

Northern Ireland EU Competitiveness Programme 2007-2013
Strategic Environmental Assessment Statement
(Article 9 (1) of the SEA Directive)

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Northern Ireland Competitiveness Programme has been allocated £211m (€306,833,439) from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), together with national match funding the programme is worth a total of £422m to be spent within the region during the period 2007-2013.
- 1.2 European Regulations for 2007-2013 includes measures to improve the strategic focus of EU policies, including a requirement for all Member States to draw up a National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF), setting out their main spending priorities for future EU Structural Fund Programmes. The UK's NSRF including a separate chapter on Northern Ireland established three high level priorities from which the NI Competitiveness Programme priorities were established. The Programme will focus on three inter-related priorities: increasing investment in research and technological development and promoting innovation; promoting enterprise and entrepreneurship and improving accessibility and protecting and enhancing the environment.
- 1.3 In compliance with the European Directive 2001/42/EC and the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2004 a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the NI Competitiveness Programme was carried out. This statement is the output from that process.
- 1.4 The SEA is a systematic process that assists in the identification, assessment and mitigation of any significant environmental impacts of the programme.

2.0 How environmental considerations have been implemented into the Programme

- 2.1 The need to positively identify and address environmental issues has been an integral part of the Programme development process from the start. It is a cross cutting theme for the programme meaning that such issues are addressed at strategic, programme, priority and project level. The Programme will be targeted and implemented in a manner that respects the environment, seeking to create a strong and stable economy by becoming more resource efficient and reduce the amount of waste. Northern Ireland has the potential to develop renewable energy sources and to come up with innovative ideas and new technologies, this Programme will contribute to this development by allocating direct funding to projects that directly promote renewable energy production.

- 2.2 The Developmental Path Analysis (DPA), a tool adopted during the 2000-2006 programme to monitor environmental impact will be expanded and used to inform all project funding decisions of the programme selection panels.
- 2.3 It is envisaged that once the Programme Monitoring Committee is established an Environmental Working Group will be set up to monitor the impact the programme has on the environment and provide advice and guidance to the Monitoring Committee and Managing Authorities.
- 2.4 Sustainable development issues will form part of programme evaluations to ensure any unforeseen effects are identified at an early stage.

3.0 Summary of consultation responses received

- 3.1 One response was received, in the main the response is supportive and makes six points which are summarised below:
- Welcomes the decision to conduct a full SEA and considers the exercise has been justified;
 - Recommends consideration of complementarity of environmental monitoring and mitigation with other EU Programmes;
 - Welcomes the integration of DPA scoring into project selection;
 - Generally agrees with the analysis of alternative delivery mechanisms;
 - As regards monitoring it is vital that the identification of 'unforeseen' adverse effects are identified at an early stage and remedial action is taken; and
 - It believes that monitoring only the predicted climate change is inadequate and due attention should be paid to cumulative impacts on bio-diversity, landscape and water.

4.0 How consultation has been taken into account

- 4.1 With reference to the above, the following will be acted upon:
- Complementarity of environmental monitoring – all EU programmes within Northern Ireland will utilise the DPA tool to monitor environmental impacts;

- The Environmental Working Group, to be established under the Programme Monitoring Committee, will be tasked with monitoring environment impacts, both positive and negative; and
- Programme evaluations will include and assessment of Sustainable Development impacts.

4.2 Another aspect arising from the consultation is the request to monitor cumulative impacts on bio-diversity, landscape and water in addition to climate change. The Programme as a whole was assessed against each of the SEA topics and identified only climate to have any potential significant negative impact. The programme will include a target to reduce green house emission.

5.0 Reason for choosing the programme as adopted over other reason alternatives

5.1 This is a relatively small Structural Funds Programme where alternative options are restricted by the requirement to conform to the UK policies for the allocation of structural funds and the Lisbon agenda where by 75% of the programme expenditure must be set aside for activities deemed compatible to the priorities of promoting competitiveness through support of research and development, innovation and entrepreneurship. In identifying potential alternatives the emphasis was placed on potential delivery mechanisms and approaches for the programme. Details of the consideration of alternatives are available in the final SEA report.

6.0 Monitoring

6.1 The SEA Directive requires monitoring to identify unforeseen adverse effects and to enable appropriate remedial action to be taken (Article 10.1 refers). As climate has been identified as having a potential negative effect, greenhouse gas emissions within Northern Ireland will be monitored and reported annually.

6.2 The DPA tool will be utilised to allocate and monitor EU funding to all potential projects. On receipt of an application an environmental score will be awarded which will help inform project selection.

6.3 It will be recommended to the Programme Monitoring Committee to establish an Environmental Working Group to monitor and report how the EU Structure Funds programme impacts on the environment.

6.4 Programme evaluations will consider the impact of the programme sustainable development cross cutting theme.