

**COUNCIL FOR NATURE CONSERVATION
AND THE COUNTRYSIDE**
An Advisory Council to the Department of the Environment

Calvert House, 23 Castle Place, Belfast, BT1 1FY

Tel: (028) 90254835/ 4744 Fax: (028) 90254706

secretariat-hillst@doeni.gov.uk

www.cncni.gov.uk

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Wayne Morrison
Research Policy Branch
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development
Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
Belfast
BT4 3SB

Dear Mr Morrison

DARD Evidence and Innovation Strategy 2009-13

CNCC welcomes these constructive and forward-looking proposals, and the emphasis on sustainable systems that is apparent throughout the document. We have a few specific comments to make on some of the research topics as outlined below.

On a more general note we would suggest that Paragraph 5 of Section 1 (page 3) includes reference to research being carried on outside of Northern Ireland, much of which is applicable to our production systems. We have been guilty in the past of duplicating useful work carried on elsewhere at huge cost and with little benefit.

Annex 1 Research Topics

Sustainable and Competitive Production

We welcome the strong emphasis on the improvement of efficiency of resource use, and the move away from fossil fuel based systems, including fuels, fertilisers and the use of embedded energy. This is an area of agriculture that needs major investment in research to develop new systems and technologies so that we can produce food in a significantly more sustainable way in the future.

Renewable Energy

We agree with the need for research into the production of energy from biomass, forestry and agriculture and food waste, but believe that this should lead to systems that are not just profitable but also show clear life-cycle carbon savings. The economics of energy production may be severely distorted by factors such as government incentives which may support systems that provide little or no carbon benefits.

Cont'd.

Sustainable forestry

We welcome these proposals, but wonder if they might not be better taken forward in a more structured way by adopting the model of Coed Cymru in Wales, which has successfully addressed many of these topics in a very cost-effective and targeted way through creative partnerships. Among the projects that they have been involved with is a study of the effect of trees on soil porosity, with startling results.

Sustainable fisheries and aquaculture

This is a challenging and contentious area, and some of the suggested topics may prove to be mutually exclusive. We would suggest that an additional topic might be the control of invasive non-native species in the aquatic environment. These species often pose threats to fishing and aquaculture and may also be introduced and spread through these activities.

Novel and innovative approaches to nutrient management

We welcome the emphasis on effective use of nutrients, and would suggest the mention of the vital role of soil management in this process. Our soils are significantly more than a mere growing medium for crops, as has been shown by the realisation of their huge importance in carbon storage.

Socio-economic research

We welcome the interest in alternative land use and diversification, and the inclusion of tourism. We suggest that this might be extended to include recreation more generally, and the health benefits that have been shown to derive from outdoor activities.

Responding to climate change

We suggest again that there is specific mention of the importance of our soils as the major store of carbon, and the need to protect them and where possible improve their capacity for carbon storage.

We strongly welcome the inclusion of carbon life-cycle analysis of food production systems, which ties in with many of the other topics.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Casement', with a horizontal line underneath.

**PATRICK CASEMENT
CHAIRMAN**