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| <p>Title of Report:</p> <p>River Basin Management Plan Consultation Response</p> | <p>Officer Presenting:</p> <p>Director of Environment and Regeneration</p> <p>Author:</p> <p>Biodiversity Officer</p> |
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1 Purpose of Report/Recommendations

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Members' approval for the content of the Council's response to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) Consultation on the *Draft 3rd Cycle River Basin Management Plan: For the North Western, Neagh Bann and North Eastern River Basin Districts (2021 – 2027)*.

2 Background

- 2.1 The *Draft 3rd Cycle River Basin Management Plan: For the North Western, Neagh Bann and North Eastern River Basin Districts (2021 – 2027)*, sets out targets and actions on how to improve our water environment in Northern Ireland over the next six years. Water is a vital resource that we all rely on. Maintaining the quality of our water environment, will help to protect and improve public health and biodiversity; and support agriculture, industry, tourism and recreation.
- 2.2 Under The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (NI) 2017, which transposed the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) into Northern Ireland legislation, requires that all water bodies achieve good status by 2027 at the latest, unless where exemptions apply.
- 2.3 Council's Biodiversity Officer attended a number of online events hosted by DAERA, prior to formulating the response to the consultation. The draft response to the ten questions contained within the consultation document is included in Appendix 1.

3 Key Issues

- 3.1 Over the period of implementation of the 1st cycle, between 2009 and 2015, status assessments show an improvement from 28% to 37% of all water bodies. In 2020, this increased to 38%. Since the EU Water Framework Directive legislation was drafted in the late 1990s, it has become clear that implementation of measures to address water pollution is difficult and requires a cross-cutting approach across society. This is reflected across Europe, with similar regions struggling to achieve improvement in all water bodies to good ecological status in the second cycle (2015-2021). Therefore, it has become apparent that it is highly unlikely that Northern Ireland will achieve good status in all water bodies by 2027.
- 3.2 Overall within the North Western River Basin District, there are 162 rivers, with 70 (43%) classified as 'good' status in 2015 and this declined slightly to 68 (42%) in 2018. Although, there was an increase in rivers classified as 'moderate' from 74 (46%) in 2015, to 84 (52%) in 2018. The rivers within the District are above the Northern Ireland average and indicate overall improvement over a three-year period of the 2nd cycle.
- 3.3 The current system determines the status class of a river water body by conducting ~40 tests, but if one of these tests fails the overall water body status fails. Therefore, DAERA propose a number of changes to highlight this and corrective action to address failures associated with sub-categories of ecological and chemical status.
- 3.4 This *Draft 3rd Cycle River Basin Management Plan* aims for a working target of 70%, by prioritizing water bodies and pressures that require action. This will be achieved by linking with a range of existing (*Sustainable Water – A Long Term Strategy for Northern Ireland; Living with Water Programme; and The UK Marine Strategy*) and emerging strategies (*Green Growth; Agricultural Policy; Ammonia; Environment Strategy; Flood Risk Management Plans; and Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme*). The Programme of Measures has been split into key sectors to address water pollution.

4 Equality, Rural Needs, Climate Change and Data Protection

- 4.1 No equality, rural needs, climate change or data protection implications arise.

Financial, Legal, HR, Improvement and Other

- 4.2.1 No financial, legal, HR or other implications arise.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Members are asked to approve the draft response attached.

Appendix 1 – DAERA Response Letter