Dear

**Department for Infrastructure’s Budget 2023-24 Equality Impact Assessment consultation**

I am writing in response to the Department for Infrastructure’s Budget 2023-24 Equality Impact Assessment.

While I understand the current budgetary pressures the Department faces, I am strongly opposed to the proposal to reduce and/or cease wastewater treatment. The Department has legal obligations to maintain good water quality. At present, neither our freshwater nor marine water bodies are achieving Good Environmental Status. In Northern Ireland, 42% of the public view pollution as the greatest threat to biodiversity.

Clean freshwater and marine waters are the basis for healthy ecosystems, providing habitats for wildlife – 50% of our biodiversity lives in our seas – and a place for people to relax and enjoy the outdoors for fishing, swimming or other water-related activities. They also provide an essential service to our economy – drinking water, sanitation, agriculture, aquaculture, fishing, tourism and recreation.

Polluted waters, on the other hand, result in the loss of the above-mentioned services that healthy ecosystems provide, including recreational areas and services, increased costs of water treatment and damage to agricultural systems. There are also significant health risks when waterbodies are polluted with sewage, with the most vulnerable in our society, such as the elderly, children or those with a disability, most at risk. Increased incidents of toxic blue-green algae and E-coli in our waters will lead to health scares and loss of reputation in Northern Ireland as a safe place to live and visit.

Overall, this proposal will not improve the lives of people in Northern Ireland and will set us back many decades in terms of having water in good condition. Any savings gained from not treating wastewater is a false economy and will be cancelled out by the threat of infractions and fines from breaches of legislation and lost business.

I urge the Department to scrap this proposal and develop a long-term investment plan for wastewater treatment, including a greater emphasis on nature-based solutions such as constructed wetlands and native oysters, which can be cost-effective and would benefit biodiversity. Working with nature and not against it could ease budgetary pressures and be a win-win situation.

Yours sincerely

(include full name and address)