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Foreword by the Chief Executive

Loughs Agency has developed this Corporate Plan as part of an overall process to develop and identify the Agency’s Strategic Direction over the next ten years.

Seldom before has the role of environmental protection, stewardship and conservation been so important. As a Body which incorporates legislative, regulatory, scientific and environmental protection, conservation and public stewardship functions, Loughs Agency is ideally placed to continue to provide a model of environmental leadership, at a time when many are recognising the need for structures and solutions for environmental protection, which transcend administrative and jurisdictional boundaries.

The integrative model of excellence which Loughs Agency has committed to in its emerging Strategic Direction, recognises the fluidity and fragility of natural resources. These natural resources are not contained by administrative boundaries, and are enhanced by co-operation and evidence-informed action.

Loughs Agency’s Corporate Plan is presented in this overall context of clarity on our responsibilities, recognition of opportunities to develop and improve what we do and how we do it, and in the context of an overall commitment to demonstrate best possible international practice as a North South Body, charged with a crucial environmental management and regulatory role.

Our Corporate Plan will be delivered by a framework characterised by evidence-informed practice and decision-making, using our rich resource of scientific data to guide what we do in respect of all activities promoted by the Agency.

The Plan will be supported with a performance framework linked to organisational and staff development, risk management, and outward-looking strategic and operational communications. This will not only promote the work of the Agency but also articulate its important role as an organisation which can provide leadership and convey clear understanding of environmental evidence, in an international climate which welcomes quality scientific data and research, practice-based action, and the facilitative legislative frameworks.

We recognise the fundamental roles of effective and robust corporate governance, resource management and workforce development in achieving our Vision, and on this basis I am happy to present this Corporate Plan on behalf of Loughs Agency, its Board and Management.

Sharon McMahon
Designated Officer
Introduction

WHO WE ARE

Loughs Agency is an agency of the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission (FCILC), established as one of the North South Implementation Body’s under the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, constituted under the North South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 and the British Irish Agreement Acts 1999 and 2002.

The Board of the Loughs Agency reports to the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and our Government Sponsor Departments - the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in the North, and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) in the South.

WHAT WE DO

Loughs Agency aims to provide sustainable social, economic and environmental benefits through the effective conservation, management, promotion and development of the fisheries and marine resources of the Foyle and Carlingford Areas. Loughs Agency’s statutory functions are as follows:

• Promotion of development of Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough for commercial and recreational purposes in respect of marine, fishery and aquaculture matters;
• Management, conservation, protection, improvement and development of the inland fisheries of the Foyle and Carlingford Areas;
• Development and licensing of aquaculture and shellfisheries; and
• Development of Marine Tourism.

HOW WE OPERATE

Our Headquarters are located in Derry~Londonderry, with a regional office in Carlingford, County Louth. The Agency has a staff complement of 53 across a diverse range of functions including fishery protection, scientific research, development, marketing and administration support. As a North South Body we operate under the policy direction of the North South Ministerial Council and the two governments, and are accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas. At an administrative level, we report to our Sponsor Departments.
The Agency is fully committed to its statutory obligations in relation to equality and good relations duties and continues to meet its Equality Scheme commitments and the targets in its Audit of Inequalities.

The Agency also operates within a wider context of the other formal North South infrastructure, and a range of regional agencies, local authorities and other stakeholders whose work and co-operation are important for the overall conservation and protection of the Foyle and Carlingford systems. Loughs Agency is committed to working in partnership at strategic level with these stakeholders, and where appropriate to engage at operational level provided that operations and resources in this regard are aligned with the core purpose of the Agency, and serve to enhance corporate objectives.

FUNDING THE CORPORATE PLAN

Loughs Agency receives grants from money voted by the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas. The Agency is funded 50:50 by the Assembly in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government. The proposed Corporate Plan is intended to be resourced within the existing recurrent baseline resource of the Agency’s annual core budget. Where there are exceptions to this, projects will only commence in the context of additional external funds having been secured. Any activity arising during the period of the Corporate Plan will be considered in the context of a financial risk assessment and consideration of alignment to the Agency’s Strategic and Corporate priorities. The Agency will explore opportunities for accessing additional funds as both a lead partner and in co-operation with other agencies and stakeholders, where mutual objectives have been agreed and endorsed.

The Agency is fully committed to ensuring that all financial decisions and work processes are underpinned by good governance and value for money, while providing our customers and stakeholders with satisfying experiences, together with the need to continue to achieve operational efficiencies.

To continue to ensure maximum efficiencies are achieved, we have taken account of the efficiency savings guidance issued by the two Departments of Finance.

Additional saving opportunities will be realised by continuing to work with other Government Agencies and Public Bodies to share resources where feasible, and through transfer of knowledge and systems between organisations. The Agency continues to comply with corporate governance standards, as defined in the Agency’s Financial Memorandum, which is under review by both Finance Departments.
This Corporate Plan will be subject to budgetary considerations by the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas. Key enabling actions within the Corporate Plan which have been highlighted as subject to securing of additional resources will be kept under review and effective risk identification, assessment, and mitigation will take place on an ongoing basis in respect of these actions.
Executive Summary

The Corporate Plan 2020-22 has been developed within the overall context of the Agency’s Strategic Direction 2020-2030 and its priorities, and their outcomes have been aligned within an overall outcomes framework which will contribute to implementing a strategic vision for the Agency over a new decade.

The Corporate Plan sets out clear priorities for the work of the Agency over the period 2020-22. These priorities take into account the imperatives which the Agency must meet in terms of its overall business, namely:

- Statutory regulatory, reporting and enforcement functions.
- Provision of scientific evidence to support and underpin the statutory functions of the Agency.
- Development of a robust scientific research function which contributes to the advancement of science and bodies of scientific knowledge.
- Development of collaborative area-based approaches with a range of stakeholders to enhance and scale-up conservation and protection of the natural resources, for which the Agency is a formal designated steward.
- Development of a dynamic business, executive and leadership environment and culture within the Agency which is focused in equal measures on agility, ambition, resilience, participation and efficiency, with staff wellbeing and professional development at the core of everything we do.

The four priorities of the Corporate Plan are as follows:

1. To ensure that the priorities and values of the Loughs Agency Strategic Plan are progressed in the course of the Agency’s business, with particular reference to staff, core operations and our relationships.

2. To continue to maintain, develop and promote an accurate scientific evidence base providing data and information to support and inform the Agency’s core and statutory operations, while also promoting its role as a steward of key scientific knowledge.

3. To develop, promote and sustain the natural resources of the catchments under Loughs Agency’s statutory care, through conservation, quality improvement, protection of species and habitats, education and awareness, partnership working and sustainable access to our natural resources.
4. To transform Loughs Agency, by investing in our people through building the capability and effectiveness of our staff; by creating a digitally-enabled organisation through upgrading our systems, strengthening our culture of evidence-informed decision making and planning and through seeking new insights to create corporate resilience.

This Corporate Plan sets out each of the four priorities above within an outcomes framework in which the link between priority, measure and enabler actions (specific projects) is clear. Further detail on enabler actions is contained within the Loughs Agency Business Plan for the same periods.

The Corporate Plan will be implemented, monitored and managed within an overall transformational, organisational and business performance framework which will also take account of the principles of embedding the Agency’s Strategic Direction at all levels of the Agency’s business, operations and stakeholder engagement. This will be characterised by alignment of scientific and development priorities, and by an overall staff development framework benefitting staff at all levels and across all functions of the organisation.

Loughs Agency is uniquely placed as a North South Body to directly contribute to and co-ordinate with stakeholders and other relevant organisations, to achieve the outcomes that both Programmes for Government aim to deliver. The areas under our remit can help enrich peoples’ lives through our conservation, protection, environmental, recreational programmes and educational initiatives.

We will endeavour to maintain a watching brief on the challenges and opportunities which are presented by BREXIT locally, nationally and internationally, which have the potential to impact or enhance the work of the Agency.

Our Plan has therefore been developed in the context of the policy priorities of our Sponsor Departments and the priorities of other government departments and agencies, which have cross cutting responsibilities with those of the Agency.

It also reflects the ethos and directly links with the high-level outcomes of the Northern Ireland Programme for Government and the Programme for a Partnership Government (May 2016). Both Programmes for Government contain a number of key elements which will provide guiding principles by which the Agency can continue to maximise the impact of its work through this Plan, and into the future. The common theme of both Programmes is working together to create and drive economic growth, improving health and wellbeing, and providing a more equal and fair society.

Our Strategic Objectives will contribute to the delivery of the vision statement of each Sponsor Department.
“Our vision is for Ireland to become an acknowledged leader in delivering climate action, achieving environmental sustainability and bringing the opportunities offered by the communications revolution to all citizens”.

- Department of Communication, Climate Action and Environment.

“Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone”.

- Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Loughs Agency, within and through the work of the Plan will take account of additional relevant policy drivers including the Climate Change Act (UK), the National Development Plan (RoI), National Mitigation Plan (RoI), National Adaptation Framework (RoI), and the National Policy Position on Climate Change and Low Carbon Development (RoI).

Overall, the Foyle and Carlingford Areas can provide the catalyst to develop commercial opportunities which will encourage economic growth in the context of overall climate change, and adaptation and in keeping with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. We can provide leadership to create energetic and sustainable environments through educating and empowering people to live and work sustainably to respect, protect and conserve their natural environment, and benefit from enhanced social wellbeing.

In all of our work, we will continue to engage with local communities and will provide opportunities that are inclusive and accessible to everyone.
Our Mission
Sustainably manage, promote and develop the fisheries and resources of the Foyle and Carlingford Areas.

Our Vision
Through partnership and inspired science, protecting and developing our fisheries and natural resources.

Our Values
Integrity
Acting and communicating with honesty and sincerity.

Teamwork
Working collectively and productively together to achieve more.

Professionalism
Using our unique skills and experience to achieve the highest standards of practice.

Passion
Having enthusiasm and enjoyment in our work.

Innovation
Finding better and more creative/productive ways of working and delivering services.

Respect
Treating colleagues, areas of work, and stakeholders with decency and courtesy.

Sustainability
Focusing our efforts on core services, innovating, influencing and planning for the long term.
2017 - 2019 Corporate Plan

OUR SUCCESSES

Throughout the last corporate planning period, the Agency continued to develop and grow, while building on the many successes achieved in previous years. We continued to firmly establish our commitment to delivery of our remit, and to the development and promotion of the Agency and its staff.

During the previous corporate planning period, the following measures ensured successful delivery of Agency objectives:

- **Enforcement Actions**

  The Agency pursued offenders in both jurisdictions and in both civil and criminal courts. These actions were part of the maintenance of a robust programme of activities to detect and deter non-compliance with fishery legislation. Illegal fishing activity continued throughout the reporting period, with both illegal salmon netting and a variety of angling offences.

- **Pollution Incidents**

  Throughout the reporting period Agency staff dealt with an increase in water pollution related issues, mostly related to civil construction and agricultural slurry. In addition to civil and agriculture pollution, Agency staff have responded to oil spills, large fires, sewage discharges, unauthorised landfill sites and issues arising from management of green energy projects.

- **Fish Counters**

  With additional support from our Sponsor Departments the Agency delivered a substantial upgrading and maintenance programme, providing future proofing of our statutory fish counters. The ongoing effective management of the counters has led to appropriate legislative Declarations being made in each of the reporting years, and continues to monitor the populations of target species to ensure robust management.

- **Interagency working**

  Throughout the reporting period Agency staff have been at the forefront of environmental protection, in partnership with a large number of organisations on both sides of the border, in areas including, environmental management, flood defence, wildlife crime, cross border crime, research and any other issues which could significantly affect the fishery.
• Freshwater Fisheries Monitoring Programme

The Freshwater Fisheries Monitoring Programme successfully delivered a number of scientific surveys. This included completion of the Water Framework Directive Fish Monitoring Programme, Water Framework Directive compliant Lake Fish Surveys, Loughs Agency Water Framework Directive Fish in Rivers Classification Report and a pre-spawning adult sea trout survey was completed on the index tributary the Altnaghree Burn.

• Salmonid Habitat

Loughs Agency staff have undertaken significant habit works during the reporting period, these have included riparian fencing, tree planting, and the development of instream salmonid habitat structures. The Agency has also undertaken erosion control schemes to protect juvenile salmonid habitat.

• Native Oyster Fishery

The Agency continued to manage the fishery in order to limit the stress on the native oyster and retain an acceptable biomass of spawning stock. The declared landings for the period are as follows:

• 2017/18 - 205 tonnes. The Fishery was open for 23 days.
• 2018/19 - 115 tonnes. The fishery was open for 14 days.
• 2019/20 - 40 tonnes. The fishery was open for 18 days*.

* The figures for the 2019/20 fishery are incomplete. The fishery does not close until March 2020.

• Native Oyster Spawning Assessment

The Agency undertook annual scientific surveying, monitoring and research to support delivery of annual production reports for all aquaculture and commercial shellfisheries species.

The native oyster spawning assessment takes place between May and September each year. Weekly samples were taken to determine oyster brooding activity, bivalve larval abundance and environmental variables within 5 oyster beds. The proportion of the sampled population brooding in 2019 was lower than that recorded in 2018 (4.2%), with the early summer temperature trends around 1-2°C lower on most beds than the same period in 2018.

• EASE Sampling

During the period water sampling continued at the 11 spatial water stations on Lough Foyle. Samples have been submitted to the Agri-Food & Biosciences
Institute (AFBI) and will be used to determine how changes in the ecosystem are being used to drive shellfish production rates.

• Shellfish Hygiene Sampling

This programme continued throughout the reporting period. The Agency took an active role in meetings and forums with both the Food Safety Authority Ireland and the Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland.

• Access Development Works

During the period of the Corporate Plan the Agency established a number of collaborative initiatives, which enabled the careful balance of increased access to and the protection of natural resources.

The Agency prioritised a listing of project proposals for multi-use activity access to the Inishowen (Co. Donegal) coastline and the rivers Foyle and Finn. Working in partnership with Donegal County Council, Donegal Local Development Company and Inishowen Development Partnership, the latter two are developing applications to the EU LEADER Programme based around these proposals. Similarly, the Agency has worked with Derry City and Strabane District Council on an application to the same Programme. Project proposals will bring significant benefits to the development of angling and marine tourism. These initiatives will come to fruition during the life of this Corporate Plan.

As a strategic partner, Loughs Agency has also worked within the Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership to connect the people with the local landscape through the rich heritage of the natural environment, defence theme and outdoor recreation.

In Benone and Culdaff, the Agency worked with local councils to install boardwalks to protect the delicate dune systems. The Agency has improved access at 12 rivers for anglers through the installation of stiles, footbridges, pontoons and signage all in partnership with local landowners and angling clubs.

To facilitate development and promotion of angling skills a considerable investment was made in the angling hub at Loughs Agency Headquarters, ensuring the coarse pond is fully accessible. Work was also undertaken with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council to develop an angling hub in the Omagh area.
• Capacity Building

Numerous angling training courses have also been delivered as well as training in powerboating, safety boat use, sailing and paddle sport coaching through our Ambassador Programmes, and completion of a training needs analysis of the angling and marine sectors.

• Marketing and Promotion

Through promotional shows and marketing activity we have promoted Foyle and Carlingford as top destinations for angling and marine tourism activities to a global audience. Our digital media presence has enabled us to reach a wide audience and attract anglers from many different countries.

The Agency hosted the following events:

• The Foyle Maritime Festival 2018;
• The Commonwealth Fly Fishing Championships;
• Loughs Agency Confluence Celebration and Conference 2019;
• Launch event for SeaMonitor 2019; and
• Foyle Salmon Conference 2019.

The Agency engaged with local users to promote the angling and marine tourism offering through fairs and festivals such as the North West Angling Fair, Carlingford Oyster Festival and NI Science Fairs.

• Education and Outreach

Our schools engagement continued through the delivery of exciting education programmes and the enhancement of the Riverwatch Visitor Centre and Aquarium with fresh interpretation. They Agency expanded the extremely successful Foyle Ambassador Programme to Carlingford with great success, with almost 200 young people having now graduated from the Programme.

• Organisational Improvements

Throughout the period of the Corporate Plan the Agency continued to improve and invest in communication, information technology and other relevant processes and systems, which have provided global organisational and governance benefits. These include:

> The installation of a new financial accounting system and chart of accounts.
> Employment of a permanent Deputy Principal Accountant.
> An eLicensing system and subsequent upgrade.
> The installation of a new fleet management system.
> Development and upgrade of Agency website.
> The installation of a new time management system.
> The introduction of an asset and inventory management systems.
> Server and cyber security upgrades and investment.
> Commencement of re-development of the Omagh Office.
> Development of a new Strategic Direction.

• External Funding

During this period the Agency has been successful working with local, national and international partners to secure Lead Partner in SeaMonitor and Project Partner for CatchmentCARE and SWELL. All 3 projects are funded under EU INTERREG VA.
Our Strategic Priorities 2020-2022

To enable delivery of our Strategic Direction, comprising of our vision, our mission, our values and our statutory functions we have identified four key corporate priorities for the period ahead:

• To ensure that the priorities and values of the Loughs Agency Strategic Plan are progressed in the course of the Agency’s business, with particular reference to staff, core operations and our relationships.

• To continue to maintain, develop and promote an accurate scientific evidence base, providing data and information to support and inform the Agency’s core and statutory operations, while also promoting its role as a steward of key scientific knowledge.

• To develop, promote and sustain the natural resources of the catchments under Loughs Agency’s statutory care, through conservation, quality improvement, protection of species and habitats, education and awareness, partnership working, and sustainable access to our natural resources.

• To transform Loughs Agency, by investing in our people through building the capability and effectiveness of our staff; by creating a digitally-enabled organisation through upgrading our systems, strengthening our culture of evidence-informed decision making and planning and through seeking new insights to create corporate resilience.

These strategic priorities will underpin our annual Business Plans and operational work programmes for the next three years.

CORPORATE PLAN OUTCOMES AND ENABLERS FRAMEWORK

Loughs Agency’s Corporate Plan for 2020-22 has been developed on an outcomes-based framework, in a matrix which clearly identifies the link between priority, measure, outcome and specific enabler actions which will help deliver on each corporate priority. Beneath the Corporate Plan will sit the Business Plan which will set out specific costed enabler actions, designated to progress and implement the four priorities of the Corporate Plan. The Corporate Plan will be monitored as to the progress of specific measures regarding their capability in delivering on the corporate priorities. The Business Plan will be monitored in terms of specific project progress and will focus on the enabler actions in detail. The Corporate Plan as monitored, will allow for a robust risk management approach to be taken to the delivery of all planned business towards the Corporate Plan outcomes set out below.
Loughs Agency, as a unique body that combines regulatory, scientific research, development and public environmental stewardship functions, recognises its responsibility to align and optimise these functions individually and in combination with each other, in order to carry out its statutory role to the maximum benefit of the Foyle and Carlingford Catchments under its care. As a public body charged with a role by two Governments, the Agency recognises the need for clear impact, demonstrated by quality evidence and supported by effective strategic and operational governance, against high level outcomes within Government programmes, and global sustainable development and climate mitigation principles.

In this context, the delivery of this and subsequent Corporate Plans will be within a clear framework which acknowledges the importance of strategic coherence and congruence across its functions, and in the day to day work of the Agency. Recognising that its workforce is one of the Agency’s key assets in pursuit of its mission, at the heart of this process are the staff of Loughs Agency who will benefit from training and leadership opportunities at all levels.

Within this corporate planning period, Loughs Agency will initiate a staff development programme which will have ongoing personal and professional development at its core for all staff. Staff development needs will be addressed in the context of the Agency’s direction, and the need for alignment, communication and co-ordination across the Agency, in order for our vital role as an environmental protection and conservation agency, with a public engagement and education role across two jurisdictions, that share the precious resources of the Foyle and Carlingford systems.

Also within this corporate planning period, and as a first step towards alignment of functions with strategic priorities, the Agency will also carry out reviews of a number of areas of its strategic and statutory remit, to ensure that priorities for operational activities are evidence-informed, particularly in relation to scientific evidence gathered by the Agency as regards conservation and protection, and that priorities are aligned with the Strategic Direction of the Agency and with key priorities. The Agency will conduct five reviews in total, as follows:

- Review of Legislation.
- Review of Science.
- Review of Angling.
- Review of Marine Tourism.
- Review of Corporate Communications.

Each review will be carried out according to agreed terms of reference, and will produce a series of actionable recommendations, the implementation of which
will be taken into account in this and subsequent corporate and business planning cycles.

Loughs Agency will effect an approach to delivery of the Corporate Plan which recognises and takes into account the organisational governance, capacity building and corporate cultural enablers required for successful delivery of its Strategic Direction. At the core of this will be leadership at all levels within the Agency, the Agency aims to foster an organisational environment which enables and supports every staff member to reach their full potential in delivering on the Agency’s priorities.

**Fig. 1.0 Review and Transformation – Summary of Key Reviews**
Resourcing the Corporate Plan

It is anticipated that the greater portion of the Corporate Plan will be resourced from within the Agency’s baseline funded budget. However, in order for full impact to be achieved, the Agency will seek additional resources on the basis that activities to be funded with these resources are firmly aligned with the Corporate Plan and overall strategic priorities of the Agency. Effective risk management processes and reporting will be implemented in relation to any activities identified as actions within the Corporate Plan which require additional resourcing.

EXTERNAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Throughout the period of the Corporate Plan the Agency will endeavour to seek new external funding opportunities, while continuing to deliver current programmes, which enhance delivery of the Strategic Direction.

**SeaMonitor – €4.7m EU-funded under the European Regional Development Fund and match-funded by Government Departments North and South.**

SeaMonitor is a unique marine research project, the first of its kind in Europe, studying the seas around Ireland, Western Scotland and Northern Ireland. This Project has a partnership of nine, comprising of funded partners located in Northern Ireland, Ireland, Scotland, and non-funded partners located in Canada and the USA. The Project is led by Loughs Agency and supported by another eight leading marine research institutions, using innovative marine species tracking technology to better understand and protect vulnerable marine life in our oceans. The Project Partners are Queens University Belfast, University of Glasgow, University College Cork, Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, Marine Institute, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute Northern Ireland, Ocean Tracking Network Dalhousie University Canada and Davis University College California.

The Project aims to address three Programme Output Indicators and deliver the INTERREG VA objective of developing cross-border capacity for the monitoring and management of marine protected areas and species. It will deliver Europe’s largest telemetric marine array and spatial models, supporting the conservation of basking shark, cetaceans, salmon, seals and skate. It will also provide three Management Plans; one for skate in the area from Loch Sunart to the Sound of Jura and two for salmon in both the River Foyle and Clyde estuaries.

**CatchmentCARE – €13,792,432 EU-funded under the European Regional Development Fund and match-funded by Government Departments North and South.**

CatchmentCARE (Community Actions for Resilient Eco-systems) is an EU-funded Project that aims to improve freshwater quality in cross-border river basins across three cross-border catchments. The aims will be achieved through development
of three water quality improvement projects in the River Finn, River Blackwater and Arney River catchments, and installation of 50 boreholes across the region.

Local authorities, Donegal County Council (Lead Partner), Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council, working with academia in Ulster University, as well as the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, British Geological Survey, Loughs Agency, Geological Survey Ireland and Inland Fisheries Ireland, bring a rich and diverse skill-set from which to bring the CatchmentCARE Project forward.

Working in partnership, the consortium will develop three policy actions, six catchment actions and three community actions, based on three critical criteria: (i) measurable impact on water quality; (ii) transferable beyond the three catchments; and (iii) contribute to a project legacy.

The actions selected will address water quality issues relating to hydromorphology, point and diffuse sources of pollution, farm nutrient management practices, characterisation and monitoring of groundwater quality, lag times in response to the implementation of measures and an economic analysis of the cost of achieving the objectives of the Water Framework Directive in the three catchments.

**SWELL** - €35m EU-funded under the European Regional Development Fund and match-funded by Government Departments North and South.

The SWELL(Shared Waters Enhancement & Loughs Legacy) Project represents a cross-border partnership comprising NI Water, Irish Water, Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute (AFBI), Loughs Agency and East Border Region, working collaboratively to improve water quality within the shared waters of Carlingford Lough and Lough Foyle.

The partnership will utilise best practice, innovation and knowledge sharing to effectively achieve the outputs and results of the INTERREG VA Programme. Through engineering excellence, strategic catchment investigation and modelling, SWELL will deliver sustainable upgrades to wastewater assets on both sides of the border and make a positive contribution towards ‘Good Ecological Status’ under the EU Water Framework Directive.

Throughout the life of the Project Loughs Agency and ABFI will provide resources for undertaking the catchment studies and associated analysis to include the ‘legacy’ ecosystem model.
To ensure that the priorities and values of the Loughs Agency Strategic Plan are progressed in the course of the Agency’s business, with particular reference to staff, core operations and our relationships.

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<th>MEASURE</th>
<th>OUTCOME(S)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Develop and implement a monitoring and evaluation framework for the Strategic Direction of the Agency.</td>
<td>A monitoring and evaluation framework using quantitative and qualitative information has been developed, implemented and embedded across core business functions of the Agency. Staff have been trained, understand how they can contribute, and are supported to contribute within their sphere of work to the overall Strategic Direction of the Agency. The Corporate Plan is reviewed against the Agency’s Strategic Direction at key points within the annual implementation cycle. Show clearly how activities have contributed to the Strategic Direction outcomes and therefore overall to the Programme for Government North and South and other relevant areas of statutory and international policy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Strategic Priority 2**

To continue to maintain, develop and promote an accurate scientific evidence base providing data and information to support and inform the Agency’s core and statutory operations, while also promoting its role as a steward of key scientific knowledge.

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<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>To employ comparative and evaluator approaches to ensure our scientific activities continue to be carried out to evolving international standards.</td>
<td>The Agency has identified and is addressing areas where scientific activities can be further aligned with evolving international standards, while continuing to deliver core activities and services. Analysis produced indicating current and any additional requirements in order for the Directives to be implemented in the context of the emerging environment in which the Agency will operate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>To continue to develop the Agency’s role in implementing and safeguarding Water Frameworks Directive and biodiversity and habitats obligations.</td>
<td>The Agency has identified and implemented actions to improve data security, quality, real-time information and operates ICT-based solutions which are deployed on a day to day basis in the course of the Agency’s work. Analysis produced indicating current and any additional requirements in order for the Directives to be implemented in the context of the emerging environment in which the Agency will operate. This will include recommendations for formal engagement with a range of sectoral and geographical stakeholders where this engagement is relevant to progressing statutory obligations.</td>
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### 2.3 To carry out habitat surveys on the systems under Loughs Agency’s care.

The Agency has carried out and reported on an agreed number of habitat surveys annually, and has formulated recommendations for sharing and action on an interagency basis.

Engagement with agencies has taken place on the basis of these recommendations.

- To identify priorities and implement a number of habitat surveys relative to abundance of juvenile fish.
- Utilise court awarded resource for additional surveys, habitat improvement and pollution prevention on the River Strule.

### 2.4 To develop Loughs Agency’s role as a key stakeholder in collaborative research initiatives relating to the areas under its care.

The Agency has repositioned itself as a unique combination of hands-on environmental scientific services and evidence provision, with the ability to support and / or lead on high quality scientific research and publications.

The Agency has explored and established strategic alliances with any relevant research bodies on the island of Ireland and is investigating additional international accreditation to support this role.

- Conduct a review of the Agency’s scientific function with a view to developing a strategy to oversee scientific fisheries research analysis and evaluation, to build an evidence informed and effective Fishery Management Policy fit to deliver on future environmental local and global issues.
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<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>To deliver scientific information to enable informed sustainable management of commercial species and the natural environment.</td>
<td>The Agency has successfully delivered outputs from INTERREG funded projects, on schedule and within budget. The Agency has carried out and reported on annual surveying, monitoring, stock assessments on native oysters in Lough Foyle. Any issues or risks arising from routine scientific monitoring data and analysis of same have been appropriately identified and are reviewed and managed within a risk management framework. Issues requiring action or input from partner organisations or other stakeholders have been appropriately highlighted / escalated and are monitored on an ongoing basis.</td>
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### Strategic Priority 3

To develop, promote and sustain the natural resources of the catchments under Loughs Agency’s statutory care, through conservation, quality improvement, protection of species and habitats, education and awareness, partnership working, and sustainable access to our natural resources.

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<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>To conduct a comprehensive review of legislation to support Loughs Agency’s statutory functions relating to the management and protection of the resources under its care, and to fully enable its regulatory and enforcement roles in the interests of the environmental heritage and resources for which the Agency has responsibility.</td>
<td>A single comprehensive analysis has been produced through a process overseen by a working group established by the Agency. This analysis has been shared with all relevant statutory / law-making stakeholders of the various changes in legislation and overall law reform actions, which will be required to support the Agency in effectively executing its statutory functions in light of evolving context and need. Both administrations are fully briefed on the details of a required comprehensive legislation update to discharge their international obligations as regards implementation of Directives and other relevant legislation.</td>
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<td>3.2</td>
<td>Continue to carry out the enforcement functions of Loughs Agency including addressing illegal angling and pollution response.</td>
<td>Continue to gather and provide high quality evidence from Fishery Officers to support the statutory enforcement functions of the Agency, which are required in order to protect the resources, habitats and species of the Foyle and Carlingford areas.</td>
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| 3.3     | Conduct strategic reviews of key functions within the Agency’s statutory delegated functions in respect of the catchments it is responsible for, in order to identify and align priorities for the coming period. | The Agency has conducted a strategic review of angling on the Foyle and Carlingford systems and has identified its strategic and operational priorities concerning its role in angling support and regulation. The Agency has conducted a strategic review of marine tourism and has clearly identified, aligned and implemented its recommendations in a way which aligns with other functions of the Agency and is evidence-informed.  
• Carry out a strategic review of angling including positioning the Agency’s role and strategic priorities and identifying operational priorities. Development of new opportunities for angling development and promotion in context of the strategic review (initial action briefing paper based on review).  
• Carry out a strategic review of marine tourism, examining and making specific recommendations on the role of the Agency to avoid duplication of functions within the wider context of North / South and Cross-Border marine tourism promotion / marketing and conservation and protection functions of the Agency. |
| 3.4     | To continue to deliver education and outreach programming to support the core purposes and Strategic Direction of the Agency. | Communities and communities of interest are aware of the core role of the Agency and are given opportunities to become involved as partners. This includes but is not restricted to young people at primary, secondary and third level / further education levels.  
• Continue to deliver relevant events, outreach and community based youth programmes. |
3.5 To appropriately support the development of relevant infrastructure connected with the core purposes of regulated access to conservation and protection of the Foyle and Carlingford systems.

Additional actions undertaken in relation to angling provision, subject to strategic review (Priority 1) of the Agency’s angling support role, and identified strategic priorities arising from this.

Two coarse fisheries have been developed and are operational (Strabane and Newry).

The Agency is appropriately involved in area-based development work involving access to the Foyle and Carlingford systems in a way which is aligned with Agency core business objectives, and without duplicating the functions or resources from other agencies or bodies.

The Agency maps and reviews its development partnership engagements on a regular basis via the Senior Management Team.

The Agency’s development partners across its catchment area are fully aware of the role and Strategic Direction of the Agency.

The Agency identifies emerging strategic development opportunities and decisions are made at Senior Management Team level as to what the Agency’s role in progressing these opportunities is. Opportunities are progressed in line with core business requirements, and corporate strategic direction.

- Develop and deliver a programme of river works to optimise maximum production of juvenile salmonids.
- Identify and deliver a programme of river access works.
- Fulfil existing commitments to support rural development river-based initiatives led by external partners.
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<th>MEASURE</th>
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<td>3.6</td>
<td>To identify need and appropriately lever or lead on adequately resourced activities to build public, community and sectoral capacity for engagement with the conservation and protection needs of the catchments under the care of the Agency.</td>
<td>The Agency has conducted an analysis of capacity building requirements at community and voluntary sector level which can support the public engagement needed to assist with the conservation and protection of the Foyle and Carlingford systems. The Agency has engaged with appropriate bodies and partners as to how these requirements can be met, and where appropriate / consistent with core purpose and business requirements and where appropriately resourced, the Agency will either lead or act as partner to delivery.</td>
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### Strategic Priority 4

To transform Loughs Agency, by investing in our people through building the capability and effectiveness of our staff; by creating a digitally-enabled organisation through upgrading our systems, strengthening our culture of evidence-informed decision making and planning and through seeking new insights to create corporate resilience.

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<td>4.1</td>
<td>Develop and implement a Corporate Communications Plan for 2020-22 to support delivery of the Strategic Direction of Loughs Agency and operational activities outlined within the Corporate Plan. Delivery of a comprehensive and structured approach to strategic policy and public / stakeholder consultations.</td>
<td>The Agency combines strategic communications, audience building and operational promotional activities within a connected communications framework. The Agency has a fully-functioning and appropriately targeted corporate communications function aligned with overall corporate strategic and operational priorities, which works across the entire Agency to both undertake and build capacity for effective communications and relationships. • Development of a Corporate Communications Plan and renewed sets of procedures and protocols, matched to various modes and purposes of communication. Linked with Priority 1. • Carry out a review in relation to delivering and implementing communications throughout the Agency and in the external environment.</td>
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<td>4.2</td>
<td>To enhance and maintain existing facilities, infrastructure and assets through adequate maintenance, rehabilitation and replacement as appropriate.</td>
<td>The Agency has a comprehensive programme of ongoing maintenance, rehabilitation and replacement as appropriate in order to effectively enhance and maintain existing facilities, infrastructure and assets and takes account of projected future and emerging needs with regards to all of these areas. This programme of work is prioritised, planned, monitored and effectively managed in terms of all identified risks; operational, health and safety and financial. • Initiate the incremental introduction of electric vehicles, reducing carbon emissions, noise levels and whole-life costs of fleet vehicles.</td>
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<td>4.3</td>
<td>Support the delivery of Loughs Agency’s business objectives through the development of a three year learning and development strategy that will focus on talent management, resilience planning and employee motivation and engagement.</td>
<td>• To provide tools for employees and managers to engage in self-directed learning and professional development, through enhancing the Performance Management System.</td>
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The Agency has a well-established culture of staff development and encouraging staff to take ownership of their personal and professional development, supported by management and with adequate resources in place to meet identified development needs that are consistent with business requirements.

The Agency has developed and delivered cross-cutting orientation and learning programmes aimed at supporting leadership at all levels of the organisation in delivering on the Strategic Direction of the Agency.

Staff are supported to support their own health and wellbeing and that of their colleagues.

| 4.4     | Provide effective and facilitative cross directorate support services. | • To ensure that the Agency has effective systems and processes in place to provide assurance to the Board and our stakeholders, that the organisation is performing to the statutory and regulatory highest standards. |

The Agency has a cross-directorate annual scoping / scheduling plan to allow Corporate Services to plan for supporting all Directorates with relevant Corporate Services.

Each Director prepares an indicative annual corporate support requirements schedule for Corporate Services. Ad hoc / short term / unforeseen requirements for support are communicated as soon as a Director becomes aware of these.

• Improve access and visibility of management information and build engagement levels between all staff.

• Improve productivity and contribute to efficiencies throughout the Agency.

• To build and develop staff capability through bespoke training on a range of relevant topics.

• Deliver an effective Corporate Services Support function.

The Agency has a well-established partnership with professional representative and trade union organisations in delivering health and wellbeing supports for staff.

Staff are supported to maintain their own health and wellbeing and support that of their colleagues, including staff who are engaged in higher risk / lone working. Stress risk assessments are carried out with all staff as a participative one to one exercise with a designated person.

• Develop systems and processes to enable maximum organisational efficiency and resilience.
Implementation and Conclusions

The Loughs Agency Corporate Plan 2020-2022 has been developed and will be implemented in a manner which enables the Agency to meet the requirements of new business environment, which public sector corporate organisations must operate in. At the heart of this is corporate behaviour and strategic alignment which is evidence-informed and consistently focused on delivering on the Agency’s strategic and operational priorities, current and emerging, including the outcomes of the key strategic reviews which the Agency will carry out in 2020 (Legislation, Angling, Marine Tourism, Science and Corporate Communications).

It is recognised that some projects will be multi-annual beginning in 2020, and will be delivered over the lifetime of this Corporate Plan.

The Corporate Plan and associated business implementation activities will be delivered in the context of an overall performance framework, to underpin effective and aligned decision making, resources management (including the seeking and securing of additional resources required for key enabling actions within the Plan), risk management and mitigation, and scrutiny / accountability by the Senior Management Team, in order to support overall good corporate governance processes.

The Agency will ensure effective governance regarding decisions on new opportunities / commitments and will clearly identify, manage and review on an ongoing basis any resourcing risks arising from the conditionality of planned activities in terms of securing additional resources.

Loughs Agency will deliver the Corporate Plan and associated Business Plan within an overall approach to delivering the Vision and Mission of the Agency, which is characterised by capacity building, review, transformation, and evidence-informed performance management. The Agency will work to ensure its resources, including human resources and staff supports, are aligned with corporate strategic priorities while continuing to refine and develop its strategic impact as a key environmental protection, conservation and scientific agency, with a role in fostering public and community stewardship of the Foyle and Carlingford systems, at a time when environmental protection and climate change mitigation are international and global priorities.
Loughs Agency has four Directorates under which we deliver our remit. We have an approved staffing compliment of 53.