NI Biodegradable Waste to Landfill Advisory Group Briefing Note

The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has asked the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to work on a feasibility study to establish the best way forward for Northern Ireland to implement a biodegradable waste to landfill restriction or ban.

The feasibility study is broken down into six work packages. A summary of these work packages can be found in Appendix 1.

**Advisory Group**

As part of this feasibility study, DAERA have established an Advisory Group. The purpose of the group is to assess feasibility, provide advice, input and feedback in relation to the potential for restricting or banning biodegradable waste. The group is made up of a range of organisations representing councils, private sector service providers, reprocessors, and policy makers.

**Waste Arisings and Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

In the consultation on Northern Ireland’s 2030 & 2040 emissions Reduction Targets & First Three Carbon Budgets & Seeking views on Climate Change Committee (CCC) Advice Report: The path to a net Zero Northern Ireland proposes options to reduce or eliminate biodegradable waste from entering landfill sites.

This policy intervention is considered to be the most impactful for reducing the amount of waste going to managed waste disposal sites. This type of waste is identified as being the biggest emitter of methane from landfill.

**Collection Services**

Driven by the requirements of the Food Waste (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2015, much of the collection infrastructure is already in place to support the diversion of organic waste to recycling. A waste composition study conducted by DAERA in 2017, however, identified that 26% of the household residual bin by weight was still food waste which could have been recycled.

The European Environment Agency Economic instruments and separate collection systems – key strategies to increase recycling, highlights that all five of the Member States with the highest recycling rates apply a well-designed landfill tax or ban, or a combination of these.

The best performing Member States also have highly convenient bio-waste collection systems in place. The effective separate collection of bio-waste — the single largest waste component of municipal waste — is critical to achieving high recycling rates.

**Landfill Bans: Feasibility Research**

In a previous study, the WRAP Landfill Bans: Feasibility Research the design of policies was summarised as follows:

Material / Product Restrictions – visual inspection of the waste at the landfill backed up by requirement to check on waste transfer notes. This could only meaningfully imply a restriction on what is landfilled, not a ban.

Unsorted Waste Ban – as material / product restrictions, but with a supporting policy to define what is meant by ‘sorting’, this being defined with consideration given to materials quality. Since the policy would require the sorting to take place, the aim, in this case, is to ban material which has not been subject to the required sorting.

Biodegradable Waste Ban – measures on the biodegradability of waste will be taken, and any waste not meeting specified thresholds would be banned.

The WRAP report on Landfill Bans: Feasibility Research defined a ‘restriction’ as whereby different types of waste are to be restricted from landfill so that landfilling is avoided as far as is able to be known.

If a ban was introduced, this is where different types of waste are to be absolutely diverted from landfill. A landfill ban is where the intention is that as little as possible of the targeted waste is landfilled at all. Landfill restrictions or bans may apply to all waste, to streams (such as municipal waste and / or non-household municipal waste), or to individual products or materials.

**Enforcement**

International examples of policies to eliminate biodegradable waste to landfill has shown that simple enforcement is essential and that there must be a way to identify target wastes. Usually, a test on the properties of the waste is used to identify biodegradable material. This can include tests on total organic carbon content (TOC), density, moisture content or calorific value.

**Infrastructure**

The phasing of a restriction / ban in Northern Ireland will require to be carefully considered alongside regulatory and policy reforms at a UK level, as well as ‘Reforming Waste Collections in Northern Ireland’. Such an approach would allow for an approximation of potential timescales for implementation.

Of key importance is sufficient lead-in time before implementation of policies to allow for investment to be made in alternative treatment infrastructure for the diverted biodegradable waste.

Around the world, landfill bans have been a used as a policy intervention to promote recycling and reduce negative environmental outcomes.

**Appendix 1**

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| **Work package** | **Scope** | **Milestones (all 2023)** |
| **1: Review** | **Review of the impact of international restrictions, including definitions, materials and sectors** | **July** |
| **2: Model** | **Develop a mass flow model, taking account of recycling interventions** | **September** |
| **3: Map** | **Undertake a review of waste management infrastructure and capacities** | **October** |
| **4: Assess** | **Based on the revised modelling undertake an economic assessment** | **November** |
| **5: Enforce** | **Review of enforcement activities and costs related to restricting / banning Biodegradable Waste to Landfill** | **August / December** |
| **6: Outline** | **Development of outline proposals in relation to restricting Biodegradable Waste to Landfill based on the above work packages** | **December** |