caryophylla*, Carnation Sedge *C. panicea* and Glaucous Sedge *C. flacca* and occasional rushes such as Sharp-flowered Rush *Juncus acutiflorus* and Field Wood-rush *Luzula campestris*. In the hay meadow taller herb species flourish, such as Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Meadow Buttercup *Ranunculus acris*, Cat's-ear *Hypochaeris radicata* and Red Clover *Trifolium pratense*. The grassy banks have a shorter sward and support low growing grassland herbs which thrive in the light open conditions. Typical species include Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Mouse-ear-hawkweed *Pilosella officinarum*, Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*, Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Smooth Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla glabra*, Hairy Lady's-mantle *Alchemilla filicaulis* ssp. *vestita* and Eyebright *Euphrasia officinalis* agg. Bryophytes are common throughout the sward and include Springy Turf-moss *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*, Glittering Wood-moss *Hylocomium splendens*, Pointed Spear-moss *Calliergonella cuspidata* and Neat Feather-moss *Pseudoscleropodium purum*.

Further botanical interest is added to the dry grassland by the presence of a range of orchid species including Common Spotted-orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*, Northern Marsh-orchid *D. purpurella* and Greater Butterfly-orchid *Platanthera chlorantha*. Across the more open grassland the notable Burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga* can be found.

Gortycavan has been managed in a traditional way and has a high degree of naturalness. As a result, in addition to its grassland the area acts as an important location for species, providing valuable feeding and roosting sites for a range of animals, including birds and invertebrates.

## SCHEDULE

**The following operations and activities appear to the Department to be likely to damage the flora and fauna of the area:**

1. Any activity or operation which involves the damage or disturbance by any means of the surface and subsurface of the land, including ploughing, rotovating, harrowing, reclamation and extraction of minerals, including sand, gravel and peat.
2. Any change in the present annual pattern and intensity of grazing, including any change in the type of livestock used or in supplementary feeding practice.
3. Any change in the established method or frequency (or introduction), of rolling, mowing or cutting.
4. The application of manure, slurry, artificial fertiliser or lime.
5. The application of herbicides, fungicides or other chemicals deployed to kill any form of wild plant, other than plants listed as being noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977.
6. The storage or dumping, spreading or discharge of any material not specified under paragraph 5 above.
7. The destruction, displacement, removal or cutting of any plant, seed or plant remains, other than for:
  - (i) plants listed as noxious in the Noxious Weeds (Northern Ireland) Order 1977;
  - (ii) normal cutting or mowing regimes for which consent is not required under paragraph 3 above.
8. The release into the area of any animal (other than in connection with normal grazing practice) or plant. 'Animal' includes birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates; 'Plant' includes seed, fruit or spore.

9. Burning.
10. Changes in tree or woodland management, including afforestation, planting, clearing, selective felling and coppicing.
11. Construction, removal or disturbance of any permanent or temporary structure including building, engineering or other operations.
12. Alteration of natural or man-made features, the clearance of boulders or large stones and grading of rock faces.
13. Operations or activities, which would affect wetlands (include marsh, fen, bog, rivers, streams and open water), e.g.
  - (i) change in the methods or frequency of routine drainage maintenance;
  - (ii) modification of the structure of any watercourse;
  - (iii) lowering of the water table, permanently or temporarily;
  - (iv) change in the management of bank-side vegetation.
14. The killing or taking of any wild animal except where such killing or taking is treated as an exception in Articles 5, 6, 11, 17, 20, 21 and 22 of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.
15. The following activities undertaken in a manner likely to damage or disturb the wildlife of the area:
  - (i) Educational activities;
  - (ii) Research activities;
  - (iii) Recreational activities;
  - (iv) Exercising of animals.
16. Changes in game, waterfowl or fisheries management or fishing or hunting practices.
17. Use of vehicles or craft likely to damage or disturb the wildlife of the area.

## **FOOTNOTES**

- (a) Please note that consent by the Department to any of the operations or activities listed in the Schedule does not constitute planning permission. Where required, planning permission must be applied for in the usual manner to the council or the Department under Part 3 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. Operations or activities covered by planning permission are not normally covered in the list of Notifiable Operations.

- (b) Also note that many of the operations and activities listed in the Schedule are capable of being carried out either on a large scale or in a very small way. While it is impossible to define exactly what is large and what is small, the Department would intend to approach each case in a common sense and practical way. It is very unlikely that small scale operations would give rise for concern and if this was the case the Department would normally give consent, particularly if there is a long history of the operation being undertaken in that precise location.

## **GORTYCAVAN**

### **Views About Management The Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 Article 28(2)**

#### **A statement of the Department's views about the management of Gortycavan Area of Special Scientific Interest ("the ASSI")**

This statement represents the views of the Department about the management of the ASSI for nature conservation. This statement sets out, in principle, our views on how the area's special conservation interest can be conserved and enhanced. The Department has a duty to notify the owners and occupiers of the ASSI of its views about the management of the land.

Not all of the management principles will be equally appropriate to all parts of the ASSI and there may be other management activities, additional to our current views, which can be beneficial to the conservation and enhancement of the features of interest. It is also very important to recognise that management may need to change with time.

The management views set out below do not constitute consent for any operation or activity. The written consent of the Department is still required before carrying out any operation or activity likely to damage the features of special interest (see the Schedule on pages 2 - 4 for a list of these operations and activities). The Department welcomes consultation with owners, occupiers and users of the ASSI to ensure that the management of this area maintains and enhances the features of interest, and to ensure that all necessary prior consents are obtained.

#### **MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES**

##### **Lowland meadow**

Species-rich grasslands are important habitats for wildlife. The Department would encourage the maintenance and enhancement of these grasslands through the conservation of associated native plants and animals.

Many of the more sensitive species can be quickly lost through intensive management treatments, such as fertiliser and herbicide application. However, grasslands generally need some management to retain the interest. Although occasional small patches of scrub can be valuable in providing additional habitat niches for birds and invertebrates, in the absence of management, coarse grasses can quickly take over and ultimately woody species may become dominant.

Low intensity management for hay has contributed to the conservation and enhancement of the grassland. The Department would encourage the continuation of this practice.

**Specific objectives include:**

Prevent the loss of more sensitive species through the control of scrub, bracken and rushes. In general, this can be achieved through the appropriate cutting or grazing regimes.

A late season hay cut allows most of the flowering plants to set seed and regenerate. The Department would encourage the continuation of this practice.

Maintain the diversity and quality of the grasslands by ensuring there is no application of fertiliser, slurry, manure or herbicide to the site.

Ensure that disturbance to the site and its wildlife is minimised.

Discourage non-native species, especially those that tend to spread at the expense of native wildlife.

Maintain the diversity and quality of habitats associated with the grassland such as hedgerows and scrub, through sensitive management. These adjoining habitats can often be very important for wildlife.

Sealed with the Official Seal of the  
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs  
hereunto affixed is authenticated  
by



**HELEN ANDERSON**

Senior Officer of the  
Department of Agriculture,  
Environment and Rural Affairs

Dated the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2017

# GORTYCAVAN

## A SPECIAL PLACE...



*View of the hay meadow at Gortycavan*

SITES OF BIOLOGICAL AND EARTH SCIENCE IMPORTANCE HAVE BEEN SURVEYED BY NORTHERN IRELAND ENVIRONMENT AGENCY TO ASSESS THEIR SCIENTIFIC INTEREST. THE BEST SITES ARE NOW BEING DECLARED AS AREAS OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST (ASSIs). IN DOING SO WE AIM TO SAFEGUARD THESE IMPORTANT SITES FOR THE BENEFIT OF PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS

Gortycavan has been declared as an ASSI because of its species-rich dry grassland. A special type of species-rich dry grassland known as Lowland meadow occurs at Gortycavan. Species-rich grassland tends to occur only where traditional farming practices have been maintained. Such dry grassland is now a scarce habitat in Northern Ireland.

The grasses and sedges found at Gortycavan are typical of lowland meadows and include Sweet Vernal-grass, Heath-grass, Red Fescue, Crested Dog's-tail, Spring-sedge, Carnation Sedge and Glaucous Sedge. In the hay meadow taller herb species flourish, such as Common Knapweed, Oxeye Daisy, Meadow Buttercup, Cat's-ear and Red Clover. The grassy banks have a shorter sward and support low growing grassland herbs which thrive in the light open conditions, such as Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Smooth Lady's-mantle, Fairy Flax, Mouse-ear-hawkweed, Tormentil and Eyebright.

Many of the plants and animals within Gortycavan are only found in habitats where traditional forms of land management are used. The use of artificial fertilizers, herbicides or the application of manure or slurry, would cause a reduction in plant numbers on the site. When soils become more fertile, grasses tend to thrive, growing faster and taller. Smaller plants such as orchids are not able to compete with the tougher grasses and as a result are lost.



*Common Knapweed*

Gortycavan is located approximately 5km west of Coleraine, situated on the lower slopes of Ballystone Hill. The area's interest is associated with the unimproved grassland which borders the northern shore of Ballinrees reservoir. The underlying geology is dominated by rocks of the Upper Basalt Formation. This igneous rock occupies large areas of Antrim and north-east Londonderry and is the parent material from which the soils have developed. The soils at Gortycavan are a mixture of brown earths and mineral gleys.

The area is composed of a core section of hay meadow to the east and two areas of shorter vegetation, on sloping grassy banks.



*Common Spotted-orchid*

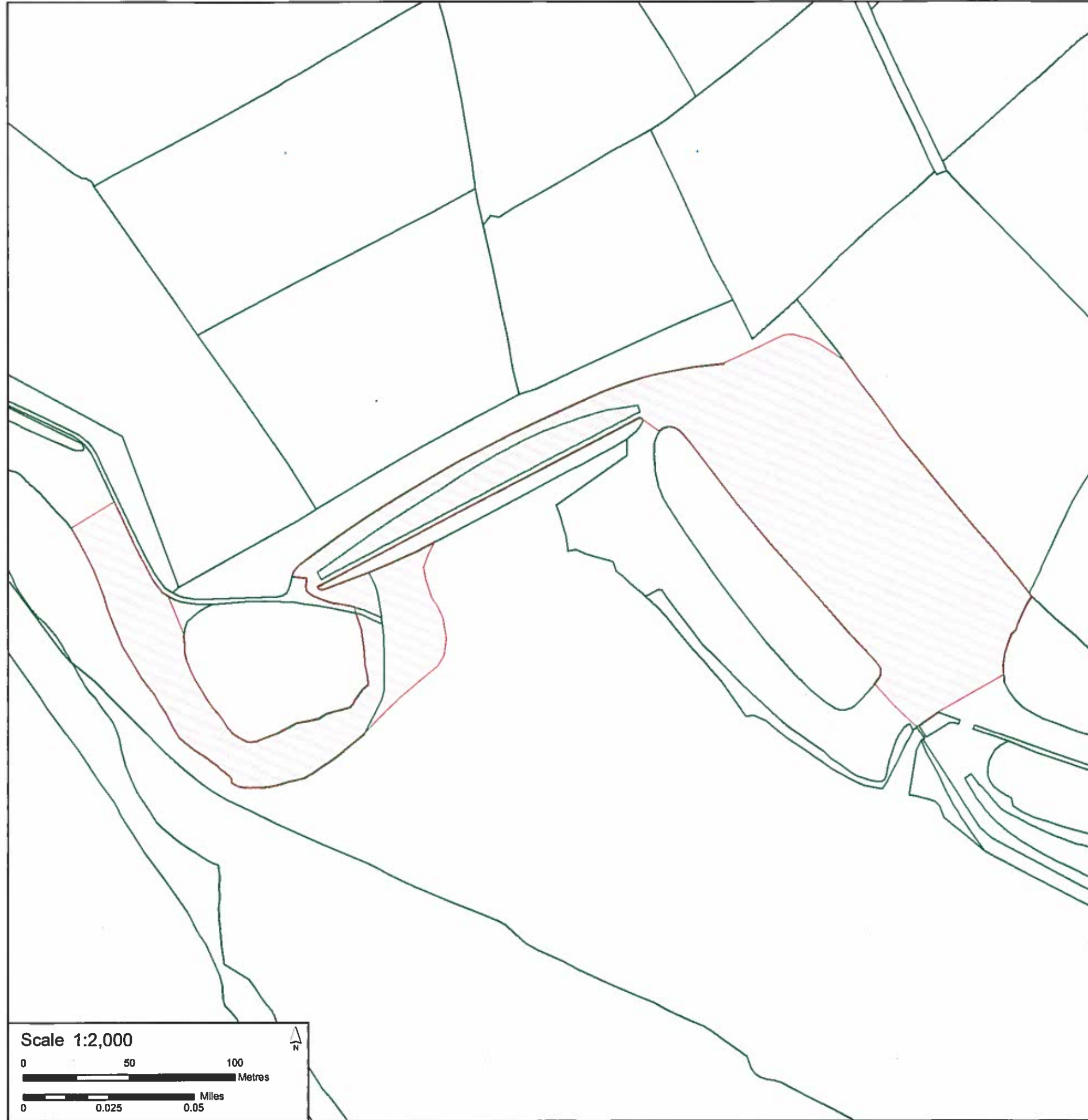
The grassland also supports a range of orchid species including Common Spotted-orchid and the scarce Northern Marsh-orchid and Greater Butterfly-orchid.



*Oxeye Daisy*

Correct management is essential for special places like Gortycavan. If for example, cutting was to cease, the field parcels would quickly become rank and scrub would invade. This would cause a reduction in the numbers of grasses and wildflowers found here. Sympathetic management practices will ensure the survival of the rich range of plants and animals at Gortycavan. Northern Ireland Environment Agency is keen to work closely with landowners to maintain and enhance Gortycavan ASSI.

# GORTYCAVAN ASSI



## GORTYCAVAN AREA OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST

Map referred to in the Declaration dated: 1<sup>st</sup> DECEMBER 2017

SITE BOUNDARY: The Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) includes all the lands highlighted within the solid coloured line.

AREA OF SITE: 2.6 hectares

OS MAPS 1:50,000: Sheet No. 4  
1:10,000: Sheet No. 20

IRISH GRID REFERENCE: IC 796 302

COUNCIL AREA: CAUSEWAY COAST AND GLENS BOROUGH COUNCIL

COUNTY: LONDONDERRY

*Helen Anderson*

HELEN ANDERSON  
SENIOR OFFICER OF THE DEPARTMENT OF  
AGRICULTURE, ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL AFFAIRS

