

From the Permanent Secretary
Katrina Godfrey



Our reference: SCORR-0455-2023
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30 October 2023

Dear Dominic

MUDC MOTION TO ESTABLISH AN INTERDEPARTMENTAL GROUP TO MANAGE LOUGH NEAGH

Thank you for your letter dated 2 October 2023 which I received by email on 6 October 2023 and thank you also for taking the time to let me know about the motion on Lough Neagh which was passed by your council in September.

I note the Council's view on ownership and management of the Lough and have also noted and share the Council's concern about the impact of blue green algae. I do want to assure you that DAERA has a significant programme of work underway, working in collaboration with other government departments (including DfI) and agencies, to address that impact. That work is underpinned and informed by science.

DAERA has also established a Water Quality Steering Group (WQSG) comprising senior officials from DAERA, NIEA and Department for Infrastructure (DFI) who have been tasked with producing a set of evidence-informed recommendations on the actions required to secure longer term improvements in water quality.

The WQSG is supported by a Review Team to review scientific and other evidence to identify further action that might be needed in addition to the work we already have in train, such as the development of River Basin Management Plan, the Soil Nutrient Health Programme, the Nutrient Action Plan, Environmental Farming Scheme and Environmental Challenge Fund.

The work of the Review Team will be assisted by an Independent Expert Science Working Group (ESWG) which will provide advice and guidance to the review process.

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I also want to assure you that officials will continue to engage with their officer counterparts from the relevant councils as part of the work programme I have outlined above.

Finally, you mentioned that you would be inviting the Environmental Protection Agency to present to Council on the situation at Lough Neagh. If it is the Northern Ireland Environment Agency from which the Council wishes to hear, I understand that the Agency is content to rerun the briefing it previously provided to the Council on 11 September 2023 if that would be helpful. This can be arranged directly with the NIEA.

Yours sincerely



KATRINA GODFREY

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15th November 2023

Adrian McCreesh
Chief Executive
Mid Ulster District Council

Adrian.McCreesh@midulstercouncil.org

Dear Chief Executive

I am writing to advise you of a Notice of Motion that was passed by Derry City and Strabane District Council at it's meeting in September 2023.

This Council agrees that the current management of Lough Neagh is unsustainable and has led to significant damage to this culturally, socially, environmentally and economically significant resource. The Lough itself and the surrounding communities are now suffering the consequences of this failed management system.

This Council agrees that the environmental disaster happening in Lough Neagh is unprecedented and calls for unprecedented action. This Council understands that a rights of nature approach may be used to inform the design of governance frameworks that are capable of producing better outcomes for the environment and communities of Lough Neagh.

This Council will call an urgent meeting of all Councils in the North with QUB School of Law and FOE NI to explore the potential of legally recognised Rights of Nature for Lough Neagh.

"That this Council calls on NILGA to immediately establish a working group made up of DAERA and its respective agencies, representatives from Councils that border Lough Neagh, NI Water and the Public Health Agency and the Food Standards Agency in order to establish a time bound targeted strategy to address the ecological issues ongoing at Lough Neagh and calls for the Lough to be brought into public ownership."

Our Chief Executive has asked that I write to you in order to establish if you would be willing to attend a meeting in relation to exploring the potential of legally recognised Rights of Nature for Lough Neagh and/or if there are any other existing forums that are dealing with Lough Neagh at which this matter could be explored.

I would be grateful if you could respond with your views in relation to this matter.

Yours sincerely

Karen Phillips
Director of Environment & Regeneration

Cc Karen Smyth, NILGA