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Climate Change Public Body Reporting
Climate Change and Green Growth Policy Division
2nd Floor, Klondyke Building
1 Cromac Avenue
Gasworks Business Park
Belfast BT7 2JA

Ref: 23/MO/MMcC/072

9 June 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: Consultation on Climate Change Reporting by Specified Public Bodies -
Developing New Regulations**

The Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY) was established in accordance with 'The Commissioner for Children and Young People (Northern Ireland) Order' (2003) to safeguard and promote the rights and best interests of children and young people in Northern Ireland. Under Articles 7(2) and (3) of this legislation, NICCY has a mandate to keep under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law, practice and services relating to the rights and best interests of children and young people by relevant authorities. Under Article 7(4), NICCY has a statutory duty to advise any relevant authority on matters concerning the rights or best interests of children and young persons. The Commissioner's remit includes children and young people up to 18 years, or 21 years, if the young person has a disability or experience of being in the care of social services. In carrying out our functions, NICCY's paramount consideration is the rights of the child or young person, having regard to their wishes and feelings. In exercising our functions, NICCY is required to have regard to all relevant provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

NICCY welcomes the opportunity to briefly respond to this consultation informed by our work on climate breakdown and biodiversity loss. This work has included:

- Engaging with children and young people in relation to Children as Human Rights Defenders, for example, through supporting their engagement with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's Day of Discussion on this matter

and running a day of activities for children and young people across NI where more than a thousand young people learned about rights and their roles as Human Rights Defenders in 2019;

- Providing advice to government (in relation to the Northern Ireland Environment Strategy, Green Growth Strategy and Circular Economy Strategy) and working with young people to support their engagement with government including following the 2016 Day of General Discussion on Children's Rights and the Environment;
- As members of the European Network of Ombudsmen for Children, contributing to drafting synthesis report and position statement for the Annual General Assembly on Climate Justice in 2022. We have disseminated this to each relevant NI government Department including DAERA;
- Supporting young people (NICCY Youth Panel) to develop messages for government during the COP-26 conference in 2021, linking the global priorities to local action as well supporting them participate in the European Network of Young Advisors (ENYA) Forum Report 'Let's Talk Young, Let's Talk About Climate Justice' and in the first drafting process of General Comment 26;
- Working with the NICCY Youth Panel around this year's 'Clean Air Day' on the 15th of June.

Through this work we have heard directly from hundreds of young people about how importantly children and young people across Northern Ireland place climate breakdown as a priority issue for government ensuring the realisation of their right to a healthy environment. Other important rights include the general principles of the Convention of the Rights of Child (CRC), that is, the right of children to be heard and to have their views given due weight (Article 12); the right of children to have their best interests as a primary consideration (Article 3); the right to life, survival and development (Article 6); and non-discrimination (Article 2). It also includes the principle of the evolving capacities of the child (Article 5); the right to health, including a healthy environment (Article 24); and the right to be educated about the environment (Article 29).

We also acknowledge and support recognition by the UN General Assembly of the right to a healthy environment as a human right in Resolution A/76/L75.

In addition, we note the recent recommendation 45 (e) from the UNCRC in their

concluding observations on the combined sixth and seventh reports of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to

“Promote, with the active participation of schools, children’s awareness of and preparedness for climate change and natural disasters, especially in the Overseas Territories that are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of climate change, and strengthen awareness-raising among children on relevant climate legislation and their right to a clean environment and the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health.”¹

Throughout our engagement with children and young people in relation to environmental matters, a number of fundamental points have become very evident:

1. Children are the group that are most impacted by climate breakdown, as they are dealing with the issues now and will be for the rest of their life;
2. Children and young people are very much engaged in environmental matters, including climate breakdown and they have been calling on governments for many years to take action on the environmental crisis, one of the greatest threats to children’s rights; and
3. Children and young people are often excluded from conversations and decision-making in relation to environmental matters, including climate breakdown. The environmental crisis is a child’s rights crisis and giving opportunities for young people to understand, have a voice and participate must be at the heart of our climate change architecture.

Designated public bodies effectively reporting on climate change adaptation and mitigation measures is a core part of the architecture being set up to meet Northern Ireland’s obligations under the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022. Whilst we cannot comment on the mechanics of the reporting process, we wish to emphasise that the information produced must be collated and made accessible to children and young people.

Public involvement and in particular the involvement of children and young people across this architecture is a matter of legitimacy and mandate of the Climate Change Act.

¹ [Experts of the Committee on the Rights of the Child Note Progress in Addressing the Age of Marriage in the United Kingdom, Ask about High Poverty Rates among Families with Children with Disabilities and the Proposed Illegal Migration Bill | OHCHR](#)

Clear communication, including greater transparency and clarity on what public bodies are doing and where they are struggling, and the presentation of materials alongside sufficiently resourced communication channels will facilitate much richer public engagement and involvement. Ultimately compelling narratives that excite and inspire is what will lead to the transformational changes required.

We recommend that children and young people are involved in co-designing a reporting process that provides them with the information they require to provide input and to hold duty bearers accountable to meet the legislative targets. NICCY can advise and support DAERA in the development of this co-design process.

Yours sincerely



Mairead McCafferty PQH LLM
Chief Executive