Office for Environmental Protection

# Minutes

Meeting of the Board
Wednesday 8th April 2026
MS Teams

## Members

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| Malcolm Beatty OBE | Board Member |
| Professor Liz Fisher | Board Member |
| Julie Hill MBE | Chair |
| Professor Dan Laffoley | Board Member |
| Dr Paul Leinster CBE | Board Member |
| Caroline May | Board Member |
| Natalie Prosser | Chief Executive |
| Helen Venn | Chief Regulatory Officer |

## OEP Attendees

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| Mike Fox | Head of Communications and Strategic Relations |
| Professor Cathy Maguire | Head of Assessments |
| Craig McGuicken | NI Lead (item 26.17) |
| Angel Lai | Head of Finance and Corporate Services |
| Andy Lester | Head of Business Strategy and Planning |
| REDACTED | Board Secretary and Private Office Manager |
| Kate Tandy | Acting General Counsel |

### 26.14 Apologies for Absence and Declarations of Interest

Apologies were received from Liz Fisher. There were no new declarations of interest.

### 26.15 Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes of the 10 December meeting were approved

The minutes of the 22 January meeting were approved.

The matters arising report was noted.

### 26.16 Report of the Chief Executive

The report on the nutrient action programme regulations in Northern Ireland is scheduled for publication on 30 April, and due diligence in relation to any potential conflicts of interest associated with the report has been completed. The Board were updated on publication arrangements, including the planned Executive presence in Northern Ireland to support

publication. It was also noted that the Minister's Task and Finish Group will report its work in due course.

We are finalizing the waste inspections report and continue to engage closely with the Environment Agency. We believe all outstanding matters with the EA have now been resolved. The forthcoming report remains of significant importance to both us and the EA.

New strategic position statements have been released for both Natural England and the EA, outlining expectations Ministers have of them. Marian Spain has announced that she will retire in the autumn, and recruitment for her replacement will commence soon. It was noted that recruitment of new Chairs of both NE and the EA is to follow within the next twelve months.

Government has published its response to the Fingleton Review. *This section has been redacted as its publication would be prejudicial to the effective conduct of public affairs.*

The Land Use Framework (LUF) has also been published; we will continue to monitor its implementation. **Action** Chief Regulatory Officer to initiate engagement between the planning team and Paul Leinster.

The Board was provided with a general update on all of the live investigations. *This section has been redacted as it relates to information recorded for the purposes of OEP's functions relating to investigations and enforcement.*

The Board noted that a delegation is in place should the Chief Executive become unable to fulfill her duties. Following a request from the National Audit Office, this now includes agreement with Defra as to what steps would be taken in relation to her Accounting Officer responsibilities.

The staff survey results were noted as positive. Incidents of bullying and harassment were reported as very low, resulting in data that is insufficient for further analysis. A full analysis of the results will be provided to the Board at a future meeting. **Action** Head of Finance and Corporate Services.

The Board congratulated the intelligence team on its award for innovation at the Institute of Regulation awards.

### 26.17 EIP progress reports – Northern Ireland draft main findings and England scoping update

The Board was updated on progress in development of the Northern Ireland progress report and advised on how this will differ to the reports the Board is aware of for England. These include that the NI report will take a more local and place-based approach. Unlike England, the NI report will not have an assessment rating by Strategic Environmental Outcome within its structure, instead presenting at more granular levels.

The Board considered the likely recommendations. It noted that some will endure for a number of years and will closely mirror those of other scrutiny bodies in different areas of government activity. In addition, we aim to set out recommendations in those areas where DAERA could deliver meaningful progress in the coming year.

The findings present a negative picture of environmental progress in NI. The Board discussed the importance of injecting a sense of optimism and forward momentum, clarifying what success might look like in this context. The report could recognise the level

of activity undertaken by DAERA in recent years, and changes to resourcing, where relevant, even if environmental outcomes are not immediately apparent.

The Board also discussed the scope of the England report, which must align with EIP 25. Improving engagement with Defra remains a priority. The Board discussed the positioning of the England report and suggested that the cross-government implications of the EIP should be highlighted.

**26.18 Framework Document**

The Board considered progress in concluding the framework document.

The Board queried some of its provisions. It sought assurance on the proposed arrangements in respect of conflict between the Board and Chief Executive and suggested some textual corrections for accuracy.

The Board discussed the position in relation to the certainty of funding. It noted these differ from the commitments made to Parliament in the passage of the Environment Act in 2021 but also noted that this was under a different government and is now some time ago. It was advised that Defra has indicated that the document will not be amended in line with the 2021 statements.

Given this, the Board discussed whether and how this difference should be noted, to provide a record as to why the Board agreed the framework document notwithstanding this difference.

The Board highlighted the continuing importance of maintaining our independence within the approved framework.

The Board noted the requirement for members to review the terms of reference and code of conduct each year, ensuring these are also noted by ARAC, and the need for an annual appraisal of the Chair. **Action** Head of Business Strategy and Planning

The Board agreed the OEP's Framework Document presented, along with the accompanying side letter.

The Board also agreed to write to Defra stating the Board's reasons for agreeing the framework document now, and noting the differences between the commitments included in relation to funding, and the statements made to Parliament during passage of the Act. **Action** Head of Business Strategy and Planning to draft a letter to Defra in consultation with the Chief Executive and Chair.

**26.19 Any Other Business**

It was confirmed that the annual appraisals with Board members will take place in the next month.