

Consultation on the setting of Northern Ireland's Fourth Carbon Budget (2038-2042) – November 2025

About the Institute of Chartered Foresters

The Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) is the Royal Chartered body for Foresters and Arboriculturists in the UK. We have 2,300 members who practice forestry, arboriculture and related disciplines in the private and third sectors, central and local government, research institutions, universities and colleges throughout the UK. The Institute regulates standards of entry to the profession. It provides support to its members, guidance to professionals in other sectors, information to the public, and educational advice and training to students and tree professionals seeking to develop their careers in the forestry and arboriculture industry.

Our response

The ICF has not submitted a response via the Citizen Space portal but requests that the Climate Change and Legislation Policy Division accepts this paper as our response. This paper has been produced in consultation with our membership.

Trajectory

Q1. Do you feel this would provide the necessary trajectory to reduce Northern Ireland emissions and meet the legislative requirements?

We agree with the advice received from the UK Climate Change Committee (CCC) that an average annual reduction of 77% in emissions across the 2038-2042 budgetary period should be delivered against the 1990 baseline. We note the CCC's report setting out, "The Northern Ireland Net Zero Pathway", which details how the carbon budgets can be delivered and met.

Balancing Ambitions

Q2. Whilst DAERA must set carbon budgets in line with the targets in the Act, what considerations/factors are important to you?

We would stress the need for '**equity among sectors**' and while we acknowledge that this consultation is not about how budgets can be delivered and met, we note that the DAERA consultation document fails to specifically include woodland creation when listing 'the types of actions that the CCC have suggested might be considered in Northern Ireland to reduce emissions' (see page 16). We note that the CCC's report, "The Northern Ireland Net Zero Pathway" does include woodland creation along with peatland restoration and emissions

reductions from farming practice. We also note that the CCC state that: ‘A significant increase in woodland creation rates is needed over the next decade’.

In addition, we would identify the need for **‘economic opportunities including green jobs’** and **‘environmental and public health benefits’**, both of which are essential for future sustainable development. Woodland creation “down the hill,” where land is more fertile, at landscape scale and with appropriate tree species can produce productive, diverse, and well-structured forests. These forests will offer a wide range of ecosystem services including green jobs, both in the woodland and the wood processing sector, habitats for wildlife and places for people to visit and enjoy.

Impacts and Benefits

Q3. Do you have any views on the potential impacts (positive and negative) that will be realised in Northern Ireland reducing its emissions to meet the proposed Fourth Carbon Budget?

DAERA and the CCC have identified an increase in woodland creation to help achieve emissions reductions to meet the proposed Fourth Carbon Budget which potentially have positive and negative impacts. A net positive impact from the transition of agricultural land to woodland would be assisted by the following actions:

- (1) **Social and Rural impacts** - A better understanding of how to generate new behaviours from farmers and landowners are required to achieve woodland creation. Behavioural change in the farming community is an under-researched area and more research on the ‘how’ is needed rather than DAERA simply setting more ambitious woodland creation targets.
- (2) **Social and Rural impacts** - Farmers and landowners will need to be guided and helped to do what is needed, individually and collectively. However, the thrust of any new woodland creation programme should be to ‘pull’ positive action, rather than its absence, having a negative consequence for farmers and landowners.
- (3) **Economic and Financial impacts** - The transition of agricultural land to woodland needs to target appropriate agricultural land types (e.g. unimproved grassland) to a much greater extent than existing programmes to ensure the least negative impacts on Northern Ireland’s agri-food production and in doing so has potential to improve agri-food productivity. In the short to medium term, incentives for landowners and farmers to transition to woodland will require support to establish woodland and support comparable with the current agricultural subsidy.
- (4) **Economic and Financial impacts** - To ensure establishment of viable long-term forestry businesses, economic appraisal and modelling will be essential to encourage farmers and landowners to create landscape-scale woodland, since forestry benefits from economies of scale. Given Northern Ireland’s generally smaller sized



- (5) landholdings, compared with the rest of the UK, this would require collaboration between landowners, either through cooperation, joint projects or expansion of existing woodlands. The resulting creation of viable woodland enterprises can boost the rural economy, create green jobs, create places for people to visit and enjoy and create new wildlife habitat