

Consensus grows on Environmental Protection Agency



Pic courtesy of Strangford Lough Management Advisory Committee



Conservation Volunteers
Northern Ireland



Friends of
the Earth



THE
NATIONAL
TRUST



environment
link
Northern Ireland



Ulster Wildlife Trust



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TRUST



Northern Ireland's environment faces many threats, including our growing mountain of waste, rising carbon emissions and relentless development pressures. This generation is witnessing the loss of wildlife habitat, the decline of many species, and the erosion of our built heritage and special landscapes. It's no surprise that there is public support for new institutional arrangements for the management and protection of our environment. Indeed, the recent report of the Review of Environmental Governance presents our political representatives with a

once-in-a generation opportunity to seize the initiative and introduce the necessary reforms.

Our region is unique within the UK and Ireland in not having an independent Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Although the call to establish an agency came first from the environmental community, the chorus of support is getting louder as the consensus grows that a high quality environment underpins economic prosperity. In this document we share the views of key stakeholders on the establishment of an EPA here.

Endorsements



Gerry Adams

The protection of our environment is one of the most important challenges confronting society today and the new Executive. Reports stretching back over the last decade, including the Waste Management Advisory Board's highly damning report into the DOE's environmental protection and waste management record, demand urgent action and real solutions.

Sinn Féin believes that environmental protection powers should be removed from the DOE and that a new agency should be established with strong enforcement powers and a tough commitment to ensuring that the polluter is held responsible for their actions and meets treatment costs.

Sinn Féin believes that on an island this size it makes economic and environmental sense that there should also be an all-Ireland EPA and we will continue to work to achieve these important changes to the environmental protection arrangements.

**Gerry Adams MP MLA
President
Sinn Féin**



Gordon Best

It is the view of the quarry products industry that existing environmental enforcement is failing and confidence in EHS's ability to protect and maintain Northern Ireland's environment is at an all time low. Legitimate businesses are being undermined by ineffective regulation and interpretation of existing laws. It is our view that the introduction of an independent EPA provides an ideal opportunity for industry and environmental NGOs to work together to ensure the protection of the environment and environmentally responsible businesses.

We have concerns, however, and do not support all the findings of the REGNI report. Our members have no difficulty in supporting the creation of an independent EPA once assurances with regard to the cost effectiveness of establishing the agency, adequate core funding from Government and a fair, proportionate and transparent charging regime are received.

**Gordon Best
Regional Director
Quarry Products Association
Northern Ireland**



Deborah Boyd

As former Chair of the Waste Management Advisory Board for Northern Ireland one of the key recommendations from our NI Waste Management Strategy Review June 2004 was the establishment of an independent Environmental Protection Agency for Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Waste Management Strategy needs to be viewed within Government as a strategy for all Government.

I continue in my support for the establishment of an independent Environmental Protection Agency and this issue needs to be given priority.

**Deborah Boyd
Chief Executive
Re3 Group**



Endorsements



Tom Burke

A high quality environment is essential to Northern Ireland's economic regeneration. The high value, low impact businesses that will provide economic security in the 21st century are free to locate in those places that offer the best all round conditions for their highly skilled and well trained employees and their families. Increasingly, this includes a desire to live and work in a superior natural and cultural environment.

Northern Ireland has a tremendous environmental heritage. But its care was sadly neglected during thirty years of conflict. As we discovered in carrying out our Review of Environmental Governance, there has been a very great loss of public confidence in the ability of the Government of Northern Ireland to maintain environmental quality. The creation of an independent Environmental Protection Agency is now essential to restore that confidence and maintain Northern Ireland's attractiveness to inward investment.

Tom Burke CBE
Chairman
Review of Environmental
Governance



Patrick Casement

Over the past few years our environment has faced an unprecedented level of challenge and threat as Northern Ireland has raced to make up lost ground. This has placed enormous strains on the systems in place for environmental protection. All too often these systems have been hampered by their position within Government which has constrained both policies and practice.

The situation requires an independent, impartial, energetic and properly funded Environmental Protection Agency. An independent EPA would not mean the introduction of more regulation: rather it should ensure that the focus is on a risk-based approach and on effective and efficient regulation.

We still have a wonderful natural and built heritage. Let's give it the champion it deserves, before it is too late.

Patrick Casement
Farmer;
National Trust Regional
Chairman



Peter Dixon

Phoenix Natural Gas is fully committed to achieving high standards of environmental performance and minimising the environmental impacts of all our activities. We are also dedicated to helping make Northern Ireland a cleaner, healthier place to live and work by delivering the benefits of natural gas to homes and businesses throughout the region.

Therefore we are strongly supportive of the establishment of a single independent Environmental Protection Agency, in line with the rest of the UK and Ireland. We believe that such a move would ensure that improvements in environmental regulation and governance are delivered. The establishment of such an agency would demonstrate clear accountability and greatly support the Northern Ireland business community by the promotion and communication of environmental best practice. Given that we now govern our own affairs it is time for a fresh start, one which looks to the future with hope.

Peter Dixon
Chief Executive Officer
Phoenix Natural Gas Ltd



Endorsements



Mark Durkan

The SDLP has consistently advocated an all-island independent Environmental Protection Agency. Successive reports such as the Review of Environmental Governance, the Criminal Justice Inspectorate report and the Audit Office report into Areas of Special Scientific Interest demonstrate that Government is not providing effective environmental protection.

We need to safeguard the clean, green image of Ireland through halting biodiversity loss, protecting habitats, waste reduction and ensuring marine protection. To achieve this, we need an Environmental Protection Agency independent of all vested interests, public or private, and dedicated to best environmental practice and standards of openness.

Mark Durkan
Leader
SDLP



David Ford

Northern Ireland is the only part of these islands without an independent Environmental Protection Agency, and it shows. Regardless of the dedication of many individuals, the civil service structures are not working properly. In recent months we have seen the REGNI report set out the way ahead; the Assembly accepted, without opposition, a motion from Brian Wilson and me on the need for an independent agency; the courts have ruled that the Planning Service must have independent advice on the environmental impacts of area plans; and the RSPB has researched the possible costs of a new agency. The ball is now in the Executive's court: Alliance will keep up the pressure.

David Ford
Leader
Alliance Party



Eleanor Gill

The Consumer Council believes that an independent, transparent and accountable Environmental Protection Agency should robustly and consistently protect and regulate.

Independent environmental governance is important against the background of Water Reform where the water undertaker no longer enjoys Crown immunity. We supported and advanced the "polluter pays" principle as an economic and social protector and contributor to sustainable development. Any regulator must vigorously apply this principle for known polluters in line with EU legislation. Those who pollute the environment must pay for its clean up.

We welcome the campaign for structures to ensure we are protected, regulated and independently championed.

Eleanor Gill
Chief Executive
The Consumer Council for Northern Ireland



Endorsements



Michael Hughes

Rural Community Network recognises that a safe and healthy environment is an essential component of any sustainable community. Rural dwellers often enjoy the advantages of appropriate environmental protection through clean air, a connection with nature and the beautiful landscapes of rural Northern Ireland. However, they are often let down by poor enforcement: illegal dumping and water pollution are major issues which must be addressed and our valuable habitats and landscapes must be protected for the enjoyment of local people. We also recognise that the rural environment is a significant driver of employment and economic output. Many rural dwellers have lost faith in the current arrangements for environmental protection and believe that in order to secure sustainable rural communities a more independent, transparent and integrated agency is required to champion and protect the environment.

Michael Hughes
Chief Executive Officer
Rural Community Network



Danny Kennedy

Our generation is facing immense environmental challenges. If we fail to rise to these challenges we will be failing our children and grandchildren. An independent Environmental Protection Agency has a central role to play in protecting Northern Ireland's rich and diverse environment. That is why the UUP is committed to the creation of an EPA.

Danny Kennedy MLA is Deputy Leader of the Ulster Unionist Party in the Northern Ireland Assembly and is Chair of the Committee of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister.

Danny Kennedy MLA
Ulster Unionist Party



Daniel Lawrence

Northern Ireland has lagged behind in implementing European legislation and it has been criticised for being the “dirty corner” of the UK. The UK Environmental Law Association supports the establishment of a properly resourced independent regulatory agency, on the model of the Environment Agency in England and Wales or Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, but tailored to Northern Ireland's circumstances.

The benefits would include having a clearer focus, an independent voice and an environmental champion which could spark a culture shift and provide for better environmental regulation for business, the public and environmental quality.

Daniel Lawrence
Chairman
UK Environmental Law
Association



Endorsements



Robbie Marshall

Water is the source and mainstay of life. It is therefore vitally important that this resource is properly protected. Sadly, over the years our water systems have been neglected, damaged and mismanaged by various Government bodies. Untreated sewage continues to be released into the sea and rivers, and Northern Ireland's failure to comply with the European sewage directive is the subject of legal action by the European Commission.

We must not allow the mistakes of the past to continue. It is the opinion of the Federation that with a 'mish mash' of Government departments involved with water that it would be better to have an independent and integrated Environmental Protection Agency.

The Ulster Angling Federation is the representative body for game angling clubs in Northern Ireland.

Robbie Marshall
Development Officer
Ulster Angling Federation



Seamus McAleavy

The call for an independent Environmental Protection Agency was one of the big demands of NICVA's Policy Manifesto launched in January 2007.

Protecting our environment is now one of the most important issues in the public mind. The Policy Manifesto drew together in one place many of the key demands of voluntary and community groups that they wanted Northern Ireland's political parties to tackle in Government. There is no doubt the creation of a single Environmental Protection Agency has huge support and it's the right thing to do.

Seamus McAleavy
Chief Executive
Northern Ireland Council for
Voluntary Action



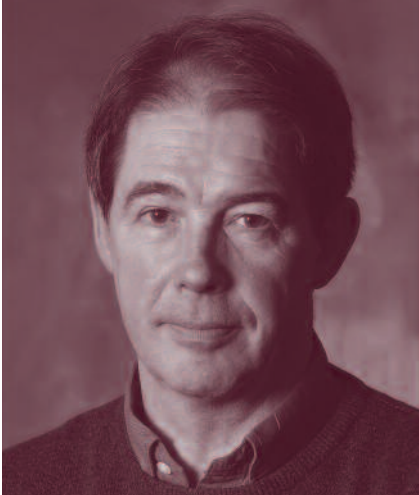
Gary McFarlane

Our health and wellbeing be it physical, mental or social, is entirely dependent on our environment. It is more important than ever that we have a modern, responsive and effective system to protect and conserve our local and regional environment as we face arguably the most vital and urgent health threat in the history of civilisation in the shape of climate change, the net result of over a century of environmental abuse. A strong, uncompromised system of environmental governance is a fundamental necessity in the face of this challenge but still we do not have an independent champion for our environment. The CIEH believes that the current system of environmental governance in Northern Ireland is compromised. We fully support the principle of an independent EPA in Northern Ireland as recommended by the Review of Environmental Governance.

Gary McFarlane
Director
Chartered Institute of
Environmental Health Northern
Ireland



Endorsements



Jonathon Porritt

Northern Ireland has come a long way over the last few years, far more than most people believed possible. The next step is to sort out some of the legacy of environmental neglect and that includes establishing an Environmental Protection Agency.

It's important to see such a step as more than a legal requirement. Having a well-resourced agency of this kind would be a huge benefit, not just to the citizens of Northern Ireland but to the business community.

Good, smart regulation is not the enemy of wealth creators but absolutely their best friend, as has been proved many times all around the world.

Jonathon Porritt
Chairman
UK Sustainable Development
Commission



Nigel Smyth

CBI members feel that existing environmental enforcement is failing and confidence in the Environment and Heritage Service's ability to protect and maintain our environment is low. Legitimate businesses are being undermined by ineffective enforcement of regulations while investors prefer a consistent and effective regulatory regime. Improved environmental governance arrangements are required which will be cost-effective, integrated and risk-based; have a primary focus on enforcement of environmental regulation and the provision of information and advice on promoting best environmental practice. While CBI members do not support all the findings of the Review of Environmental Governance, they would support the creation of an independent EPA once assurances with regard to the cost effectiveness of establishing the agency, adequate core funding from Government and a fair, proportionate and transparent charging regime are received.

Nigel Smyth
Director
CBI Northern Ireland



Dave Tovey

One of the world's largest tyre manufacturers, Michelin is committed to sustaining the environment both in its manufacturing operations and in the use of tyres on the road. Indeed, 'Respect for the Environment' is one of the five company values which underpin the way Michelin operates.

We broadly support the proposed creation of an independent Environmental Protection Agency for Northern Ireland, providing that it does not impact negatively on those companies who have for years respected the legislation and been good custodians of the environment.

Dave Tovey
Environment & Risk Prevention
Manager
Michelin Tyres
Ballymena



Endorsements



Sue Ward

Climate change and the long-term protection of our environment is one of the most challenging issues facing us in the 21st century. Meaningful and effective enforcement of regulations must sit alongside clear information and support to ensure we address our environmental responsibilities as fully as possible.

Only through effective partnerships between Government, business and environmental agencies can real progress be made. Business in the Community believes that an independent Environmental Protection Agency for Northern Ireland could be the required catalyst to champion and coordinate this cause. Whilst regulation and legislation can add to the burden for business, we acknowledge the bigger picture in this case and support efforts to improve sustainability for the benefit of all society.

Sue Ward
Environment Director
Business in the Community
Northern Ireland



John Warke

There is an expectation that the regulatory authority responsible for the protection of the environment should exercise its functions in a transparent and accountable way. The perception that the judgement of the Environment and Heritage Service has at times been influenced by political considerations has been heightened by its apparent inability to influence planning policy on housing development in areas where Waste Water Treatment Works failed to comply with EC standards. There will only be full public confidence when regulation is carried out by a body which is separate from Government and immediate priority should be given to establishing an independent Environmental Protection Agency.

John Warke
Chair
Environmental and Planning
Law Association for Northern
Ireland;
Formerly Chief Commissioner
Planning and Water Appeals
Commissions



Brian Wilson

One reason why I support the campaign for an independent Environmental Protection Agency is the continued discharge of untreated sewage into Belfast Lough, something that has been ignored by the Environment and Heritage Service.

For years, tons of untreated sewage have contaminated my local beach at Ballyholme, despite protests from the 60,000 residents of Bangor and North Down Council, who are seriously concerned about the health implications.

Yet the DOE's Environment and Heritage Service is neither able nor willing to regulate Northern Ireland Water, and continues to ignore our voices and the European Court's ruling that the discharges are illegal.

This has reinforced my conviction that an independent regulator, outside of political and ministerial control is essential.

Brian Wilson MLA
Green Party

Published by The Coalition for Environmental Protection,
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