

The Border Regional Authority

Údarás Réigiúnach na Teorann



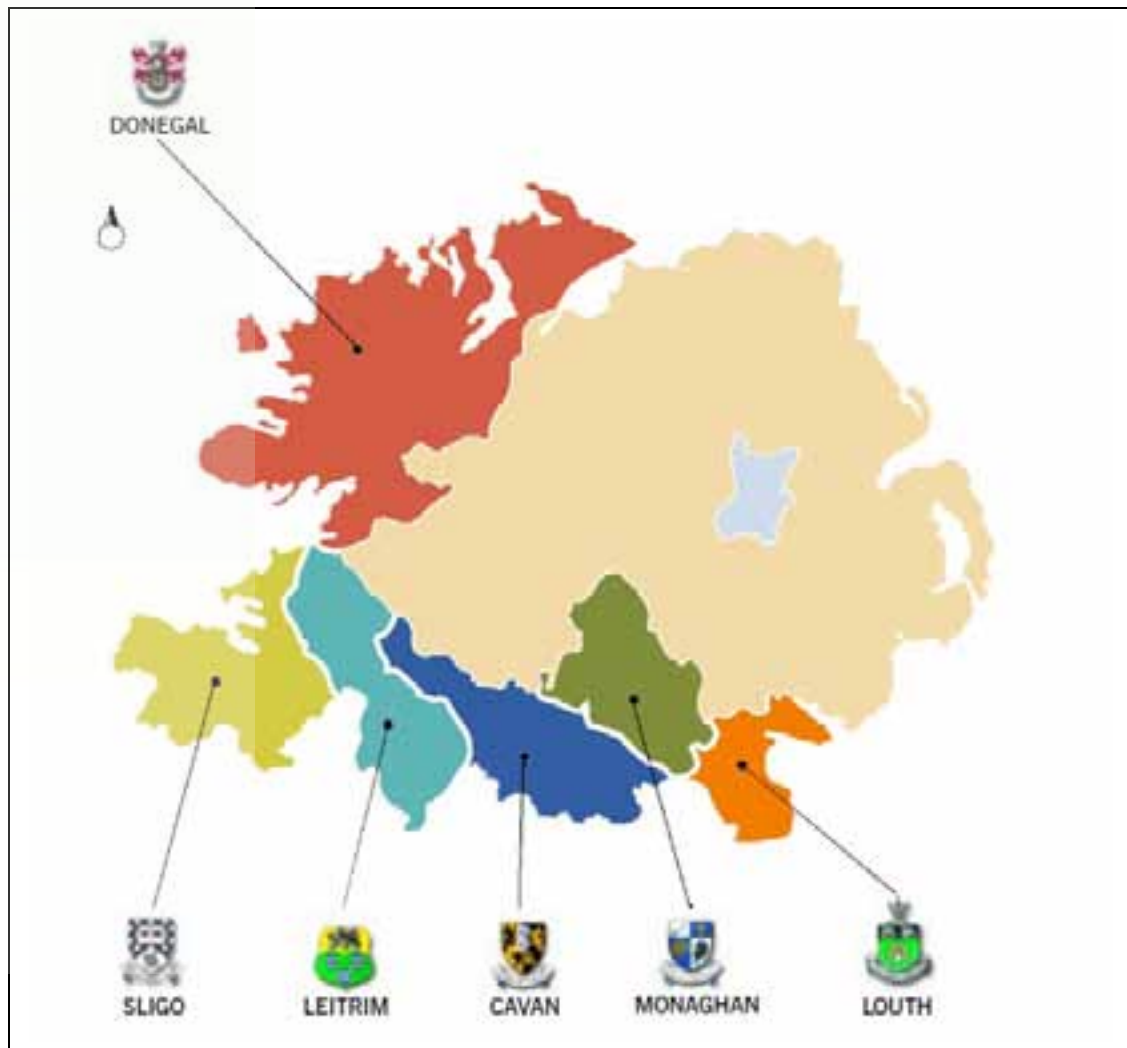
Regional Planning Guidelines (2010-2022)

ISSUES PAPER

February 2009



Border Region Counties



1.0 Introduction

The Regional Planning Guidelines (hereafter referred to as the RPGs or the Guidelines) for the Border Region were first drafted, and subsequently adopted, by the members of the Border Regional Authority on the 26 May 2004. The RPGs set out a strategic framework for the proper planning and sustainable development of the Region. The aim of the Guidelines is to implement the strategic planning framework set out in the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) published in 2002. The RPGs have a 12 year lifespan. However, under the Planning and Development Act, 2000 – 2002, a review of the RPGs is required every six years. The RPGs in the Border Region must therefore be revised, updated and adopted by May 2010.

2.0 Background to the Region

The Border Region derives its name from its location relative to Northern Ireland. It comprises the six Counties of Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan, Monaghan and Louth.

The population of the Region is 468,375 (CSO, Census 2006) which accounts for 11.04% of the national population. It encompasses an area of 12,156 sq. km. from the Atlantic Ocean on the West Coast to the Irish Sea on the East Coast. One of the key strengths of the Region is its Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Along with its strong cultural and heritage assets, it can be seen as an area very suitable for a strong tourism base. The Region is the source of Ireland's two longest rivers - the Shannon and the Erne. Both rivers are linked to form the 300km Shannon-Erne Waterway, which is one of the worlds greatest waterways. It has a considerable coastal area and unique mountain ranges.

3.0 Context

The overall objective of RPGs is to provide a long-term strategic planning framework for the development of a region over a period of 12-20 years, whilst working to implement the strategic planning framework set out in the National Spatial Strategy (NSS).

In accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), the revised RPGs **shall** address the following matters:

- ◆ projected population trends and settlement and housing strategies;
- ◆ economic and employment trends;
- ◆ the location of industrial and commercial development;
- ◆ transportation, including public transportation;
- ◆ water supply and waste water-facilities;
- ◆ waste disposal;
- ◆ energy and communications networks;
- ◆ the provision of educational, health care, retail and other community facilities;
- ◆ the preservation and protection of the environment and its amenities, including archaeological, architectural and natural heritage; and
- ◆ such other matters as may be prescribed by the Minister.

Following the adoption of the revised RPGs (forecast to be May 2010), Planning Authorities must reconsider their existing Development Plans, to determine if amendments are required to bring them in line with the RPGs. Once adopted, the RPGs will set the spatial planning context of future Development Plans and Local Area Plans in the Border Region. The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) have stated that a new Planning Bill is being considered which is likely to have an impact on the role of RPGs and influence of the Guidelines on Development Plans. As the review of the RPGs progresses, the Guidelines will incorporate any legislative amendments that will occur throughout the review process.

4.0 The RPG Review Process

This Issues Paper is a consultation document, issued prior to the drafting of new RPGs. It provides the public and all interested parties with an overview of the main regional planning issues, and provides the opportunity for each to submit their comments and suggestions. The aim of this Issues Paper is to stimulate and generate public thinking and debate on the development of the Region, both now and in the future.

We would welcome your views on any of the issues identified in this paper or any other issues that you would consider of regional importance and worthy of inclusion in the new RPGs.

Local authorities, state agencies, public and private agencies, interest groups and individuals are all invited to make written submissions regarding the revision and update of the RPGs. Submissions will be invited from the **09 of February 2009 - 15 April 2009**. Note that submissions received after the stated time and date will not be considered in the drafting of the revised RPGs.

Submissions should only be made in writing to:-

The Director OR Regional Planning Guidelines Team,
Border Regional Authority,
Corlurgan Business Park,
Ballinagh Road,
Cavan
County Cavan

Alternatively, submissions may also be sent to rpg@border.ie and should reach the **Director no later than 5 pm on the 15 April 2009**

All submissions must include the following:

- ◆ Your name and details of any organisation, community group or company you represent.
- ◆ An address for correspondence
- ◆ Be relevant to regional planning issues in the Border Region
- ◆ If your submission refers to the scoping of environmental issues for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), or a Habitats Assessment, it should clearly be marked 'Environmental Submission'

5.0 The Border Region Today – New Issues for the Guidelines

The existing RPGs for the Border Region were adopted in 2004 and were drafted during a period of unprecedented economic success. In 2004 it was estimated that economic growth could reach 5.4% GNP towards 2010. Changed economic circumstances now see forecasts of economic contraction in the short term, and lower levels of growth in the long term, with no clear trends yet predictable on economic recovery rates. This significant change to economic growth and Government finances will impact on the content and context of issues to be considered in the revised Guidelines.

The new Guidelines must also consider key environmental issues and recent national publications, which promote the proper planning and sustainable development of the Region. These include:-

- ◆ The recommendations of the Governments *National Climate Change Strategy 2007-2013* will need to be incorporated into the new Guidelines;
- ◆ Committed infrastructure projects in Transport 21 and the National Development Plan 2007 -2013;
- ◆ New Government Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities including inter alia the Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Area Guidelines, Wind Energy Development Guidelines and Provision of Schools Code of Practice;
- ◆ Regional Flood Risk Assessment in line with the current Draft Planning Guidelines published by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the OPW;
- ◆ The introduction of Strategic Environmental Assessment under the SEA Directive, Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment under draft planning guidelines published in September 2008.

Since the publication of the RPGS in 2004, the Border Region has developed and changed significantly with improved pockets of economic growth, improved infrastructure, massive in-migration from the accession states of the EU and significant development in its Gateways of Dundalk and Letterkenny. The ever improving political situation in Northern Ireland also offers huge potential for increased co-ordination and co-operation in both states, with mutually beneficial gains to be made.

Despite these improvements, the Region remains significantly inhibited by its peripheral location and quality of its infrastructure. Despite the unprecedented national growth experienced in Ireland throughout the Celtic tiger boom years, the Region is still backboneed by agriculture and manufacturing industry, both of which are, and have been in decline for a number of years. There remains a legacy of unemployment, lack of investment and a lack of high end skilled labour. Many students leave the Region to attend colleges to gain third and fourth level qualifications, but unfortunately, a trend exists where these graduates do not return to work in the Region. Reasons cited for this trend include the lack of availability of high end skilled jobs, and a career choice by graduates that better opportunities for career progression exist outside the Region. These factors combine to provide a Region where the quality of jobs are not high end

skilled jobs. These issues will have to be addressed in the new Guidelines, and more specifically the Economic Strategy.

6.0 Vision and Strategic Goals for the Border Region

The vision for the existing RPGs is as follows:-

'By 2020 the Border Region will be a competitive area recognised as, and prospering from, its unique interface between two economies, where economic success will benefit all, through the building of distinct sub-regional identities, in an outstanding natural environment, with innovative people, which in themselves, will be our most valuable asset'

The strategic goals required to achieve this vision are as follows:-

- ◆ *concentration of critical mass and the promotion and development of the three new Regional Gateways of Dundalk, Sligo and Letterkenny, as a priority for investment, and as key employment locations, with appropriate first class infrastructure and with an indigenous, educated and skilled labour force;*
- ◆ *further enhancing the urban structure in the Region by building on the strengths of the Hubs of Cavan and Monaghan, the Primary Development Centre of Drogheda, the Regionally Strategic Town of Carrick on Shannon, and other Key Towns and Villages;*
- ◆ *building on distinct sub regional identities and promoting strategic links with Northern Ireland;*
- ◆ *sustaining rural areas and rural communities;*
- ◆ *sustaining the uniqueness of the Gaeltacht;*
- ◆ *supporting the international marketing of the Region through distinct images of particular locations, with an emphasis on the quality of the natural environment and its benefits;*
- ◆ *targeting and co-ordinating key transport and communication links; and by the*
- ◆ *provision of a high quality built and physical environment, with essential infrastructure including housing, transport, water services, schools, healthcare, retail, community and recreational facilities*

1. Do you share this vision for the Region or should it be updated to mirror the current circumstances being experienced in the Region and the Country?
2. Do you consider that the strategic goals will achieve this vision? If not, what additional goals would you include and which would you exclude?

7.0 Key Issues for the Region

7.1 Settlement, Population and Housing

7.1.1 Settlement Hierarchy

The existing RPGs for the Border Region contain a Settlement Hierarchy that is at the heart of the Settlement Strategy. This strategy takes account of the network of large and small settlements in the Region and the functional role they play. The strategy includes a complex settlement structure of ten categories of settlements which are in line with the NSS.

The existing Guidelines defined and established a number of sub-regions and target population which are outlined in table 1 below.

Table 1. Population Targets of Existing Sub Regions in Border Region

Sub Region	Name	Counties within Sub Region	Sub Regional Target Population
1	Border North West	Donegal and Northern Ireland hinterland	145,000
2	Border West	Sligo, Leitrim; and Northern Ireland hinterland	104,000
3	Border East	Cavan, Monaghan and Louth and Northern Ireland hinterland	280,000

Also included within the Settlement Strategy, were a number of target populations for all major settlements namely Gateways, Hubs and Regionally Strategic Town and Primary Development Centre. These targets have been revised by the DEHLG (January 2009) and are outlined in the section below on Managing Future Population Growth.

7.1.2 Managing Future Population Growth

The Regional Planning Guidelines have a critical role to play in ensuring that the needs of future population growth is planned for, and provided within the Development Plans of each Member Council.

Through the Guidelines, the Border Regional Authority has been tasked with allocating the Border Regions projected/target population to each county and the main settlements as defined in the NSS. The population targets will be considered and assessed in parallel with the need for new housing in the Region, and subsequently recommending the best locations for housing in line with sustainable planning policy, availability of resources, proposed infrastructure, flood risk assessment, and finally and most importantly, should comply with the Regions economic growth strategy.

Revised population targets from the NSS were circulated to the Regional Authorities by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government on the 5th of January

2009. The table below sets out the target population for the Region that must be considered in the revised Settlement Strategy for the Border Region.

Table 2: Regional Population Targets for the State and the Border Region 2010, 2016 and 2022

	2008	2010	2016	2022 (low / high) range
Border Region	492,500	511,000	552,700	595,000 / 611,400
State	4,422,000	4,584,900	4,997,000	5,375,200 / 5,523,000

DEHLG, 05 January 2009

Through the implementation of the existing RPGs, it was found that some variance exists in population growth of the Gateways and Hubs in the Region. In particular there was concern that some of the Gateways and Hubs are failing to develop the critical mass in line with the RPGs aims. The most noteworthy levels of population growth were in the Gateway of Letterkenny and the Hub town of Cavan. The promotion of a balanced regional development must therefore be a priority for the new Guidelines.

7.1.3 Housing Demand

The new Guidelines will determine how these figures impact on future housing demand - looking at issues such as population age profiles, occupancy rates and migration within the Region. They will also have to address where housing demand can be met in a well planned and sustainable manner. The Guidelines must also draw conclusions on the best short, medium and long term allocations of housing demand to the main settlements in the Border Region.

Housing need allocated to each Council area has a critical role to play in the drafting of new Development Plans, and particularly for the Housing Strategies. A Housing Strategy sets out how a Council will meet the housing needs of existing and future populations of the area. The quantification of housing needs in a Development Plan and the identification of the locations for additional housing is a key way in which the objectivity and robustness of development plans and local area plans can be assured.¹ It is critical that the Guidelines ensure that the figures supplied to each Council are therefore, both robust and are clearly driven by sustainability and quality of life objectives.

Settlement, Population and Housing

<p>3. Do you consider that the existing Settlement Strategy was successful in its aims and objectives?</p> <p>4. What contribution do the existing Sub Regions make to the RPGs in the Region? Should these Sub Regions remain within the new Guidelines or should they be redefined? Should relevant border areas of Northern Ireland be included within the Sub Regions?</p>
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¹ Page 22, Development Plans, Guidelines for Planning Authorities, DoEHLG, June 2007.

7.2 Economic Growth and Development

Economic development is a key element of regional planning. Throughout the boom years in Ireland it has been argued, both regionally and nationally, that there were poor linkages between economic development and spatial planning. In undertaking a strategic plan for the long term future of the Border Region, it is essential to take into account the current economic forecasts that are available to aid the assessment of future needs and also to allow for planning for economic growth in the most suitable and sustainable locations.

In the existing RPGs the Medium Term Review published by the ESRI was the key economic source for predicting future growth patterns in the regions and the state. The most recent Medium Term Review was published by the ESRI in May 2008. This report predicts that even with the economic slowdown, that growth in Gross National Product (GNP) would be achieved at an average of 3.75% per year over the period of 2007 - 2015. It states that the economy will recover fully if appropriate action is taken and that the potential remains for growth despite the current slowdown. The report recommends that structural policy, particularly public investment, is an important policy instrument to ensure future growth in living standards. Directly relevant to the Guidelines, the ESRI recommend that physical planning focus on developing sustainable urban centres that provide sustainable living and a good quality of life for all.

The most recent ESRI publication - the 'Quarterly Economic Commentary for Winter 2008' highlights the significant economic contraction that is being experienced and is forecast to continue into 2009. The Paper re-iterates a point in the Review that (well managed) investment should continue to ensure that the Irish economy is well placed for the future upturn in the economy.

The retail sector has particular importance in the Border Region as it provides vitality to our town centres and significant employment opportunities. Due to the proximity of the Region with Northern Ireland, the retail sector is particularly vulnerable to currency fluctuations, and the comparative advantages each state enjoys at particular stages in the economic cycle. It is however a sector that is affected on a Regional basis as all six counties are affected in the same manner when currency fluctuations favour trade in Northern Ireland. This is an important issue for the Border Region. The Guidelines will, where possible and appropriate, make policy responses to the problems faced by its member counties in this sector.

Indigenous enterprise is an important enterprise base in the Region and still employs large numbers of people. Networks and clusters are also an important component of enterprise, with approximately 14 enterprise networks being located in the North West

alone. Almost half of the networks identified in the North West can be categorized as ‘Business Networks’ in that they involve firms collaborating for specific purposes, where the results of the activity will have some identifiable and measurable impact on their business (**Forfas, RSAs 2007+, July 2007**). Existing indigenous enterprise and business networks that exist in the Border Region must be protected and promoted in the new Guidelines.

The Border Region also possesses a number of inherent advantages within emerging economic drivers, and in particular; renewable energy, clean energy, the tourism and services sector, the entrepreneurial spirit and strong work ethic of the Regions population. In addition, the Regions unique culture is seen, by many, as a sector with untapped potential. These sectors will be researched and assessed in the review of the Guidelines to see how they could contribute to the Regions economy in the future.

7.2.1 Economic Strategy

The review of the RPGs in the Border Region will include an Economic Strategy at its core. The Economic Strategy will be based on, and among others, a baseline report for the Region, currently being researched and drafted by Forfas. This baseline report will include empirical analysis of the current state of economy in the Region, and provide commentary and recommendations on the way forward. Sectors of the economy being considered in this report include:-

- ◆ Enterprise and the economy
- ◆ Economic infrastructure
- ◆ Labour force and skills
- ◆ Quality of life and social inclusion
- ◆ Innovation in the Region
- ◆ Leadership capacity

The Economic Strategy will build on the findings from the above report, and facilitate sustainable economic growth through appropriate policy responses.

Economic Growth and Development

5. What do you think are the principal strengths and weaknesses of the Regions economy and what are the growth sectors?
6. What are the opportunities for enhanced economic co-operation with Northern Ireland and how can the new Guidelines facilitate these?
7. What policies relevant to planning and strategic development should be included within the new Guidelines to facilitate the emergence of a more competitive innovative regional economy?

7.3 Critical Infrastructure (to underpin Economic Strategy)

Effective infrastructure to support the economic and social development of the Region, is vital if balanced regional development is to be achieved. The Border Region has for a long number of years been lagging behind other Regions in Ireland, due mainly to its peripheral location and proximity to the border with Northern Ireland. As a result, there has been years of under investment in its infrastructure in terms of the quality of its roads, availability of rail services and public transport services, but now more importantly, in the telecoms and communications sector. It is now critical that the revised Guidelines address those key enabling pieces of infrastructure required to accommodate the population growth, housing demand and economic growth outlined in the new Guidelines. Some of the key enabling infrastructure priorities that exist at present include:-

- ◆ The construction and completion of the Dual Carriageway from Dublin – Derry (N2/A5)
- ◆ Broadband coverage and significantly improved speeds required on existing broadband throughout the Region
- ◆ Improved connectivity between the Gateways, Hubs, Regional Strategic Town and Primary Development Centre in the Region

The critical infrastructure required in the Region will be identified through consultation with the public and private service providers, operating at the national and regional level. It is at this scale that it is necessary to identify where strategic infrastructure proposals are currently being planned and developed. These infrastructure requirements will also be considered within the context of the National Development Plan 2007 – 2013, Transport 21 as well as others.

8. What do you think are the 3 - 5 key infrastructure priorities required to provide sustainable and balanced regional development in the Region?

7.4 Environment

The environment is a key strategic asset for Ireland, and it must be protected and managed to ensure that it remains as the basis for a healthy society and a strong economy (EPA, Ireland's Environment, 2008). The underlying principle of sustainable development is that the natural resources and environmental conditions fundamental to the economic and social well being of future generations in the Region, are not exhausted or degraded. In this regard, it is vital that environmental issues and considerations be placed at the heart of policy making in the review of the RPGs.

Nowhere is environmental preservation and protection more important than in the Border Region. It is often promoted and referred to as a geographically diverse and unspoilt landscape. This is reflected in the extent and coverage of the European and National Designations such as SPAs, cSACs and NHAs. The core messages from the EPA's Ireland Environment 2008 Report must therefore underpin the RPG review in the Border Region. Chapter 16 of the Report refers to the Main Environmental Challenges facing Ireland in the future. These challenges are summarised as follows:

- ◆ Water quality problems, particularly in estuaries on the east coast², some rivers and lakes and elevated levels of nitrate in groundwater;
- ◆ Loss of biodiversity due to habitat degradation shows that many important wildlife habitats have been earmarked as having bad conservation status;
- ◆ Adapting to climate change through investment in flood management and better management of drinking water resources, and producing energy from climate-proof sources;
- ◆ Contaminated lands across the State present a pollution threat to soil and groundwater;
- ◆ Meeting legal obligations of Kyoto and the Climate Action Plan of the EU through reduction in emissions.

These challenges provide a useful framework within which we should probe the environmental issues and relate them more locally to the Region. The undertaking of a Strategic Environmental Assessment in preparing the Guidelines, will assist in focusing on the key environmental issues in the Region. These issues will initially be scoped during consultation on this Issues Paper, and will later be used to frame the drafting of the Environmental Report. The Scoping and Environmental Reports will then be used to guide the policy framework for the preservation and protection of the environment in the Region, during the life of the Guidelines.

Given that we share a border with Northern Ireland, we must also consider the Environment Agency for Northern Ireland (EANI) Report titled ‘Our Environment, Our Future, Our Heritage’. It also outlines the main challenges for Northern Ireland’s environment which will be shared by many of the areas adjoining the border.

Since the publication of the existing RPGs in 2004, climate change and its associated problems have become more prominent in our thinking, planning, policy making, but more importantly, the way we live our everyday lives. One of the key issues of climate change in Ireland is the risk of flooding from both rising sea levels and the threat to our coasts. More sporadic and higher rainfall levels now lead to extensive inland flooding. Recent years have proven that our climate is changing and that our weather is becoming difficult to forecast. Innovation and technological advances can contribute to overcoming environmental problems. The Guidelines must include appropriate policy responses to these issues.

9. What do you consider are the principal environmental strengths and threats in the Region?
10. What do you think of the current condition of Biodiversity, Built, Archaeological and Natural Heritage in the Region? Are they sufficiently protected?
11. Are there any cross border environmental issues that you think should be addressed in the new Guidelines? How should they be managed?
12. What areas and settlements within the Region are affected by river/inland and coastal flooding?
13. Do you consider waste and waste management as an environmental problem in the Region?

² The EPAs Environmental Report refers specifically to water quality problems in estuaries on the east coast outside the Border Region and within the Greater Dublin Area

7.5 Protection of our Water

Protection of our water has been identified in section 7.4 above as a major challenge for the future. It is one of the most fundamental challenges facing this Region and Ireland in the future, as it is directly related to our health, well-being and ultimately, our quality of life. The quality of our water resources is vital to protect the many freshwater and marine habitats, as amenities to be enjoyed. Proper management of ground water resources is needed, not alone to maintain the quality and yield of drinking water sources, but also to ensure that groundwater is not having a detrimental impact on surface water and ecosystems that depend on water (**EPA, Irelands Environment, 2008**).

The main pressures on our water in the Region come from:-

- ◆ wastewater and industrial discharges
- ◆ landfills, quarries, mines and contaminated land
- ◆ agriculture
- ◆ wastewater from unsewered properties
- ◆ forestry
- ◆ usage and discharge of dangerous substances
- ◆ physical modifications
- ◆ abstractions

7.5.1 Water Management

Water management in Ireland is now governed by the Water Framework Directive (WFD). It marks a new approach to the protection and improvement of water resources and ecosystems. It seeks to maintain all water bodies at high status where it exists; to prevent deterioration in the existing status of water and to achieve at least “good status” in relation to all waters by 2015. The island of Ireland has been divided up into eight River Basin Districts (RBDs). The Border Region is the most complex of all regions in Ireland, as it includes the three international River Basin Districts of the Neagh Bann, North West and Western. It also includes smaller parts of the Shannon and Eastern River Basin Districts. Each River Basin District currently has draft River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) out for public consultation for the period from December 2008 to 22 June 2009. All RBMPs and associated Environmental Reports can be viewed and downloaded under the relevant River Basin Districts on www.wfdireland.ie.

The impact of RBMPs on regional planning is considered significant. RBDs include various counties due to their sheer size. It is considered appropriate that RBMPs are considered in parallel with regional spatial plans as they operate at similar spatial scales. The assessment of RBMPs in the Border Region will be closely linked and co-ordinated with the RPG review process.

14. How do you think the RPGs should address the protection of water resources and water quality in the Region? Are there additional pressures on our water in the Region, apart from those identified above?
15. What is the best way to integrate the new Guidelines and River Basin Management Plans?

7.6 Infrastructure

7.6.1 Roads

Significant progress has been made on roads in the Border Region since 2004. Some of the more significant road schemes include:

- ◆ M1 Drogheda and Dundalk Motorway bypass
- ◆ N1 Cross Border (Dundalk to Newry) Section
- ◆ N2 Carrickmacross, Monaghan Town and Castleblayney bypasses
- ◆ N4 Sligo Inner Relief Road, Drummod Roosky bypass
- ◆ N15 Ballyshannon and Bundoran bypass

7.6.2 Major Schemes under Construction and in Planning

- ◆ N2/A5 Dual Carriageway from Dublin – Derry
- ◆ M3 Clonee to Kells Motorway – A Feasibility Report is underway on the extension of the M3 motorway from Kells to Cavan by pass

Significant improvements are however required on the main arterial routes between the Gateways, Hubs, the Regional Strategic Town and Primary Development Centre in the Region. These improvements would improve access in an east – west direction which would significantly improved access into, and within the Region. It would also increase the likelihood of more balanced regional development.

7.6.3 Public Transport

The main public transport providers in the Border Region are Bus Eireann and Ulster Bus (Northern Ireland), with remaining smaller routes being taken up by private bus operators. Within the Region, the provision of rail services is poor and in particular, the Counties of Monaghan, Cavan Leitrim and Donegal. Maintaining and improving our existing rail lines is a key challenge for the Region. The rail line on the eastern corridor mainly services County Louth and the principal towns of Dundalk and Drogheda. Improvements on the Enterprise Service between Dublin and Belfast are on-going with works yet to be completed. Significant improvements have been made to the services of the Sligo – Dublin line, with rolling stock now upgraded. There remains much scope for improvement in public transport provision in the Region, as it lags behind all other Regions in the country and is therefore at a comparative disadvantage.

Donegal County Council has initiated feasibility work on the potential extension of the Western Rail Corridor from Sligo up to Letterkenny and into Derry City. This missing rail link would provide a loop for rail services around the island of Ireland and would provide significant benefits to a catchment population of most of the western counties in the Border Region.

7.6.4 Ports and Airports

Ports and Airports offer excellent external linkages for the Region, both nationally and internationally. Given the proximity of the Region with Northern Ireland, there is great potential to expand these services by offering mutually beneficial services.

Donegal and Sligo are the existing regional airports. They provide essential services for catchment populations. Significant improvements are however required in both airports. Sligo airport has plans in place to extend its runway, which is an essential safety project. It is currently at planning application stage.

7.6.5 Water & Waste Water Services

Water and waste water services are the most important roles of local authorities in Ireland. These services are critical in supporting economic and population growth in the Region. The boom in construction during the Celtic tiger years has put significant pressures these services. This additional pressure has been partially been accommodated through the expansion of waste water treatment systems in major settlements, which now provides extra capacity for additional development. Some settlements however require new waste water treatment systems, and others require new extensions to improve capacity. Through the review of the Guidelines it is proposed to identify those key settlements where additional capacity is required, but also those settlements that have spare capacity to accommodate additional growth in the Region.

Both water supply and water treatment, and their current capacities, will impact on where future population can be accommodated in the short and medium term. The Guidelines have a role in supporting existing investment, and in providing clear direction of where future demand will come from, so that future investments can be planned to meet need - a key issue as the time taken to bring on stream new facilities can take a long time to become reality.

7.6.6 Energy Provision

Geographic location, fluctuating oil prices, a high dependence on imported gas (approximately 93% is imported), and the related issue of security of supply, the transition to a deregulated market and climate change legislation, points up the need for a generation portfolio with a diverse mix. Some areas of the country are ideally located and better suited with regard to the generation of renewable supplies of energy, which indicates the need to reinforce grid structures to efficiently distribute supply, so that economic prosperity can be enhanced throughout the country.

Electricity is the main energy demand in the Region, largely met by the main energy supplier, the ESB. The development of more sustainable, competitive, diverse and secure supplies of electricity to support economic and social development, is a key challenge for the Region. Extending the network into Northern Ireland and the UK through interconnectors will provide the Region, and the Country, with a secure and reliable electricity supply into the 21st Century. In February 2008, the Border Regional Authority sent representations to Eirgrid, calling on them to underground the proposed North-South Interconnector, in order to ally the concerns expressed by people living in the vicinity of the proposed route.

Like many of the Regions in the country, demand for electricity will continue to increase, despite the efficiencies being made through innovation and new technologies. The west coast of Ireland is ideally suited to development of renewable wind energy and should therefore be prioritised, so that maximum efficiencies can be achieved in this area.

Gas is not a major energy source in the Region. On the east coast, Drogheda and Dundalk are the only settlements supplied and connected to a main gas network. The development of a gas network must be a future priority in the Region. However to date, feasibility studies looking at developing a gas network, has discovered that it may not be a viable option given the remote rural character of the Region. Planning permission has been granted for a Combined Cycle Gas Turbine Power Plant at Toomes, County Louth. Following construction, the plant will generate essential additional energy capacity, providing enough electricity to power approximately 135,000 homes. This plant will be a major benefit to the Region as an alternative energy source.

7.6.7 Telecommunications

Arguably, the most dynamic network change has occurred within the telecommunications sector in Ireland. Significant investment since the 1980s through the 1990s has intensified in more recent times. The previous RPGs considered the rollout of broadband as critical to provide infrastructure and services on a balanced regional basis. The new focus is on broadband uptake, performance and availability and is a key priority for the growth and development of the Region. Despite the aims of National Strategies and the existing RPGs, Ireland and the Border Region continue to have poor broadband performance in relative European terms. Advancement in telecommunication infrastructure and performance, represents one of the most critical steps in creating a more competitive regional and national economy. As a remote and currently high cost location, Ireland and the Border Region needs to take advantage of best available broadband technologies such as Next Generation Networks and Services.

Telecommunications has been identified as one of the key enabling pieces of infrastructure required to develop a competitive regional economy. Unfortunately, due to its location and dispersed population and ultimately the costs involved, the development of this sector has proven difficult in the Border Region. The Region was joint lowest (with the Midlands) for both PC (53%) and Broadband (12%) penetration in Ireland (Census 2006). This is an area where the Region must improve if it is to improve its levels of economic growth and promote balanced regional development.

The recent announcement of Project Kelvin is a major development in this sector. Project Kelvin is a €30 million project which is a joint initiative by the EU and Irish Governments, aimed at providing direct international submarine telecommunications connections to the north west of the island of Ireland. The project is designed to bring the cost of international backhaul connectivity in the Region in line with that in major Irish and UK cities, and provide border counties with a resilient and diverse open access network. This additional submarine cable will come ashore on the north coast and into Coleraine. The contract for Project Kelvin was awarded on the 22 December 2008. The new submarine cable and associated terrestrial cable network should be operational before the end of 2009. This project will significantly improve connectivity in the Region with settlements such as Letterkenny, Monaghan, Castleblayney, Dundalk and Drogheda directly benefiting by open access once works are completed. The potential for other settlements in the Region to link into this cable network will remain a challenge for the future. It is however a challenge that must be aggressively targeted to provide balanced regional connectivity, and offer a modern communications link to the US, Europe and the rest of the world. It is no longer acceptable that a rural region such

as ours should have to pay significantly higher costs for telecommunications of a sub standard nature.

Project Kelvin will assist the development of telecommunications in the Border Region, but it should not be seen as the only solution to addressing the regional imbalances. It does not provide broadband coverage for the entire Region, nor does it improve broadband speeds in some areas, which is also a significant issue. The roll out of national broadband and improved speeds must therefore continue as a priority for Government and Regional interest groups.

Infrastructure

16. What do you consider to be the 2 or 3 overarching priorities for transport linkages in the Region?
17. Do you consider public transport acceptable in the Region? How could it be improved? Are rail services a viable option for the Region?
18. Can our ports be developed and sustained in their existing uses?
19. What role is there for airports within, and adjoining the Region? How could they be further utilised to support development of the Region?
20. Are our water supplies and waste water treatment facilities sufficient to accommodate future development and economic growth in the Region? Are there settlements with additional capacity that could accommodate growth?
21. What do you consider is the best way to provide for the Regions future energy demands? What infrastructure is required to meet this demand and how should it be provided? Are green technologies viable options as alternative supplies?
22. How can broadband penetration be improved within the Region? What are the most appropriate mechanisms for providing it?

7.7 Interregional Issues and Northern Ireland

The Border Region is bounded by Northern Ireland, the West, Midlands and Mid-East Regional Authorities in Ireland.

The Region is centrally located on the island of Ireland. The eastern part of the Region comprises an important section of the Belfast – Dublin Corridor and therefore benefits from excellent accessibility through its airports, ports, roads and rail links. The west and north western parts of the Region are considered polar opposites, in that by the extension of the continent of Europe, it is generally perceived as peripheral to the centres of economic activity. This perception is however changing. It is the aim and purpose of these Guidelines to re-image this perception, and put the west and North West of the Region, at least on par with that of the east. It is critical that links and connectivity is improved with adjoining Regions, and more particularly Northern Ireland.

There are two spatial strategies on the island of Ireland - the National Spatial Strategy for Ireland, and the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) for Northern Ireland. Both spatial strategies have many mutually interdependent characteristics, such as the recognition of the potential of the Dublin/Belfast corridor and the Letterkenny/Derry

area in the North West. Other significant documents with a cross border and spatial planning dimension include:-

- ◆ Spatial Strategies on the Island of Ireland – Development of a Framework for Collaborative Action (InterTradeIreland, June 2006)
- ◆ Non-Statutory Spatial Development Framework for the North West Gateway (Report due 2009)
- ◆ The Twin City Region: Supporting the Implementation of Cross Border Collaborative Frameworks in Newry/Dundalk (Report due 2009)
- ◆ Fostering Mutual Benefits in Cross-Border Areas (Report published by ICLRD in 2008)

All of the above documents have a central theme which supports collaboration in spatial planning on a cross border basis. This theme will also be at the core of the new Guidelines. The Guidelines form the link between the two National Strategies, and considering that the NSS Refresh is on-going and the RDS is currently being completely reviewed, now is considered an opportune time to improve cross border spatial planning. The challenge of improving cross border links is somewhat difficult in that the RPGs refer only to Counties in the Ireland. It is however critical that all cross border issues identified in the review should be fully considered and assessed.

23. How do you consider co-operation with other Regions in Ireland important and beneficial to this Region?
24. What are the key cross border issues that should be addressed in the new Guidelines?
25. What contribution should these Guidelines make to cross border spatial planning?

7.8 Rural Development

The Border Region is predominantly rural in nature with 305,252 persons (65.2%) of its total population living in rural areas. This compares to a corresponding national figure of 39.3% (Census 2006). A reason cited for this high rural figure in the Region is due to the relatively small size of its settlements. The Region is also not dominated by any large urban centre, and is generally dominated by urban centers of 1500 persons and smaller. It is therefore imperative that rural areas in the Region are given due consideration and direction in the new Guidelines.

7.8.1 Rural Economy

Since 2004 the following key documents have been published and are of direct relevance and influence to the rural economy of the Region:-

- ◆ the *Rural Development Programme for Ireland 2007-2013*
- ◆ the *National Development Plan 2007*, which has a strong rural chapter; and;
- ◆ the *European Agriculture Rural Development Fund* was agreed in 2006.

These documents all show a marked shift away from direct supports and towards environmental improvements and rural development initiatives. The Guidelines need to

consider the planning issues emerging from a changing rural economy, and what policies can help support sustainable and vibrant rural areas.

7.8.2 Rural Housing

Since the 2004 Guidelines were published, two key policy documents have been published by the DEHLG:-

- ◆ Sustainable Rural Housing 2005 and;
- ◆ Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas 2008 (which contains a section on rural villages), and a Circular issued by the Department on foot of a formal notice from the European Commission. The new Guidelines will need to take these policy directions into account.

The key elements coming from these documents are:-

- ◆ adequately providing for rural need housing
- ◆ ensuring that rural villages grow in a sustainable manner and protect their heritage and community structures
- ◆ recognition of the differing types of rural areas within the Border Region

7.8.3 Rural Housing and Communities

The impact of development on the rural economy during the Celtic tiger years has been both positive and negative. Since 2004, the construction sector significantly increased manufacturing activity throughout the Region, providing much needed employment in rural areas. The businesses were generally located outside urban centers, and are almost exclusively dependant on rural services. In recent years, people have returned to work in rural areas and have chosen to live closer to their place of work. Rural services such as rural schools, local shops, health centers have prospered as a result. The issue however is the pressure being exerted on rural infrastructure, which has not been developed and invested in, in line with the expanding rural economy. There is now excessive pressure on services such as schools and rural roads. However, the increasing numbers of septic tanks in rural areas pose a significant threat to our surface and ground waters, which is also a problem nationwide.

Counties across the Region adopt various rural housing strategies in their Development Plans, which they are entitled to under the Planning and Development Act 2000-2002 (as amended). The impact on the Region however, is that some rural areas are experiencing excessive development pressure, while others are experiencing decline. This problem is further exacerbated by rural housing policy in Northern Ireland, where draft Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 14 (now revised through PPS 21), is much more restrictive than any rural housing policy in Ireland. Studies are being undertaken to assess the impact of the restrictive rural housing policy in Northern Ireland, but anecdotal evidence suggests that it is forcing people to look south of the border and into our Region, where rural housing policy, is in general, more relaxed. There are both direct and indirect costs and benefits of this movement of people, but the impacts are not yet understood or assessed in any great detail. The Guidelines need to consider whether there is a role to provide guidance across the Region on this issue, and to encourage best practice and/or consistency across county boundaries.

26. What are the key issues facing rural areas in the Border Region?
27. What impact (if any) do you think the policy approach to rural housing in Northern Ireland has on the Border Region?
28. What policies should the Guidelines contain to provide for, and ensure the continuation of vibrant rural communities?

7.9 Social Infrastructure

7.9.1 Schools

The provision of schools in expanding communities is a hotly debated and topical issue, following unprecedented pockets of growth throughout the country. The high levels of population growth in some places have put enormous pressure on resources. Delays in school provision can cause major problems for local communities. There are many challenges in this area, and will require strong co-operation and co-ordination between local authorities and the Department of Education & Science. In seeking to address this issue, the Department of Environment, Heritage & Local Government have put in place a series of policy recommendations and directions in recently published Planning Authority Guidance - the Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (Dec 2008), 'Code of Practice for Planning Authorities on Schools' (July 2008), and the 'Development Plan Guidelines, 2007'. With regard to school provision, the key issues which face Planning Authorities are demand forecasting, the timely identification of suitable sites, phasing arrangements, and facilitating the necessary infrastructure. While the RPGs do not have a direct role in schools provision or recommending specific locations for new schools, they could recommend best practice and policies, and identifying key new housing growth areas where schools will be required and planned for in the future.

7.9.2 Recreation and Amenities

The provision of recreational facilities is a key part of building new communities. There are many different approaches used by Councils regarding the standards applied, and how open space can be provided. The recreation and amenity requirements of towns and rural villages can differ significantly. Policies need to be structured to facilitate local demands and requirements. The issue of quality and integration of spaces is important. The Guidelines could include policies to encourage new approaches in the provision of recreational space, in particular, the provision of indoor leisure facilities.

7.9.3 Healthcare

Again, healthcare is not a social service provided by local authorities. It is however, a vital core service that should be carefully planned for. Reform of the healthcare system by the Health Service Executive, points to the fact that some Hospitals face closure, while other Hospitals may have to expand to provide for additional patients. Other necessary developments in this sector include the facilitating of local clinics, nursing homes and day hospitals within the community. The practice of some of these facilities

being proposed in rural locations is an issue, both of alienation, and sustainability. Provision of these services within towns raises issues of cost of land.

Future provision of healthcare facilities in the Border Region will have to include consideration of facilities outside the Region, which includes Northern Ireland.

7.9.4 Social Inclusion

Social exclusion is a significant problem in the Region due to the high percentage of rural areas relative to urban areas, and the associated isolation of parts of the Region such as the west coast of Donegal and the islands. The role of planning policy is a small part of the overall integrated response required. The Guidelines have a role in setting out common policies for all Councils on how social inclusion can be incorporated into planning policy documents. These policies should aim to ensure that existing problems are not exacerbated through decisions made at local government level, and seek to encourage other stake-holders to respond to these issues in a coordinated way, through investment in vulnerable locations within the Region. The following quality of life issues, either directly or indirectly, should be addressed:-

- ◆ access to public transport and places of work;
- ◆ encouraging quality new residential development with facilities and play areas;
- ◆ supporting the Housing Strategy objectives to provide diverse communities;
- ◆ requiring the built environment to respond to the needs of those with disabilities and planning for the needs of elder member of the community.

29. What are the key pieces of infrastructure required to develop the social infrastructure of the Region?

30. Could social infrastructure be provided on a cross border basis?

7.10 Tourism

The Border Region is rich in natural resources such as topography, landscape, indigenous heritage and its unique culture. The promotion of tourism in the Region has always been strong, but unfortunately, to date, it is a sector with much potential and limited success. The lack of progress in the tourism sector, has in the past been linked to poor infrastructure and a lack of access to many areas. Moving forward, economic conditions will be a key factor in the future development of tourism. The Region will have to develop its resources in a sustainable manner. Recent announcements such as the reopening of the Ulster Canal and the designation of the Geopark, centred on the Marblearch Caves, will significantly raise the profile of the Region. These are examples of flagship projects, which should only be considered in conjunction with the development of other medium and small scale projects. The Marble Arch Caves in County Fermanagh shares an international border with County Cavan. This is a major success for the Region and represents a huge step forward for tourism. It is a world first for a Geopark to cross an international border, and in light of the recent turbulent history of Ireland, sets a wonderful example of co-operation to the rest of the world. It is important that these flagship projects, as well as others, are included and promoted into the new Guidelines so that multiplier effects can be enjoyed throughout the Region.

31. What contribution can planning and the co-ordination of development at a regional level make to the development of the tourism sector in the Region?
32. What are the key infrastructure priorities for the development of tourism in the Region?

7.11 The Gaeltacht and the Islands

The second largest of the seven separate Gaeltacht Areas in the Country is located in Donegal, mainly along the coast, in the west of the county. The importance of the protection and the development of Gaeltacht areas has been recognised in both the NSS and the NDP and requires the provision of strategic support in a regional context. Currently the Gaeltacht faces many challenges not least the existing infrastructural and economic deficiencies in peripheral and disadvantaged areas in the Gaeltacht and the fact that the remaining Irish-speaking communities are facing serious difficulties maintaining the critical linguistic sustainability threshold (findings of the *“Comprehensive Linguistic Study of the Use of Irish in the Gaeltacht:”* 2007). In light of these and other issues:-

33. How should the RPGs provide for the sustainable economic, social and cultural development of Gaeltacht areas and the islands in a regional context?

7.11 An Ghaeltacht agus na hOileáin

Is i nDún na nGall, ar an chósta den chuid is mó, in iarthar an chontae, atá an dara ceann is mó de na seacht gceantar Gaeltachta sa tír suite. Aithníodh an tábhacht atá le cosaint agus forbairt na gceantar Gaeltachta sa SSN agus sa PFN agus tá gá le tacaíocht straitéiseach a sholáthar i gcomhthéacs réigiúnach. San am i láthair, tá cuid mhór dúshlán roimh an Ghaeltacht, go háirithe na heasnaimh bhonneagair agus eacnamaíochta atá i gceantair atá ar imeall na Gaeltachta, agus i gceantair atá faoi mhíbhuntáiste sa Ghaeltacht, agus an fhíríc go bhfuil sé ag dul crua ar na pobail labhartha Gaeilge atá ar marthain an tairseach rithábachtach d'innharthanacht teanga a chaomhnú (torthaí an *'Staidéar Cuimsitheacht Teangeolaíoch ar Úsáid na Gaeilge sa Ghaeltacht.'* 2007). Maidir leis seo agus ceistanna eile:-

33. Cén dóigh ar chóir do na Treoracha Pleanála Réigiúnacha soláthar a dhéanamh d'fhorbairt innharthana eacnamaíochta, shóisialta agus chultúrtha na gceantar Gaeltachta agus na n-oileán i gcomhthéacs réigiúnach?

7.12 Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment

The preparation of new Guidelines will for the first time, be subject to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The purpose of an SEA is to evaluate the likely significant environmental effects of implementing new Guidelines in the Border Region. It is a formal process that includes the following key stages:-

- ◆ Preparing a Scoping Report which highlights the key environmental issues in the Region;
- ◆ Preparing an Environmental Report where the likely significant environmental effects identified in the Scoping Report are further assessed and evaluated;
- ◆ Consulting the public in parallel with the Issues Paper and the Draft RPGs, notifying environmental authorities and relevant authorities in Northern Ireland on transboundary issues and the Environmental Report; and
- ◆ Notifying the public of the decision on adoption of the revised RPGs, outlining how SEA was considered and included in the review process.

Appropriate Assessment must also be carried out on the RPG review in accordance with Article 6 of the Habitats Directive. It is a parallel, but a separate process to SEA and must be documented as such. Appropriate Assessment is an evaluation and assessment of the potential impacts of policies and objectives in the new Guidelines. on European sites such as cSACs and SPAs (also referred to as Natura 2000 sites) both within, and outside the Region. Like SEA, a report will be prepared assessing how the Guidelines will impact on all Natura 2000 sites, with the ultimate aim of avoiding any negative impacts.

34. What do you consider are the key environmental issues in the Region that should be assessed in the Strategic Environmental Assessment? Are there any transboundary issues that should be considered in reviewing the Guidelines?
35. Are there areas, or settlements within the Region where Natura 2000 sites are under threat from development?

8.0 Next Stages

This is the first stage of a 17 month process in preparing new RPGs for the Border Region. This public consultation phase, in advance of preparing the new Guidelines, is an opportunity to gather the many opinions and issues that the public may have, and bring them into the process. This will assist the Regional Authority in setting out the focus of the Guidelines. Public consultation will be carried out in parallel with internal consultation with each of the Local Authorities in the Region, and with state and semi state bodies such as the Enterprise Ireland, IDA, the National Roads Authority, Forfas etc.

Following public consultation, a Directors Report will be drafted, summarising the issues raised in submissions, assessing their input into the Guidelines and recommending how these issues should be framed in the draft Guidelines. The Border Regional Authority Steering Committee will be presented with the Directors Report and will advise on future directions. Members of the Authority will then approve/amend this report. The new RPGs will be drafted during the Summer and Autumn of 2009.

8.1 Future Consultation

Further public consultation will take place on the draft RPGs in October 2009. A minimum period of 10 weeks will be provided for public consultation, taking the review process up to Christmas 2009. A series of meetings will be held with the members of the Border Regional Authority in the Spring of 2010 with a view to finally adopting the revised Guidelines.

8.2 Timetable

The following timetable sets out the anticipated timeframe for the review of the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Border Region

RPG Review Timetable

2009												2010						
J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J

	Draft Issues Paper agreed with Steering Committee & Members of Regional Authority
	Public Consultation on Issues Paper (min. 8 wks)
	Directors 1 st Report on Public Consultation
	Preparation of Draft RPGs and Environmental Report's
	Draft RPGs finalised for Public Display
	Public Consultation on Draft RPGs and Environmental Report's (Min. 10 wks)
	Directors 2 nd Report on Public Consultation
	Directors Report considered and RPGs finalised and adopted by B.R.A. Members
	Final RPGs prepared and translated/RPGs published