



Step 01 - Understand Your Context

What is the climate change policy context and reporting requirements in Northern Ireland?

Introduction

Climate change policy has changed rapidly in recent years, alongside a growing awareness of the risks and opportunities to our natural environment, infrastructure services, built environment, economy, and other vital societal support structures.

Below you will find the climate policy timeline, outlining the main climate policy publications relevant for Northern Ireland. To use the timeline press 'continue' and scroll from left to right. For more information about a particular publication click on the respective 'event'.

[Climate NI Policy Timeline](#)

International Policy

The Paris Agreement 2015

The Paris Agreement is a landmark climate change agreement adopted on December 12, 2015 at COP21 in Paris, France under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The deal marked a critical turning point toward a zero carbon and climate resilient world. Today, 195 Parties (194 states plus the European Union) have joined the Paris Agreement. The Agreement commits all countries to reducing their emissions, working together to adapt to the impacts of climate change, and strengthening their commitments over time.

The deal aims to¹:

- Limit global temperature increase to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, whilst ambitiously pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
- Mobilise and enhance support for climate change mitigation and adaptation in developing countries by providing 'climate finance'.
- Provide a framework for transparency and accountability on countries' progress of mitigation, adaptation, and support.

UK & NI Policy

Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022

In June 2022, the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) received Royal Assent. The Act sets a legally-binding target for net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, with interim targets including at least a 48% reduction in net emissions by 2030, and a 77% reduction by 2040.

[More information on the Climate Change Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022 can be found here.](#)

Climate NI has developed the following short summary of key requirements in the 2022 Act:

- **Five-yearly Carbon Budgets**
 - A carbon budget is the maximum total amount of emissions permitted for a budgetary period (5 years). The first three carbon budgets are for the years 2023-27, 2028-32 and 2033-37. Each carbon budget must be set at a level that is consistent with Act's interim emissions reduction targets.
 - If a carbon budget is not met, the Act requires the Department for Agriculture, the Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) (with the assistance of other departments) to publish a report on the policies and proposals needed to compensate for the excess emissions in subsequent budgetary periods.
- **Climate Action Plans**
 - The Act requires the development and publication of 5-year Climate Action Plans. Climate Action Plans are the key delivery mechanism for meeting carbon budgets. Each Climate Action Plan must undergo a 16-week consultation and must include:
 - Policies and proposals from all NI departments,
 - Annual greenhouse gas and air quality targets,
 - Soil quality and biodiversity targets.
- **Public Body Reporting on Climate Change**
 - In accordance with the Act, The Climate Change (Reporting Bodies) Regulations (NI) 2024 were made and came into operation on 3rd May 2024. The Regulations place climate change reporting duties on 40 public bodies including councils, health trusts, the police and fire service.
 - These bodies must report on their greenhouse gas emissions as well as their actions, plans and progress in reducing these emissions (mitigation action).
 - These bodies must also report on their plans and actions and their progress in tackling their current and predicted risks and impacts from climate change (adaptation). plans and progress in reducing these emissions (mitigation).

[Read more about the Climate Change \(Reporting Bodies\) Regulations \(NI\) 2024 here.](#)

- **Sectoral Plans**

- In order to meet the overall goal of net-zero by 2050, the departments in Northern Ireland are tasked with publishing long-term plans for different sectors of the economy over and above the 5-year climate action plans. These plans, known as sectoral plans, must also support a just transition.
- Sectoral plans set out how specific sectors will contribute to the targets in the Act. There will be sectoral plans for:
 - Energy
 - Industrial processes
 - Transport
 - Infrastructure
 - Waste management
 - Agriculture
 - Fisheries

- **Just Transition Commission**

- The Act places a duty on DAERA to establish a Just Transition Commission for Northern Ireland. The Just Transition Commission will oversee implementation of the just transition elements of the Act and provide advice to Northern Ireland departments on how to ensure that all proposals, policies, strategies and plans required under the Act comply with the just transition principle.
- The Act sets out the objectives of a just transition principle which include supporting jobs that are climate resilient and environmentally sustainable, supporting low-carbon investment and supporting those who are most affected by climate change and may be the least equipped to adapt to its effects or may stand to lose out economically.

- **Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner**

- In accordance with the Act, the Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025 are now in place to appoint a Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner, who will have responsibility for overseeing and reporting on the operations of the Act.

[Read more about the role of the Northern Ireland Climate Commissioner here.](#)

UK Climate Change Act 2008

The UK Climate Change Act 2008 establishes a legally binding framework for the UK government to address and combat climate change.

The Climate Change Act commits the UK government to:

- Achieve net zero emissions by 2050. This means that all UK greenhouse gas emissions are reduced to net zero and/or offset through natural or technological measures. The devolved administrations of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland while contributing to the UK's 2050 net zero target, also have their own climate

change legislation which sets their bespoke emissions reduction targets that are consistent with the overarching UK target.

- The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 sets Northern Ireland's net zero emissions reduction target for 2050 and includes legally binding interim targets in that regard.
- Assess the risks and opportunities from climate change by producing a UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) every five years and, in response, lay in parliament a UK National Adaptation Programme (NAP) to address these climate risks and opportunities.

The UK Climate Change Act 2008 requires Northern Ireland government departments to prepare an Adaptation Programme that responds to the climate change risks and opportunities for Northern Ireland, as identified in the most recent UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA). Scotland and Wales have their own climate change legislation which mandates separate adaptation programmes/approaches in response to the most recent UK CCRA, and which complements the UK Act.

Mitigation in the UK Climate Change Act 2008

Carbon Budget and Growth Delivery Plan 2025

The UK government published its revised plan for meeting the UK's net zero target, the Carbon Budget and Growth Delivery Plan, in October 2025. This plan sets out how the government would meet the emissions reductions for the UK's carbon budgets four to six (2023 to 2037).²

[Read more about the UK Government's Net Zero by 2050 plans here](#)

Adaptation in the UK Climate Change Act 2008

UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2022

The UK government's 5-yearly Climate Change Risk Assessments (CCRA) are informed by an independent Evidence Report, produced by the Climate Change Committee (CCC). The CCC are independent climate advisors to the UK government and the devolved government administrations and were established under the UK Climate Change Act 2008. The CCC's five-yearly Evidence Reports are an analysis of the current priority climate change risks and opportunities for the UK at that time. The most recent CCC Evidence Report (CCRA3-IA) – published in 2021 and endorsed by the UK CCRA3 – classifies the more urgent risks as 'More Action Needed' & 'Further Investigation', while less urgent risks are categorised as 'Sustain Current Action' & 'Watching Brief'.³

The results of the CCC's assessment can be found on UKClimateRisk.org, including:

- [Technical Report](#)
- [National Summaries](#)
- [Sector Briefings](#)
- [Research and Supporting Analysis](#)

The CCRA3-IA national summary for Northern Ireland assessed 61 climate risks and opportunities. More action is needed now to address 31 of them, further investigation is urgently needed for 19, sustaining current adaptation action is only deemed appropriate for five of the risks or opportunities, and six have been classified as watching brief.⁴

Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP)

In response to the risks and opportunities identified in the most recent UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA), NI government departments must develop a Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP), setting out how they are addressing and how they will address the risks and opportunities brought about by climate change on a five-yearly basis. DAERA leads on behalf of NI governmental departments, the development and publication of these NICCAPs.⁵

Recent NICCAPs

There have been two 5-yearly NICCAPs published since its inception. NICCAP1 covered the period of 2014-2019, and NICCAP2 covered the period of 2019-2024. NICCAP3 is currently in draft and yet to be published.

Focusing on NICCAP2 and NICCAP3

- Northern Ireland's second Climate Change Adaptation Programme covering 2019-2024 was published in September 2019 and sets out NI's adaptation actions for this period. This Programme set out government's response to the risks and opportunities identified in the second CCC Evidence Report – UK CCRA 2017 Evidence Report Summary for Northern Ireland (which informed and was endorsed by the UK CCRA2).
- For the first time, NICCAP2 also included an outline of how civil society and local government will contribute to addressing these climate change risks and opportunities.
- NICCAP3: The third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP3) is in its draft phase and will cover the 5 years following its publication. NICCAP3 includes a coordinated action plan in response to the findings of the CCRA3- IA national summary for Northern Ireland. It also contains the policies and proposals from across wider society through the inclusion of actions from local government, eNGOs, academia and the private sector, in recognition of the important role they can play in creating climate resilience.

[Read the Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019-2024 here.](#)

Civil Society and Local Government Adapts

Climate NI, through its DAERA Work Programme engaged with civil society and local government to develop their response to the risks and opportunities outlined in the 2017 CCRA. A Civil Society and Local Government chapter is included in the main NICCAP, and Climate NI also prepared the Civil Society and Local Government Adapts Supporting Document which provides further detail on the adaptation actions being undertaken by civil society (academic, voluntary and community, and private sectors) and local government across Northern Ireland.⁶

Climate NI also supported work on developing the third (draft) Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP3) 2024-2029, by requesting and gathering information relating to actions outside of government i.e. planned or ongoing projects during the period 2024-2029 which address the impacts of climate change in Northern Ireland.

[Access the draft third Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme \(NICCAP3\) here](#)

Note: NICCAP3 is still in its draft phase, this will be updated once a final copy is published by DAERA

References

1. United Nations Climate Change (UNCC) (2020) 'What is the Paris Agreement?' Available online: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>
2. House of Commons Library (2025) 'The UK's plans and progress to meet Net Zero by 2050'. Available online: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9888/> Accessed December 2025.
3. Committee on Climate Change (2021) 'UK Climate Risk Independent Assessment (CCRA3).' Available online: <https://www.ukclimaterisk.org/publications/technical-report-ccra3-ia/> Accessed December 2025.
4. Climate Change Committee (2021) 'Evidence for the third UK Climate Change Risk Assessment - Summary for Northern Ireland.' Available online: <https://www.ukclimaterisk.org/publications/summary-for-northern-ireland-ccra3-ia/> Accessed December 2025.
5. Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) 'Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019-2024.' Available online: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Northern%20Ireland%20Climate%20Change%20Adaptation%20Programme%202019-2024%20Final-Laid.PDF> Accessed November 2019.
6. Climate Northern Ireland (2019) 'Civil Society and Local Government Adapts.' Available online: <https://climatenorthernireland.org.uk/site/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/NICCAP2-Civil-Society-and-Local-Government-Adapts.pdf> Accessed January 2023.