



WWF *for a living planet*

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Reference: WWF Northern Ireland response to draft Programme for Government 2011-15

22 February 2012

Dear Sir/Madam,

WWF Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft Programme for Government (PfG) 2011-15. Probably the single greatest weakness of this draft PfG is the ambiguous, non-committal wording used throughout, which greatly weakens the document and often renders the targets within completely ineffectual. There is however one target which is not vague and which is of real concern to WWF Northern Ireland and that is in relation to planning, as outlined on pages 7 and 31. WWF Northern Ireland regards the changes the draft PfG 2011-15 proposes to make to the planning system as fundamentally flawed and incompatible with existing government duties and policy, in the same way that the proposals in draft PPS 24 were, and recommends these proposals be withdrawn.

Priority One: Growing a Sustainable Economy and Investing in the Future

- **Target: Support the promotion of over 25,000 new jobs (DETI).**

WWF Northern Ireland is supportive of the Executive's apparent desire to have over 25,000 new jobs in Northern Ireland. However, the issue with this target is the ambiguous wording. The target is not to create 25,000 new jobs, but to "*support the promotion of over 25,000 new jobs*" though it is unclear exactly what the Executive believes is involved in supporting the promotion of over 25,000 new jobs and what the Executive and individual departments will do as a result. It is also unclear how many jobs this "*promotion*" will actually create and what the nature of those jobs will be i.e. will they be short term, low paid jobs or long term, highly paid jobs? This is a clear illustration of the weakness of the ambiguous, non-committal wording used throughout the PfG.

WWF Northern Ireland believes that energy has the potential to be the most important influence on Northern Ireland's economic development in the medium to long term. The potential economic opportunities offered by moving to a low carbon economy have been clearly identified by many studies and in addition to the environmental, social and moral reasons, there are sound economic reasons why Northern Ireland must move to a low carbon economy. Probably the outstanding issue for Northern Ireland is that it remains overly reliant on imported fossil fuels, which provide approximately 99% of its primary energy needs⁽¹⁾, and which cost approximately £2.3 billion a year - a clearly unsustainable situation.

The International Energy Agency has made it clear that current energy consumption trends and rates are unsustainable, as illustrated by the following statement in the 2008 World Energy Outlook (p37):



President: HRH Princess Alexandra,
the Hon Lady Ogilvy KG, GCVO
Chair: Ed Smith
Chief Executive: David Nussbaum

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“The world’s energy system is at a crossroads. Current global trends in energy supply and consumption are patently unsustainable – environmentally, economically and socially. But that can – and must – be altered; there’s still time to change the road we’re on”

According to the UNEP Green Economy Report (GER)⁽²⁾ investing just 2% of GDP in a green transformation of (ten) key sectors can kick start a transition towards a low carbon, resource-efficient economy and

“Greening the economy not only generates growth and in particular gains in natural capital, but it also produces a higher growth in GDP and GDP per capita. Under the GER modelling exercise, a green investment scenario achieves higher economic growth rates than a business as usual scenario within 5-10 years”

It seems clear, therefore, that there is a pressing need to find alternatives to this unsustainable system and in particular, to oil. According to the 2008 BP Statistical Review of World Energy⁽³⁾ there was only 41.6 years supply of oil left, at the 2007 rate of consumption. However, apart from the two years of decline in 2008 and 2009, mainly due to the global recession, global energy demand has a clear upward trend, with global energy demand growing 5.6% in 2010, the largest increase in percentage terms since 1973, with oil consumption growing by 3.1% in 2010, to reach a record level of 87.4 million barrels a day⁽⁴⁾. Despite this increasing demand, estimates for global oil reserves have risen to 46.2 years, though this also includes the estimated reserves of unconventional oil sources, in particular the Canadian oil sands which are much more polluting and much more energy intensive than conventional oil. Though there is significant uncertainty attached to what are after all only *estimates*⁽⁵⁾ of remaining oil reserves, this small increase in estimated global reserves does not disguise the problems surrounding global oil supply and in particular, the issue of peak oil, which may already be upon us. For example, a report by Uppsala University⁽⁶⁾ concluded global oil production has already peaked and that

“It is unlikely that future world crude oil production will ever return to the levels seen in 2008”

The net effect of the (im)balance between supply and demand for oil is that oil price and consequently the price of energy based on or derived from oil, is likely to rise in the future. This was acknowledged by DETI in the consultation on the draft SEF 2009, which said in paragraph 2.1. on page 8,

“Energy will become increasingly expensive as fossil fuel resources decline”

and by the Minister for Enterprise Trade and Investment who said in November 2009⁽⁷⁾

“The cost of inaction on renewables now would lock us into potentially even higher costs over the long term. The era of low energy prices is over.”

In this context the lack of a reference to the need to develop a low carbon economy is disappointing and indicative of the fact that the low carbon economy does not, in WWF Northern Ireland’s opinion, have a high enough priority, despite the confirmation by the DETI Minister in the consultation on the 2010 SEF that the overall objective, outlined on page 4, was for a

“sustainable, low carbon energy future.”

WWF Northern Ireland agrees that Northern Ireland must aim to have *“a sustainable, low carbon energy future”*, but achieving this will require an energy policy predicated more fully on the three principles previously advocated by Invest NI⁽⁸⁾ of

- Decreasing energy demand
- Diversity of energy sources, moving away from fossil fuels to more sustainable sources and
- Decentralisation of production and supply

The importance of reducing demand was clearly highlighted by DETI who said that⁽⁹⁾

“Reducing overall energy demand offers the potential for the most social, environmental and economic gains”

and that

“The Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation (NIAUR) also recommends energy efficiency as the best opportunity to reduce emissions and energy bills in the near to medium term”

Reducing absolute demand and increasing energy efficiency (using the energy consumed more efficiently) will be fundamental to the sustainable low carbon energy future that DETI appear to want for Northern Ireland. Reducing energy demand will also save money. For example, it has been estimated that 27 EU countries could save \$100 billion a year by 2020 through energy efficiency measures⁽¹⁰⁾. In light of the many benefits of reducing energy demand, WWF Northern Ireland believes that the Executive should also set a target for the reduction of energy across Northern Ireland, and the public sector in particular, something that should fit perfectly with the ‘invest to save’ policy of the Executive. For reference, the Republic of Ireland’s National Energy Efficiency Action Plan 2009-2020⁽¹¹⁾ has an energy savings target of 20% by 2020 for the whole economy and recognising that Government must take the lead, a higher target of a 33% for the public sector. WWF Northern Ireland believes the Executive should set targets for energy reduction in Northern Ireland of this magnitude. The EU Renewable Energy Directive of 2008 has three targets – to reduce primary energy use compared with projected levels by 20%, to reduce EU GHG emissions by at least 20% below 1990 levels and to have 20% of EU energy consumption to come from renewable resources, all by 2020 (the 20/20/20 targets). The EU Energy Efficiency Directive is being developed in order to make this energy reduction target a firm target, so it seems likely that a reduction in energy demand of this magnitude will be required in the near future in any case. That being the case, the sooner Northern Ireland reduces its energy demand by this magnitude, the better.

Northern Ireland could also learn from the experience of others countries that have realised the benefits of moving down a low carbon path. In Germany for example, in 2009 more than 10% of all energy and more than 16% of electricity was generated from renewables⁽¹²⁾ and in 2007, renewable energy sources in Germany generated more electricity than the entire UK nuclear fleet⁽¹³⁾. Despite the recent economic crisis, the contribution from renewables increased, and as a result of rising investment, which reached a total of €17.7 billion, employment in the sector grew. As of 2009, more than 300,000 people were employed in the renewable energy sector in Germany (as compared to 12,000 in the UK in 2008)⁽¹⁴⁾. The German government already has a target to cut CO₂ emissions by 40% against 1990 levels by 2020, which it estimates will generate savings of €5bn in private households and industry by 2020, and that on average, every tonne of CO₂ saved has a saving effect of €26⁽¹⁵⁾. When Germany adopted the second package implementing the integrated energy and climate programme, Federal Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel⁽¹⁶⁾ said it

“protects the climate, lowers energy costs for our citizens and will create more than 500,000 additional jobs by 2020”.

A 2010 report on offshore renewable energy⁽¹⁷⁾, estimated the job creation potential for the UK as ranging from 70,000 (lowest scenario where offshore renewables meet 50% of UK electricity demand) to around 430,000 jobs (highest scenario where offshore renewables meet 50% of UK electricity demand and export an amount of electricity equivalent to 25% of the EU’s electricity demand).

Though wind power will most likely continue to be the dominant renewable energy source in Northern Ireland, tackling climate change needs a multi faceted approach and other options such as bioenergy and marine renewables have a role to play. According to the Carbon Trust, the UK could generate up to £70 billion for the economy and almost 250,000 jobs in offshore wind and wave power⁽¹⁸⁾. A 2009 report by IWEA and Deloitte⁽¹⁹⁾ found, in order to provide the 7,800 MW of wind power needed on the island to meet the current renewable energy targets, the Irish wind energy sector will involve approximately €14.75 billion of investment, of which €5.1 billion will be retained in the Irish economy by 2020 (€4.3 billion in RoI and €786 million in NI).

At a UK level, the Carbon Trust⁽²⁰⁾, found that, if Northern Ireland were to match the UK target set as part of the EU Renewable Energy package of 2008, to have 15% of the UK’s energy from renewables by 2020, there is the potential to create more than half a million jobs (564,000) in renewables in the UK with between 8,470 and 33,124 jobs, in a sector that could be worth almost £1 billion (£989M) in Northern Ireland alone. Accounting for the many significant economic benefits from developing a more sustainable

energy system, WWF Northern Ireland finds the overall lack of vision and lack of commitment to developing a low carbon economy in the 2011-15 PfG very disappointing. Scotland has made clear its intention to grasp the economic opportunities offered by developing a low carbon economy and has produced a Low Carbon Economic Strategy for Scotland⁽²¹⁾. WWF Northern Ireland believes that the Northern Ireland Executive should follow the Scottish example and develop a plan for a low carbon economy for Northern Ireland.

- **Target: Ensure 90% of large scale investment planning decisions are made within 6 months and applications with job creation potential are given additional weight (DOE)**

While WWF Northern Ireland recognises that there have been occasional difficulties with the planning system, with some applications taking a considerable time to process, and that having a shorter time frame within which planning decisions will be made could be positive. However, the setting of an apparently arbitrary six month timeframe within which all large scale planning decisions are to be made is not without its problems. For example, no definition was offered as to what decisions will be defined as large scale and whether or not this is a realistic ambition. In England national projects are given a twelve month deadline because of the scale and complexity of the applications and it may be the case that some/many/the majority of the large scale planning decisions in Northern Ireland may take more than six months simply because of the complexity of the case in hand which raises the question as to whether the six month deadline is the most realistic and pragmatic option.

WWF Northern Ireland is much more concerned about the potentially unlawful proposal to give applications with job creation potential additional weight.

The purpose of any planning system must be to achieve sustainable development. This ensures the *integration* of economic, environmental and social objectives in plan making as well as *equal* consideration of economic, environmental and social impacts and benefits in the assessment of proposed forms of development. The basic premise of the proposed change to the planning system is completely inconsistent with this overarching purpose of planning, as it proposes to give additional weight to the job creation potential of a proposal. The express intent of this policy is that job creation considerations are to be elevated above all others, including environmental and social considerations, regardless of any negative impacts that may arise as a result of the development. WWF Northern Ireland simply cannot agree with or support this policy. This proposed approach runs contrary to many, if not all, other existing Northern Ireland sustainable development policies. Furthermore, there is no definition given for the threshold of job creation potential that will apply, with the result that the present wording means that potentially a project that may create one short term job, could be given the go ahead no matter what the potential impacts of the proposal. WWF Northern Ireland would like to emphasise that even if a threshold for job creation potential were to be included in any rewording of this draft target it would make no material difference as the basic premise of this proposal is completely flawed. This draft target, in effect, potentially gives *carte blanche* for virtually any development to proceed on the basis that it has job creation potential, a situation which WWF Northern Ireland regards as inappropriate, unacceptable and, where it overlaps with relevant provisions of domestic and EU law, potentially unlawful.

WWF Northern Ireland would like to emphasise that it does not oppose development *per se*, including development that is aimed at securing economic development. In fact, WWF Northern Ireland is a strong advocate of sustainable development and believes that sustainable development offers many positive opportunities for Northern Ireland, including many of the potential economic benefits the draft PfG seems keen to facilitate. However, any such development must respect environmental limits and development aimed at delivering economic benefits must be assessed in the context of achieving sustainable economic growth, which has been defined in the English PPS 4 'Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth'⁽²²⁾ as meaning

“growth that can be sustained and is within environmental limits, but also enhances environmental and social welfare and avoids greater extremes in future economic cycles”.

In making a decision *all* relevant and material considerations must be assessed equally and weighted according to the circumstances of the case. There should be no predetermined weight given to any matter, as the determination of weight to be accorded to a material consideration must be for the decision maker

taking into account all the circumstances of the particular application being assessed. No other issue in the environmental or social spheres, has been given overriding priority in the planning process and a fundamental question remains as to why it seems the Executive wish to take this approach when a virtually identical proposal in draft PPS 24 for economic considerations to be given additional weight was rejected by the Minister for Environment?

The legitimacy of this proposed approach, whereby the implications in terms of job creation potential are given priority above all other implications in the planning process, remains undetermined, as it appears that the current draft PfG 2011-15 is not compatible with other existing national legal obligations, including the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Bill 2010, and international obligations, including the EU Habitats Directive and Birds Directive, and existing government policy, including, PPS 1, PPS 2, PPS 4, the Regional Development Strategy and the Northern Ireland Act 2006 .

For example, according to PPS 1, which outlines the general principles of planning in Northern Ireland, the role of planning

“is to regulate the development and use of land in the public interest”.

However, the current wording of the draft PfG 2011-15 does not appear to account for this strategic, overarching aim, and is possibly even contrary to it. WWF Northern Ireland believes that the public interest would best be served by balancing a number of potentially competing interests and benefits, not by prioritising economic implications, above all others, especially when the scale of the benefits, for example, in terms of time scale and geographical extent, and the potential negative impacts, may not be made clear.

PPS 1, paragraphs 12, on pages 7 and 8, also states that

In working towards sustainable development, the Department will aim to:

- plan for the region’s needs for commercial and industrial development, food production, minerals extraction, new homes and other buildings, while respecting environmental objectives;*
- conserve both the archaeological and built heritage and natural resources (including wildlife, landscape, water, soil and air quality), taking particular care to safeguard designations of national and international importance;*
- shape new development patterns in ways which minimise the need to travel;*
- give preference, in the zoning of land, to the development of brownfield sites within built-up areas, before considering the development of greenfield sites, provided that this creates or maintains a good living environment.*
- encourage the use of already developed areas in the most efficient way, while making them more attractive places in which to live and work; and*
- concentrate developments that generate a large number of trips in places well served by public transport*

PPS 2, Paragraph 13, page 8 also states that

“In formulating policies and plans and in determining planning applications the Department will be guided by the precautionary principle that, where there are significant risks of damage to the environment , its protection will generally be paramount, unless there are imperative reasons of overriding public interest.”

The objectives of the revised version of PPS 2, on Planning and Nature Conservation currently the subject of consultation, as stated in paragraph 3, page 10 are:

- *to seek to conserve, enhance and restore the abundance, quality, diversity and distinctiveness of the region's natural heritage;*
- *to promote sustainable development; and*
- *to assist in meeting international, European, national and local responsibilities and obligations for natural heritage.*

PPS 4 on Planning and Economic Growth states on page 3 that

“Economic growth is considered the Executive’s top strategic priority in its first Programme for Government (PfG), in order to raise the quality of life for the people of Northern Ireland, through increasing economic opportunities for all, on a socially and environmentally sustainable basis.”

The stated aim of PPS 4 as outlined in paragraph 1.4 on page 3 is

“to facilitate the economic development needs of the Region in ways consistent with protection of the environment and the principles of sustainable development.”

The first objective listed in paragraph 3.1 on page 7 of PPS 4 is

“to promote sustainable economic development in an environmentally sensitive manner;”

The basic premise of the current draft PfG 2011-15 to give determinative weight to job creation potential alone, seems at odds with existing planning policy, as outlined in the examples given above.

As outlined in paragraph 2.2., on page 12, the spatial strategy of the Executive, the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) ‘Shaping Our Future’ *“has at its heart sustainable development”* and one of its eight aims is to

“Protect and enhance the environment for its own sake”

Furthermore, no reference is made, amongst other things, to Northern Ireland’s established, legally binding national and international nature conservation designations and environmental commitments. The lack of an explicit statement in draft PfG 2011-15 that, for example, all pertinent legal obligations resulting from all national and international designations and commitments must be fully adhered to and complied with, leaves open the possibility that these legal obligations and commitments may not be fully complied with. WWF Northern Ireland would regard the possibility of this target in the draft PfG 2011-15 permitting or enabling non compliance with existing national and international legal obligations and commitments as inappropriate, unacceptable and potentially unlawful. WWF Northern Ireland regards it as totally inappropriate and unacceptable to attempt to relegate environmental, social and public health and safety considerations to a secondary status in planning policy, as this draft target appears to do.

The position of the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) in relation to the balance between economic development and sustainable development explicitly states⁽²³⁾

“The development of the Northern Ireland economy is important but it must not be our only consideration. There needs to be a balance between prosperity, people, and our environment.....What this means is that we must ensure that all of our actions take account of their economic, social and environmental consequences”

The current wording of draft PfG 2011-15 seems to be at odds with this position and also risks non compliance with the statutory duty in the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 Section 25, that⁽²⁴⁾ :

"a public authority must, in exercising its functions, act in a way it considers best calculated to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in Northern Ireland ...”

Since the wording of draft PfG 2011-15 means that, for example, it will not ensure the protection or enhancement of our environment, it appears incompatible with this duty and the other strategic duties and policies and national and international obligations and commitments referred to above, and as such is potentially unlawful.

Since the issue is with the proposed prioritisation of job creation potential of an application above all other implications, WWF Northern Ireland's concerns with draft PfG 2011-15 are unlikely to be resolved by any amended wording, as WWF Northern Ireland regards the basic premise of this proposed change, just as was the case with the previously proposed PPS 24, which proposed economic considerations be given priority over all other considerations, as unacceptable, not compliant with other strategic government duties and policies and potentially unlawful. **Consequently, WWF Northern Ireland recommends that the proposal to give proposals with job creation additional weighting in the planning process, as outlined in draft PfG 2011-15 must be withdrawn.**

- **Target: Encourage industry to achieve 20% of electricity consumption from renewable electricity and 4% renewable heat by 2015 (DETI).**

WWF Northern Ireland has welcomed the targets in the 2010 SEF for 40% of electricity and 10% of heat to come from renewable sources by 2020. As of 2011, around 10% of Northern Ireland's electricity comes from renewable sources. While targets to increase the production and consumption of renewable energy are welcome, the wording of this target is vague. For example, it is unclear from the above wording exactly why industry has been singled out and what DETI will do to encourage industry to achieve a 20% target of electricity consumption from renewable electricity and 4% renewable heat by 2015 and what impact that will have, especially given DETI's potential conflict of interest in relation to the gas network. WWF Northern Ireland is concerned that there is a potential conflict of interest, arising from DETI's statutory responsibility, as outlined for example, in paragraph 4.3 on page 28 of the recent consultation on the development of a renewable heat incentive

“to promote the development and maintenance of an efficient, economic and co-ordinated gas industry in Northern Ireland”.

This potential conflict of interest appears to manifest itself in the position described by the last two sentences in paragraph 4.3 of that consultation which state

“The movement of existing natural gas customers or potential gas customers in towns where the gas network could be easily extended to renewable heat technologies could potentially have an adverse impact on the gas network. Therefore in supporting the heavy industrial sector it is important that the existing or future gas network is not affected”.

Paragraph 6.6 on page 34 makes outcome of any potential choice between natural gas and renewable heat even more explicit:

“Therefore DETI does not intend for the introduction of incentive measures for renewable heat to impact on the existing or future gas market but instead expect to grow the renewable heat market at the same time as increasing the market share of natural gas.”

The implication of this approach appears to be that renewable heat should not be allowed to encroach into either the existing gas network or areas into which the gas network may expand. WWF Northern Ireland is concerned that the current statutory duty on DETI as outlined in the consultation means that DETI will take a protectionist approach, whereby the use of gas is to be prioritised over the potential use of renewable energy sources, *“so that the existing or future gas network is not affected”* by the potential expansion of the renewable heat network. WWF Northern Ireland is concerned that as a consequence of this duty, there is the potential for DETI policy and action to be compromised and that there is a risk that customers, both domestic and industrial, may not be afforded complete freedom to choose a renewable heating option, if they wish to and that a potential renewable heat supplier may not be allowed to expand into in an area if there is an existing gas supply, or even plans for a potential gas supply, because of this duty. The 2011 RHI report for DETI⁽²⁵⁾ also found (page 11) that if large industrial users

“were to switch to renewable heat, this would conflict with DETI's objective to extend the gas network”

This is a situation that needs to be addressed and WWF Northern Ireland would recommend that this statutory duty is either amended, so that for example, the word ‘gas’ is replaced with the word ‘energy’, so that the duty is then “*to promote the development and maintenance of an efficient, economic and co-ordinated energy industry in Northern Ireland*” or scrapped.

- **Target: Eliminate Air Passenger duty on direct long haul flights (DFP)**

WWF Northern Ireland believes the APD should be retained rather than eliminated.

Priority 2: Creating Opportunities, Tackling Disadvantage and Improving Health and Wellbeing

- **Target: Introduce and support a range of initiatives aimed at reducing fuel poverty across Northern Ireland including preventative interventions (DSD)**

Northern Ireland has higher levels of fuel poverty than other parts of the UK or Ireland with 44% of households experiencing fuel poverty. As a result, while WWF Northern Ireland would support the reduction of fuel poverty across Northern Ireland, WWF Northern Ireland believes that the aim of the Executive must be to eradicate fuel poverty, rather than just reduce it. A key component of tackling fuel poverty must be the improvement of the energy efficiency standards of buildings, through greatly improved building regulations and/or the installation of insulation and other energy saving options throughout existing building in order to reduce the energy demand of the building in the first place.

- **Target: Ensure no additional water charges during this Programme for Government**

The Water Framework Directive required Member States to ensure by 2010 that water pricing policies provide adequate incentives to use water resources efficiently and thereby contribute to the environmental objectives of the Directive. That is, to ensure that water quality in freshwater bodies is of at least ‘Good Ecological Status’ by 2015.

In Northern Ireland, water customers do not pay directly for domestic water and sewerage services. The introduction of domestic water charging has been consistently deferred for political reasons despite the fact that providing water and sewerage services in Northern Ireland is costing the public purse around £300million per year with no incentive to reduce waste or allow people to only pay for what they use.

The costs associated with water and sewerage supply comprise collection and treatment of water, disposal of sewage, energy costs, improvements to the supply network, reducing leakage, preventing sewer flooding and conserving the natural environment. More efficient use of water means less water is taken out of the environment for treatment which keeps costs efficient and avoids costly capital investment in new water resource development.

Currently, water and sewerage services are part financed by revenue raised through Rates. As regional rates are unhypothecated, it is not clear how much is spent on water and sewerage services. In reality, the figure has been estimated at £109m. Yet, the total cost of water and sewerage services is much, much more. The shortfall is funded from the Northern Ireland Block Grant, which means less money is available for other public services, such as health, education or indeed, environmental protection.

The need to fully fund water services and free up public funds is becoming imminent as pressures on budgets take their toll. In addition, WWF Northern Ireland believes there is a need to fully comply with Article 9 of the Water Framework Directive. Whilst Executive agreed not to introduce any form of charging during the current mandate, a target within the Programme for Government should be to investigate and agree a methodology for the introduction of domestic water charging by 2016. This should include a communications campaign with the general public to raise awareness about the need to reflect the true costs of water supply and the benefits of more efficient use of water and related energy, given that Northern Ireland Water are currently the largest users of electricity in Northern Ireland.

WWF Northern Ireland believes that socially responsible water pricing is essential to incentivise efficient use of water, to ensure that water users pay for what they use and to ensure that the true value of water is reflected in how we manage water. This value should incorporate the cost to the environment. WWF UK

have recently run campaigns to increase the proportion of water meters to improve understanding about water usage and promote efficient use of water in homes throughout England and Wales, as well as consideration of social issues related to water charging to ensure a system that is fair for all.

Priority 3: Protecting Our People, the Environment and creating Safer Communities

- **Target: Implement a levy on single use carrier bags by 2013 (DOE)**

WWF Northern Ireland is concerned about how the levy on single use carrier bags has been managed. In addition to the reduction in income for the DoE of £15.4 million outlined in the draft 2011/12 DoE ⁽²⁶⁾ budget, an additional £4 million was taken out of DoE core budget to pay for the Green New Deal, which takes the total reduction in income up to £19.4 million. This additional £4 million is due to be replaced by the £4 million predicted to be generated by a plastic bag levy (of 15p per bag).

WWF Northern Ireland is supportive of a plastic bag levy as a means of, hopefully, reducing the consumption of fossil fuel (oil) derived plastic carrier bags and is supportive of the Green New Deal as a means of reducing our carbon footprint while creating 'green' jobs. However, WWF Northern Ireland has a number of concerns about how it is proposed the plastic levy will operate and how the Green New Deal will be funded. Above all, WWF Northern Ireland believes that plastic bag levy should be a source of additional funds and not an alternative to core funding for DoE. The Green New Deal should be funded through new and/or additional revenue streams, such as the proposed plastic bag levy, rather than from existing departmental budgets and certainly not from the budget of the DoE alone. Given the Green New Deal is likely to help meet the aims and objectives of more than one department, the Green New Deal should be funded by contributions, financial and otherwise, from a number of departments. The DoE should not be solely responsible for providing the financial support for the Green New Deal.

As such, WWF Northern Ireland believes it is totally inappropriate for the DoE core budget to have been cut by £4 million to fund the Green New Deal, and for the proposal for this £4 million to be replaced by the anticipated revenue from the plastic bag levy. The primary driver for any plastic bag levy should be the incentive to reduce the consumption of fossil fuel (oil) based plastic carrier bags, not as a potential revenue stream, which appears to be the approach being taken to how this levy will operate.

- **Target: Continue to work towards a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by at least 35% on 1990 levels by 2025 (DOE)**

WWF Northern Ireland welcomes this target, but believes that the Executive should have been more ambitious. While this target is actually higher than the target in the UK Climate Change Act of 2008 for a 34% reduction in emissions compared to 1990 levels by 2020, the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 target is to reduce Scotland's emissions of the basket of six Kyoto Protocol greenhouse gases by 42% by 2020 and 80% by 2050, compared to the 1990/1995 baseline (the baseline for carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide is 1990, while for the other gases (HFCs, PFCs and SF₆) it is 1995).

- **Target: Protect and enhance our natural environment by working to halt the loss of biodiversity**

WWF Northern Ireland would support this target, and believes the loss in biodiversity does need to be halted, but the target is vague and the many other actions of the various departments suggest that the above are little more than token words. For example, according to page 82 of the 2011-15 budget ⁽²⁶⁾, DoE will also seek further savings of £4.3 million across a range of environmental programmes within NIEA, and in areas including environmental protection. WWF Northern Ireland previously responded to the consultation on the draft DoE budget 2011-15 and expressed its concern that in that budget DoE was proposing to cut some of the money necessary to comply with the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD) and Environmental Noise Directive, with the understanding that it there will not be any replacement funding (from the plastic bag levy) for these areas of work for over a year. WWF Northern Ireland regards this as an inappropriate and irresponsible choice on behalf of DoE, which reflects a lack of appropriate prioritisation on behalf of DoE, as it means the department's legal requirements and by extrapolation, Northern Ireland's legal requirements, may not be met. WWF Northern Ireland would not and does not support the suspension or postponement of programmes of work which are required to

comply with EU Directives, as this is not only detrimental to our environment but also exposes Northern Ireland to the risk of legal action and/or infraction fines from Europe and WWF Northern Ireland believes that alternative areas for cuts need to be identified as this course of action is not something WWF Northern Ireland can or will support. In light of the inexcusable and abject failure of the DoE and DARD to adequately protect the horse mussels in Strangford Lough, designated under the 1992 EU Habitats Directive, this sort of cut is only likely to do further damage to our environment. In relation to the specific issue of Strangford Lough, WWF Northern Ireland would be interested to know what plans the Executive has made for the potential imposition of large infraction fines from Europe arising from the failure of DoE and DARD to protect the horse mussel beds in Strangford Lough, given that any fine levied on the UK will in turn be taken out of the Northern Ireland block grant.

WWF Northern Ireland is also concerned about the proposal in the draft DoE budget (paragraph 4.16) that

“There will be a reduction in proactive pollution prevention and reduced capacity to non planned monitoring requirements to establish the source of pollution or the impact of such incidents”

While WWF Northern Ireland would like greater detail as to exactly what this proposal entails, accounting for the already inadequate monitoring of rivers, lakes and groundwater and of pollution incidents in these bodies, and the requirements of the WFD, WWF Northern Ireland regards this proposal as unacceptable. The monitoring of pollution incidents in order to identify the cause and source of the incident and, if appropriate, the prosecution of the polluter, is, in essence, the only effective and visible deterrent to those who for whatever reason do not comply with pollution related legislation and policy. Any proposal to scale back on this area of work, which urgently needs to be expanded and upgraded, rather than reduced and downgraded, is unacceptable to WWF Northern Ireland.

The overall situation regarding Northern Ireland’s biodiversity has a lot of room for improvement. For example, according to the DoE Environmental Statistics report 2012 ⁽²⁷⁾ only 4 out of 51 priority habitats were increasing in 2008 and only 1 out of 481 priority species were increasing in 2008. With this level of performance, WWF Northern Ireland believes that rather than being cut back, more resources need to be allocated to and invested in managing and monitoring Northern Ireland’s biodiversity and our priority habitats and species in particular. WWF Northern Ireland recognises that this draft PfG only covers the period up to 2015 but would urge the Executive, in the medium to longer term, to aim to not just halt the loss of biodiversity, but to restore and enhance native biodiversity.

- **Target: To invest over £500 million to promote more sustainable modes of travel.**

While this proposed investment sounds positive, WWF Northern Ireland believes the Executive needs to spell out exactly what this £500m will be spent on. According to page 91 of the draft 2011-15 budget ⁽²⁶⁾

“DRD has been allocated over £2 billion of capital investment over the budget period. This includes almost £1.2 billion for Roads, around £200 million for public transport and around £668 million for water and sewerage services”

There is no mention in the draft budget of £500 million for sustainable transport, only for £200 million for capital investment in public transport. WWF Northern Ireland understands that approximately £300 million may be allocated to a range of public grants and subsidies including concessionary fares and funding for the railway network, but believes clarification is needed. In any case, a £500m investment should make a significant and quantifiable impact on the level of sustainable transport provision and use in Northern Ireland and so the mere ‘promotion’ of sustainable modes of transport is not an appropriate target, as it is not really a target at all, and certainly not a SMART target, merely an aspiration. WWF Northern Ireland therefore believes this target needs to be reworded so as to include appropriate impacts and targets.

WWF Northern Ireland did not support and had criticised the huge imbalance in spending in favour of roads in the previous 2008-11 budget and recommended that in the next budget there be at least a 50-50 split in spending on roads and sustainable transport. However, based upon the figures in the draft budget

for 2011-15, only 10% of DRD's budget (£200 million out of £2 billion) is to be spent on public transport while around 60% (£1.2 billion) is to be spent on roads. WWF Northern Ireland is very disappointed that the Executive has chosen not to redress the imbalance in spending on roads and more sustainable transportation options and believes that the proposals in the draft 2011-15 budget are likely to only exacerbate the disproportionate problem that exists in relation to transport emissions in Northern Ireland. Emissions from road transport represented 28.2% of Northern Ireland's total Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) emissions in 2008, an increase of 39.5% since 1990, with cars responsible for 54% of the CO₂ emissions from the road transport sector in 2008 while HGVs contributed 36%. By contrast, road transport represents only 22% of the UK's total CO₂ emissions and grew by only 7% since 1990⁽²⁸⁾. The shortcomings in our transport system also cost us money, as was illustrated by PA Consulting, who claimed that congestion costs the Northern Ireland economy over £250 million a year⁽²⁹⁾.

Given the many problems with Northern Ireland's infrastructure the proposals to include reduced subsidy rates to Translink and a reduced service specification from Park and Ride is going in the wrong direction. The Executive should be investing more in sustainable and public transport as opposed to private transport options and infrastructure most notably, the estimated spend of approximately £720 million, accounting for the 90% reduction in funding recently proposed by the government in the Republic of Ireland, for the A5 improvements. Based on a projected total cost of approximately £800 million for the A5 upgrade, and the projected reduction in travelling times between Aghnacloy⁽³⁰⁾ and Derry of approximately 20 minutes, this represents an investment of approximately £40 million per (one) minute of travelling time it is predicted could be saved by this proposed improvement. WWF Northern Ireland does not regard the A5 proposal and the announcement on 14th February 2012 that almost £500 million is to be spent upgrading it, along with the A2 and A8, as best value for money for Northern Ireland and regards the Executive's approach to the DRD budget as a major failure.

The relatively small spend on public transport proposed in the draft PfG 2011-15 contrasts with the higher priority given to public transport in the Republic of Ireland which in the 2007-2013 National Development Plan (NDP)⁽³¹⁾ pledged just under €13 billion for public transport out of a total of €33 billion on infrastructure. There is an even sharper contrast with the plans announced by the Danish government in December 2008⁽³²⁾ of a "*green traffic initiative*" featuring infrastructure investments and transport measures costing DKr150bn (€20bn) over the next decade. According to the Danish plan, about two-thirds of the total will be spent on "*renovating, improving and developing the railway network*" with the aim of converting motorists to public transport. High emissions charges, road pricing, and financial incentives for fuel-efficiency are among a raft of additional measures. Similar strategic thinking and investment in greater public transport would be welcome in Northern Ireland.

Target: By 2015 create the conditions to facilitate at least 36% of primary school pupils and 22% of secondary school pupils to walk or cycle to school as their main mode of transport (DRD)

WWF Northern Ireland welcomes this target and would urge the Executive to ensure sufficient funds are allocated to measures which support active school travel to enable the target to be delivered.

Target: Maintain a high quality of drinking water and improve compliance with waste water standards by investing £600m in water and sewerage infrastructure

WWF Northern Ireland supports the target to maintain a high quality of drinking water. However, we would stress that the provision of high quality drinking water is expensive and should be used more efficiently. It is not necessary to use fresh drinking water to flush the toilet or water the garden, for example. Government should promote measures to reuse rainwater and greywater recycling systems that are cost effective and energy efficient.

In addition, we support the continued investment in our water and sewerage infrastructure but stress that this investment should be prioritised to upgrade existing infrastructure, for example to reduce leakage rates, rather than to increase capacity for water supply through additional capital projects. WWF Northern Ireland believes that any anticipated deficits in water supply-demand balance should be firstly addressed through the promotion of more water efficient behaviour.

Targets that WWF Northern Ireland believes should be included in the draft PfG 2011-15

There are a number of issues that WWF Northern Ireland believes should be addressed in the draft PfG 2011-15, but which were omitted. In particular, WWF Northern Ireland believes that firm commitments should have made in the draft PfG to

- Prioritise the development of a low carbon economy and clearly identify in the PfG how public expenditure will be invested in low carbon, resource efficient local and sustainable aspects of the economy, supporting the delivery of both footprint reduction and economic development targets. Clear targets for reducing energy demand should be set as part of this plan and a target to reduce energy demand by at least 20% by 2020 would be a good starting point.
- The introduction of a Climate Change Act for Northern Ireland, with targets for greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions that at least match those in the UK Climate Change Act of 2008, namely to reduce GHG emission compared to a 1990 baseline by at least 34% by 2020 and 80% by 2050
- Develop a long term (to 2050) energy strategy which is costed and sets clear mandatory targets to reduce our overdependence on fossil fuels and increase energy production from renewables and which matches the target for the UK in the EU Renewable Energy Directive of having 15% of energy generated from renewable sources by 2020. Research by the Carbon Trust has shown that if NI matched this target for the UK approximately 33,124, or more, high value jobs could be created in an industry worth approximately £989 million annually in Northern Ireland⁽¹⁹⁾.
- The introduction of a Marine Act for Northern Ireland which will; deliver the commitments made by Northern Ireland when it signed up to the UK Marine Policy Statement; ensures the sustainable management of our seas through the adoption of an ecosystem based approach; establish a network of marine protected areas in line with the targets of the UK Marine Act of 2009; establish a Marine Management Organisation (MMO) to oversee and implement a new system of marine spatial planning (MSP), which integrates with the UK MSP aims and objectives introduce legislation to deliver sustainable fisheries management.
- The full implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive This includes:
 - A secure source of funding to implement River Basin Management Plans. The DOE budget revealed that the Executive proposes to fund River Restoration activities for £1.1m annually from revenue raised through the plastic bag levy. This amount is less than half of the £8.8m initially requested by NIEA to fund WFD implementation. In addition, revenue raised from the plastic bag levy is not certain, and if it is effective as a levy, should see a decline over time. The Atkins Global Regulatory Impact Assessment (October 2009) found that while it would cost society £12.2m to implement the WFD in full in Northern Ireland, benefits would total £23-25m. Further, delivery of WFD in Northern Ireland is heavily reliant on existing measures such as agri-environment schemes, which have recently had their budgets cut dramatically, with no estimation of the impact on the delivery of good water quality. If we are to restore our freshwater environment and comply with our European requirements, it is essential that this shortfall in funding is prioritised.
 - Adequate levels of monitoring and enforcement supplemented by community initiatives to ensure compliance with pollution policies. Improvements are required in levels of monitoring and enforcement related to pollution of water bodies and in particular the problems caused by agriculture, industry, road construction and defective septic tanks. The draft DOE Budget proposed a reduction in preventing and responding to pollution incidents. The final RBMPs rely heavily on existing legislation and policies, such as the Nitrates Directive, to achieve improvements in water quality. Without adequate monitoring and enforcement, this approach is futile.
 - Improved abstraction licensing to ensure abstraction levels are sustainable and take account of the full impact on river habitats. Incomplete information about the level and cumulative impact of water abstraction on our rivers in Northern Ireland is resulting in excessive water abstraction leaving stretches dewatered, with high risks of interrupting salmonid migration. While efforts to harness renewable energy production from hydropower are welcome, consideration must be given to the current and future impact on the flow regimes within rivers. The protection of SAC designated rivers is a particular concern.
 - Plans are in place to deliver conservation targets in water dependent Protected Areas. Protected areas support our most environmentally sensitive and significant habitats. Under the Water Framework Directive, these sites must reach favourable status by 2015. The

current River Basin Management Plans report that only 21% of water dependent protected areas are in favourable status and 11% have not been assessed. Plans containing measures to achieve targets are incomplete.

- Introduce a duty to promote a sustainable flood management approach by all departments to manage Northern Ireland's flood risk, working with natural systems and prioritising natural flood management techniques which are less harmful to the environment; more cost effective over time as they require less maintenance and provide a range of additional environmental benefits that will support achieving Water Framework Directive targets.
- Establishing an Environmental Protection Agency for Northern Ireland before 2015
- Ensure Executive support for the greater use of electric vehicles, powered by electricity generated from renewable sources, inter alia, by setting a Northern Ireland level target for at least 10% of all vehicles and all of the public sector vehicle fleet to be electric by 2020.
- Adopt Northern Ireland's Ecological Footprint (an internationally recognised measure of the sustainability of our resource use) as a key indicator in the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy's Implementation Plan and establish clear targets for the reduction of Northern Ireland's ecological footprint, especially in terms of carbon (footprint).

Finally, though it is not referred to explicitly in the PfG, WWF Northern Ireland understands that the financial support for the Carbon Trust, which comes from Invest NI, will be terminated at the end of this financial year, i.e. in a matter of months, despite the previous achievements of the Carbon Trust. This course of action is likely to result in the loss of the jobs, and the bank of expertise, that resides within the Northern Ireland Carbon Trust office and not only is it not clear that this proposed course of action will save money, but, as WWF Northern Ireland understands it, it appears likely that this course of action may well incur additional costs. It is WWF Northern Ireland's understanding that no other Carbon Trust office is faced with potential closure, which would mean Northern Ireland would be the only administration in the UK without a local Carbon Trust office and operation and in this context, it might be worth re-examining this proposal.

Yours faithfully



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