

NILGA Response to the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Consultation on Review of Bathing Waters in Northern Ireland 2017

The following paper responds to Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Developments Review of Bathing Waters in NI 2017, **requiring response by 3rd February 2017. This response will be finalised retrospectively at the NILGA Executive meeting on 10th February 2017.**

Any queries related to this submission can be dealt with by contacting Fiona Douglas at the NILGA Offices: Email: f.douglas@nilga.org Tel: 028 9079 8972

**Derek McCallan
Chief Executive**

3rd February 2017

NILGA, the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, is the representative body for councils in NI. NILGA develops policy guidance for the sector in direct liaison with the eleven local authorities. NILGA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the DAERA consultation on the 2017 Review of Bathing Waters.

NILGA notes that Review has put forward beaches at Cloughey, Kilclief and Ballyhornan for identification as bathing waters, while rejecting the proposal for Killough on the grounds of sufficient bathers.

Through our involvement in the Blue Flag, Seaside and Green Coast Awards for quality beaches in Northern Ireland, NILGA is well aware of the many benefits that identification can bring for a beach, both in terms of the natural and economic capital basis. These awards are designed to promote beaches which protect and promote the natural environment. As a contributor to these awards NILGA is familiar with the management and facilities at most of the beaches in Northern Ireland.

It is NILGA's view, based on the provision of services as well as the development of environmental management plans and active involvement of the local community in the running of these facilities, that the above beaches should be selected as candidates for identification as bathing waters.

It is our understanding that over the last five years Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful arranged for independent water quality testing five times per season at Cloughey, and during the 2016 season this was extended to Kilclief, Ballyhornan and Killough, as well as Coney Island, Minerstown and Rossglass. The initial results of this have been shared with the Department and are promising if far short of statistically significant. That the respective Councils have paid for this testing demonstrates a commitment to the promotion of these site as destinations, and it is our view that the numbers of bathers are likely to increase if they are identified. The Councils have also shown that they are prepared to work constructively with the local community to develop sustainable facilities and events at these sites, which would further improve their attraction. The new developments of boardwalks at Cloughey and Ropewalk at Killough clearly demonstrates this.

Further, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful have, over the last five years, awarded Cloughey with a 'Pilot Green Coast Award' indicating excellent water quality, and that high standards of environmental and facility management are already in place.

NILGA welcomes and the supports the nomination of Kilclief, Ballyhornan and Cloughey beaches as candidates for identification as bathing waters.

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