



Office for
**Environmental
Protection**

Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) and its role

Darren Watson – Principal Environmental Analyst

What is the OEP?



Our mission

Our mission is to protect and improve the environment by holding government and other public authorities to account.

The Environment Act 2021 established the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) as a **new public body**.

Our principal objective in exercising our functions is to contribute to environmental protection and the improvement of the natural environment

Our remit covers **England, Northern Ireland** and **reserved matters**

Funded by, but **independent of Defra and Daera**

Counterpart of **ESS and IEPAW**

Part of the **new system of environmental governance** in the Environment Act

We have just had our 2nd birthday in England, powers in Northern Ireland came into effect in March 2021

Our remit – Environment Act 2021



s.28 – Monitoring and reporting on environmental improvement plans and targets.

s.29 – Monitoring and reporting on environmental law.

- Review and report on government's progress in meeting environmental goals and targets
- Monitor and report on the implementation of environmental law
- Advise government on proposed changes to the law and other environmental matters
- Investigate suspected failures to comply with environmental law by government and other public bodies and enforce compliance where needed

The public can make a complaint to us where they suspect that the government or a public authority has failed to comply with environmental law.

Our remit – who we hold to account



The organisations and individuals we can hold to account include:

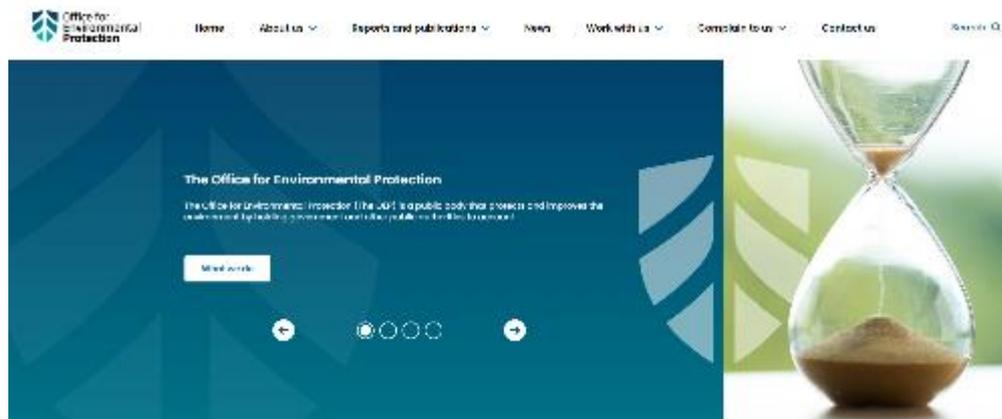
- government departments
- government ministers
- regulators
- local authorities
- some private bodies, such as water companies – but only in respect of their public powers and duties

Duty to co-operate

Public authorities have a duty to cooperate with the OEP and give it such reasonable assistance as it requests including the provision of information

Our remit - engagement

- We **work with public authorities in different ways**, as we undertake our different functions.
- We **engage, listen, and learn from stakeholders**, drawing on and respecting the deep technical expertise of specialist bodies, including those in government.
- We seek to earn the trust and respect of all organisations we work with through being **independent, objective, impartial and reliable**.



Who is the OEP?

- **Chair:** Dame Glenys Stacey
- **Non-Executive Board:**
 - Malcolm Beatty OBE (NI Non-Executive member)
 - Julie Hill MBE
 - Professor Dan Laffoley
 - Dr Paul Leinster CBE
 - Professor Richard Macrory CBE
- **CEO:** Natalie Prosser
- **Executive Committee and Directors:**
 - Chief of Staff: Richard Greenhous (Exec Northern Ireland Lead)
 - Chief Regulatory Officer: Helen Venn
 - Chief Insights Officer & Chief Scientist: Prof. Robbie McDonald
 - General Counsel: Peter Ashford
- **c.60 Staff based across Northern Ireland and England**

Non-Executive Board



Malcolm Beatty OBE - Chartered Forester and Chartered Public Finance Accountant. Chief Executive and Accounting Officer of the Northern Ireland Forest Service, and the NI Chief Plant Health Officer.



Julie Hill MBE - Chair of the Institution of Environmental Sciences (IES). Former Chair of the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), board member of the Eden Project, the Environment Agency (EA) and the Consumer Council for Water (CCW).



Professor Dan Laffoley - Marine Vice Chair of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's World Commission on Protected Areas



Dr Paul Leinster CBE – former Environment Agency CEO., Chair of Water Resources East and IEMA



Professor Richard Macrory CBE - emeritus professor of environmental law at University College, London. First chair of UK Environmental Law Association, and in 2016-2018 was co-chair of UKELA's Brexit Task Force.



Mission and strategy



OEP Strategy

Stakeholder engagement, Public consultation, YouGov survey

68 responses to our consultation and views gathered from 5,151 members of the public through the YouGov survey

Four Main Functions

The Environment Act sets out our powers and duties:



Scrutinising Environmental Improvement Plans (EIPs) and targets

We review and report on progress in delivering environmental improvement plans, goals, and targets.



Scrutinising environmental law

We monitor and report on the implementation of environmental law.



Advice

We advise government on proposed changes to environmental law and other matters related to the natural environment.



Enforcement

We investigate suspected serious failures to comply with environmental law by public authorities and enforce compliance where needed.

Four Main Functions



Scrutinising Environmental Plans (EIPs) and targets

We review and report on progress in delivering environmental improvement plans, goals, and targets.

Government is held to account for delivery of environmental goals and targets, and its plans for environmental improvement.

Monitoring the EIPs and targets

- The OEP has a duty to monitor governments' progress with their EIPs
- Our reports are laid before Parliament/ NI Assembly and the government must respond
- We published our first statutory report on the England EIP in Jan 2023
- The Northern Ireland assembly has yet to publish its EIP



A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment



**Gov
publishes
progress
report**



**OEP
responds
to report**

**Gov
responds
to OEP**



Four Main Functions



Scrutinising environmental law

We monitor
and report on the
implementation
of environmental
law.

The environment is protected and improved, and people are protected from the effects of human activity on the natural environment, through better design and implementation of environmental laws.

Monitoring the implementation of environmental law

- The OEP has a duty to monitor the implementation of environmental law. And we may report on “any matter concerned with” the implementation of environmental law

Review of environmental assessment
regimes EIA, SEA and HRA; laid in
Parliament in Oct 2023



Four Main Functions



Enforcement

We investigate suspected serious failures to comply with environmental law by public authorities and enforce compliance where needed.

Government and other public authorities abide by environmental law so it can protect people and protect and improve the environment as intended.

Complaints

- A member of the public may complain to the OEP if they believe that a **public authority** has failed to comply with environmental law.

Receive and assess complaints



Four Main Functions



Enforcement

We investigate suspected serious failures to comply with environmental law by public authorities and enforce compliance where needed.

Government and other public authorities abide by environmental law so it can protect people and protect and improve the environment as intended.

Investigation/ enforcement

- The OEP may investigate if it thinks the complaint indicates there may have been a failure to comply with environmental law and that it would be a **serious failure**.
- The public body's internal complaints procedure must be exhausted first.
- The OEP will not only be an enforcer. In many cases we anticipate it will be possible and appropriate to resolve an issue without recourse to formal enforcement procedures.

Investigations: DAERA advice on ammonia emissions / regulation of combined sewer overflows in England

Prioritisation of activities

Our prioritisation approach is founded on four principles:

We will prioritise by outcome and across our functions so that **our work makes the most difference**

We will **prioritise by judgement, supported by the evidence** available at the time

Our judgements on what we prioritise, and when, will be guided by four main questions:

- how large an effect could our action have?
- how likely is our ability to have that effect?
- what is the strategic fit?
- what is our capacity and capability to deliver?

We will be **transparent about the matters we prioritise**.

Our **Board and senior leaders will make our judgements on prioritisation**. These will be set out in our corporate plan at the start of each business year.

Activity themes – 2023/24 to 2025/26

Nature

Water

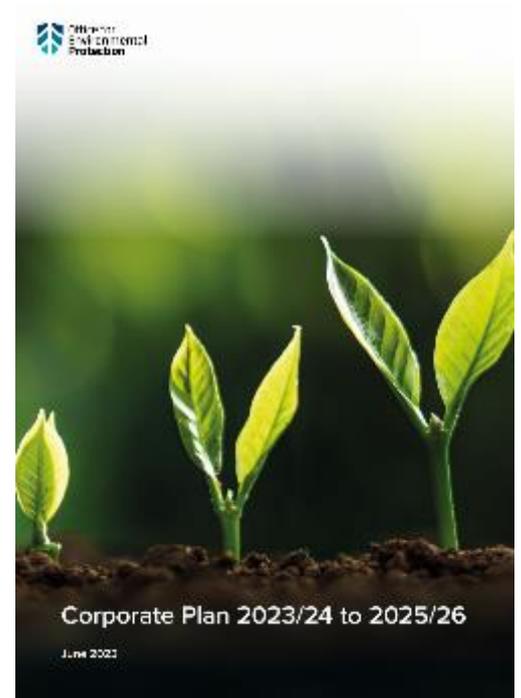
Governance

Marine

Soils

Waste

Chemicals



Emerging brownfield / urban activities Office for Environmental Protection

Contaminated Land: Assessment of Part IIA regime – future questionnaire to LAs

Waste:

- Assessment of waste management and illegal disposal in Northern Ireland
- Functioning of the waste hierarchy and resource productivity in England
- Regulation of waste sites in England

Chemicals: Understanding of regulatory landscape and evaluation of potential research / interventions

Soil: Review of evidence: Sustainable Management of Agricultural Soils in England, with potential to (later) consider peat soils and urban aspects

Urban pollution: Runoff to watercourses

Future developments



Northern Ireland Environmental Improvement Plan

Drivers and Pressures Affecting Biodiversity in Northern Ireland Report

Multi-annual approach to EIP progress in England – possible waste ‘deep dive’ / cross-cutting themes / local & regional focus

Development of our approach to marine

Land use framework / Chemicals strategy

College of experts

Futures



OEP response to Defra consultations on Fisheries Management Plans
30.10.2023

The Office for Environmental Protection has responded to Defra's consultations on Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs).

Advice and expert opinion

Letters

Read report



Call for Evidence – Drivers and Pressures Affecting Biodiversity in Northern Ireland
07.09.2023

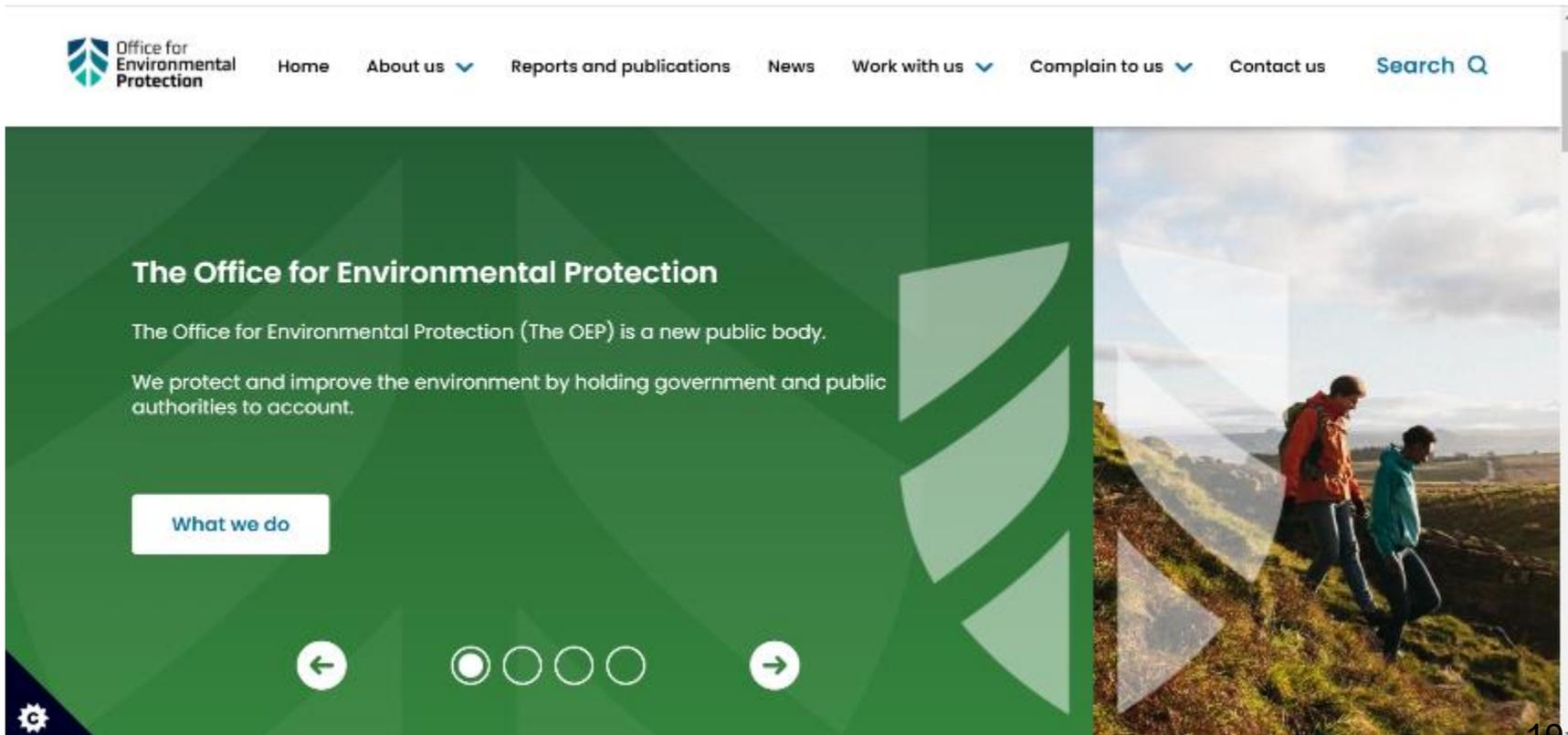
We are inviting interested parties to submit evidence as part of our review of drivers and pressures affecting biodiversity across Northern Ireland.

Advice and expert opinion

Read report

Questions / discussion

<https://www.theoep.org.uk/>



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP). The navigation bar includes the OEP logo, "Home", "About us", "Reports and publications", "News", "Work with us", "Complain to us", "Contact us", and a "Search" button. The main content area features a green background with a large leaf graphic. The text reads: "The Office for Environmental Protection (The OEP) is a new public body. We protect and improve the environment by holding government and public authorities to account." Below this is a "What we do" button. At the bottom, there are navigation arrows and a gear icon.

Office for Environmental Protection

Home About us Reports and publications News Work with us Complain to us Contact us Search

The Office for Environmental Protection

The Office for Environmental Protection (The OEP) is a new public body.

We protect and improve the environment by holding government and public authorities to account.

What we do