



Bovine Electronic Identification (EID) Consultation



Department of

**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

An Roinn

**Talmhaíochta, Comhshaoil
agus Gnóthaí Tuaithe**

Department of

**Fairmin, Environment
an' Kintra Matthers**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk



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www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/bEID

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Ministerial Foreword

I am pleased to launch this public consultation on the mandatory introduction of bovine Electronic Identification (EID) in Northern Ireland. Ensuring the health and traceability of our livestock is fundamental to safeguarding Northern Ireland's agri-food sector, protecting public health, and maintaining our reputation for high standards in animal welfare and food safety.

Electronic identification has already proven its value in the sheep sector and internationally in cattle traceability. Now is an opportune time to introduce mandatory bovine EID, as it can eliminate tag reading errors and improve efficiency for animal handling on farms, at markets and at processing sites. Consequently, it will reduce administrative burdens, improve transparency and health and safety throughout the supply chain, while supporting overall efforts to control disease in Northern Ireland.

I recognise that change brings challenges and that is why I am proposing a phased approach, initially introducing bovine EID on voluntary basis, prior to mandating the identification of newborn calves with EID tags in 2027. This will allow herd keepers more time to prepare, while at the same time minimising disruption through alignment with timescales planned under the Bovine Genetics Project.

This consultation is your opportunity to shape how bovine EID is introduced and ensure that the transition is practical, proportionate, and beneficial to all involved.

I encourage all those with an interest in this proposal to respond to this consultation by 23 February 2026.

Andrew Muir, MLA

Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs



Background

An effective cattle traceability system is crucial for controlling the spread of infectious diseases. Failing to do so can severely impact on the economy, international trade and public health. By being able to identify and trace cattle to specific locations we can better manage disease outbreaks.

Cattle in Northern Ireland (NI) are currently identified for traceability purposes using conventional plastic ear tags. These tags currently do not contain any official electronic identification components and are printed with a unique animal number, which are visually read and noted manually, when it needs to be recorded. This process is functional, fit for purpose and well understood by the NI agricultural industry.

The Department is considering the implementation of bovine EID in NI. It is widely recognised that EID can simplify the way all animal events, including movements, are recorded for farmers, markets, abattoirs and the Department, generating significant efficiencies throughout the supply chain. EID can also minimise the opportunity for misreading the numbers displayed on identification devices, which sometimes results in incorrect traceability information being notified to the Northern Ireland Farm Animal Information System (NIFAIS) database.



Consultation Details

This consultation seeks views on a proposal to make bovine EID mandatory for the identification of all newborn cattle in NI. It is aimed at industry stakeholders who have an interest in cattle identification as well as cattle herd keepers. A list of consultees is included at **Appendix 1**. This is not meant to be exhaustive, and responses are welcomed from anyone with an interest in, or views on, the matters covered by this consultation paper.

Equality, rural needs screening and regulatory impact exercises have been carried out and can be found at www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/bEID

The consultation is being conducted using the online survey tool Citizen Space and will commence on **16 December 2025**. It will run for **ten weeks** closing on **23 February 2026**.

Following analysis of the responses received, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (the Department) will publish a summary of the responses received. Subject to the nature of those responses, the Department will then take steps to introduce legislation to make the use of bovine EID mandatory when newborn cattle are identified for the first time.



Rationale for Proposal

Technology

EID is a system used to identify and capture information about livestock which is primarily done in the form of ear tags. These ear tags contain a microchip programmed with the animal's unique identification number, which can be read automatically by a tag reader. EID tags are available in low frequency (LF), high frequency (HF), and ultra-high frequency (UHF) options. Each type has its benefits and limitations, with the main differences being the speed and range at which tags can be read. UHF tags allow for quicker reading from a greater distance and can store more information on the embedded microchip. LF EID is widely used in animal identification, and it has been mandatory in NI to electronically identify sheep since 31 December 2009.

NI must continue to adhere to EU Animal Health Law (AHL) rules on the identification, registration and movement of livestock. The use of bovine EID is optional under AHL, but if it is to be deployed by a competent authority, AHL states LF tags must be used (as currently used in the Republic of Ireland and will be used in England and Wales).

The introduction of 'XI/899' prefix tags from 24 June 2024 has provided NI with a numbering regime which facilitates the implementation of EID. For those animals identified with 'XI/899' prefix tags, the new numbering regime enables the retention of herd numbers and animal numbers in their historic format, while permitting the whole tag number to be encoded on the EID device in a "what you see is what you get" form.

Benefits of bovine EID

In order to maintain and improve NI's standing as a region with a robust traceability regime the Department has been examining the use of EID for the identification of cattle. In 2020 the Department commissioned the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to research the value of using EID on cattle for NI producers. The study¹ revealed that bovine EID is globally utilised in agriculture for identification of livestock and improves supply chain transparency. Feedback from countries using EID indicated it enables faster, more reliable cattle identification during disease outbreaks and supports evidence-based culling strategies. AFBI concluded that EID technology could significantly benefit NI cattle producers, alerting that not adopting EID could result in NI's agri-food industry falling behind in an increasingly competitive global market and highlighting the importance of EID for future-proofing the UK agricultural industry.

Where EID has been adopted it has proven that it can deliver benefits for supply chains including farm to fork traceability for farmers, markets, industry and the Department. Recognised benefits include:

¹ Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, The value of Electronic Identification (EID) of cattle for NI producers, June 2020.



1. Safeguarding animal welfare and human health

The incorporation of EID tags, electronic readers, and wireless data transfer not only makes record-keeping more efficient and reduce mistakes but also improves the safety of livestock handling on farms, at markets and at processing sites. The current identification procedures for cattle in NI rely on restraining and handling animals to visually read tags, as well as significant manual data input in relation to recording information at critical control points throughout the supply chain, for example at markets or abattoirs. Safeguarding animal welfare and the health and safety of everyone involved in handling cattle remains crucial.

2. Farm management data

Instant access to management data through the integration of EID, tag readers, and farm management software can support better decision-making. Many dairy farmers are already using EID management tags which facilitates the operation of automated calf feeding systems, in-parlour feeding, milk recording, robotic milking, and weight recording programmes. For those who haven't yet introduced EID management tags, bringing this technology into daily routines could streamline routine farm management tasks, such as weight tracking, informing choices about selling or feeding and quickly identifying and addressing health concerns within the herd. This approach encourages improved management and care of livestock, enabling the further development of animals' genetic traits and behaviours, which may in turn increase profitability.

3. Enhanced traceability and disease management

Implementing EID alongside electronic reporting would bring significant advantages to controlling disease outbreaks and also safeguarding public health. The ability to scan EID tags and report animal movements electronically helps to minimise human errors that can happen with manual reading and recording. In the event of a disease outbreak, faster and more dependable cattle identification strengthens traceability for both animals and beef products, increasing the speed and accuracy of responses and boosting consumer protection and confidence.

Other Jurisdictions

The Welsh Government recently launched a public consultation in June 2025 to gather feedback on the proposed implementation of LF EID tags. Their proposal is to make EID mandatory for newborn calves from 2027 at the earliest, with no current plans to retag the existing herd. Implementation will begin only after the necessary legislative changes and IT system updates are completed in Wales. Likewise in England, it is expected that LF electronic identification will be made mandatory for newborn calves from January 2027.

The Scottish Government consulted on the introduction of bovine EID in April 2024. The majority of respondents were in favour of the use of electronic ear tags as an official means of identification of cattle (90%), as using the technology would encourage a more streamlined and innovative approach to farming. In February 2025 the Scottish government confirmed the rollout



of mandatory bovine EID using UHF technology. Scotland's preference for UHF technology relate to its ability to read IDs at a greater distance and more rapidly than LF. It is anticipated that this will be implemented by late 2026, starting with newborn cattle, with the remaining herd being considered for re-tagged at a later date.

In the Republic of Ireland, bovine EID is now well embedded using LF technology and has been a mandatory requirement for newborn cattle since July 2022. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) made a small subsidy available to farmers to purchase EID tags, however that scheme ended in 2024.

Ruminant Genetics Programme

The Department is working in partnership with Sustainable Ruminant Genetics to deliver the Bovine Genetics Project (BGP). The BGP plans to introduce genotyping of cattle in Northern Ireland from September 2026. Genotyping of livestock commonly involves the analysis of an ear tissue sample which is collected using a tissue sample-enabled ear tag, i.e. the same process which is used for the Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) Eradication Programme.

In the first phase of the Project, from September 2026, testing requirements will be rolled out to all breeding age cattle. As these cattle have already been tagged, a third tissue sampling tag will need to be applied to these animals in order to collect the tissue sample. From early 2027, the BGP plans to roll out to all cattle from birth. As samples collected under the BVD programme cannot be used for genotyping, it means that the two tags applied to newborn calves will need to be tissue sampling tags.

Aligning the potential rollout of bovine EID with the BGP plans would help prevent repeated changes to the cattle tagging system over several years, which would result in unnecessary costs for herd keepers, due to them holding tags that may become obsolete. By using the same official DAERA cattle ear tag, producers would be able to electronically identify their animals and simultaneously collect the tissue samples needed for genetic testing. Introducing both measures together would therefore be a practical approach, minimising disruption to the industry and streamlining the transition to new identification and tagging requirements.



Proposals

The Department is proposing to make it mandatory for all newborn calves to be tagged with a bovine EID tag from a set implementation date, expected to be late 2027. At least six months in advance of this date (in spring 2027), it is proposed that approved tag suppliers will be required to only supply all new bovine tag sets which contain an EID tag set. This will help facilitate keepers using up stocks of non EID tags.

For these animals the number programmed on the chip of an EID tag will be the same number printed on the tag or pair of tags and would be an official form of identification. This is known as WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get). Bovine EID tags can be read either visually or electronically as appropriate.

The implementation timescales will be determined following this consultation and guidance will be publicised well in advance to ensure keepers have sufficient time to plan.

As noted above, implementing bovine EID should reduce risks to human health and safety, both direct and indirect. Given the safer read distances, bovine EID could potentially reduce the need for physical handling of cattle, as data can be accessed electronically. Alongside this, it will enable the ability to improve herd management and disease control through its use with on farm management programmes.

Overall, bovine EID is seen as a valuable tool for modernising cattle identification and traceability that will enhance the safety and sustainability of the beef and dairy industries.

Question 1

Do you support the mandatory implementation of bovine EID for newborn calves in Northern Ireland?

In advance of mandatory implementation, from July 2026 the Department intends to allow bovine EID tags to be used by keepers on a voluntary basis. Therefore, should herd keepers wish to apply bovine EID tags sooner, they will be considered as an official means of identity from that date. The introduction of voluntary bovine EID is dependant on a minor legislative change being made as well as an upgrade to the NIFAIS database to incorporate and support bovine EID.

Initially taking a voluntary approach to the introduction of bovine EID will provide the industry with additional time to adapt, allowing producers to gradually transition to the new tags and invest in the required hardware and software. Early adopters, particularly businesses already using EID management tags, will also be able to demonstrate the benefits of the new technology to those more hesitant to invest in the associated technology.

Voluntary implementation of bovine EID will also facilitate alignment with the timelines proposed by the BGP. Making EID tags available from July 2026 will mean that when the BGP rolls out



tissue sampling tags for DNA testing of existing breeding animals (expected from September 2026) these tissue sampling tags could also include EID technology for those animals which are identified with 'XI' tags. This could result in a wider uptake of bovine EID tags to existing breeding stock than would otherwise be possible from an approach that focused on EID tags for newborn cattle. It will also mean that when the BGP rolls out tissue sampling to newborn calves (expected from January 2027), keepers will have the option to purchase tag sets which include EID in one of the two tissue sampling tags.

The Department is not intending to make bovine EID compulsory for the entire existing national cattle herd at this stage, as this would require re-tagging animals already identified with UK tags, which could have impacts on animal welfare and result in significant costs for the industry. UK prefixed tags are not suitable for EID, as the 12-digit number which starts with a '9' on UK tags cannot be programmed on LF EID tags.

Financial Implications of bovine EID

A move to implement bovine EID, would have a financial impact on operators. There is likely to be a cost increase associated with EID tags compared with the cost of conventional non-electronic tags. While an exact additional cost for bovine EID tags has not been confirmed by tag manufacturers, currently EID management tags in NI are around £1.50 to £2 more expensive than non-EID tags. If keepers wish to purchase devices to read EID tags, they are likely to cost from around £600 excluding VAT.

To operate EID effectively and to fully utilise the benefits the system offers, there may also be the requirement for the upgrade of management software and hardware, including IT training and infrastructure, such as handling equipment, for farms, markets, abattoirs, assembly and collection centres. However, where this technology is already in use for sheep EID, this may reduce the need for additional hardware and software in some cases, as the same LF technology is used for sheep EID.

For farmers with smaller herds who are not looking to invest in this new technology or are put off by the financial costs, EID tags will have the ID number printed on the tag which they can continue to be read visually in the same way that non-electronic tags are currently read. Therefore, there would be nothing to stop keepers reading and continuing to enter information manually. However, in doing so they will be faced with the addition cost of EID tags, without experiencing all the benefits.

It is broadly accepted that the full benefits of EID to the wider industry will, however, only be realised when a large proportion of the national herd are identified with EID tags. This is only likely to be achieved after a period of several years of mandatory use of EID for newborns.



Implementation Issues

To support the clear identification of cattle fitted with EID tags, the Department proposes to make EID tags a different colour from the current yellow approved ear tags, for example white. Therefore, if an animal has lost an ear tag, it would be obvious which tag was lost for the purposes of ordering a replacement. Also, it would immediately be apparent whether animals are electronically identified and ensure operators of EID readers point the reader at the correct ear to speed up reading and potentially reduce errors by inadvertently reading the wrong animal. This would particularly be important to streamline processes for farmers, markets, and abattoirs as following implementation of bovine EID, they will be dealing with both EID and non-EID identified animals for a number of years.

Depending on how the tags are printed, using different coloured tags could result in the tags being slightly more expensive. Currently all parts of a set of two tags are attached together and printed together. Using different coloured tags could mean the EID and non-EID tags of the set being printed separately. These separate tags would then need to be matched up and attached together after printing. Otherwise, there could be a risk of them being mixed up with other pairs of tags, and consequently animals having a different number applied in each ear.

The Department is also open to mandating the application of the EID tags to a particular ear of the animal. Doing so would ensure a consistent approach where, for example, the tag should only be applied to the animal's left ear. Taking such an approach could mean that fixed reading equipment could be located in an optimum position to read EID tags. This approach may be more important should EID and non-EID tags be the same colour.

Question 2:

Do you agree with the Department's proposed approach to the implementation of mandatory bovine EID?



Impact Assessments

Equality and Rural Needs Assessment

Equality and Rural Needs assessments have been carried out to consider potential impacts of the proposals within this consultation. We welcome any comments or views you may have in respect of our assessments; responses can be made through Citizens Space or by emailing FarmedAnimals.IRM@daera-ni.gov.uk. Copies of these assessments are available online at: www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/bEID

Regulatory Impact Assessment

A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) has been carried out to consider the potential impacts of the proposals. We welcome any comments or views you may have in respect of the RIA; responses can be made through Citizens Space or by emailing FarmedAnimals.IRM@daera-ni.gov.uk. A copy of the assessment is available online at: www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/bEID

Next Steps

Following the public consultation the Department will publish a response document outlining the proposed way forward. Subject to views of consultees, the Department will take the necessary steps to bring forward the required legislation to give effect to the proposal.



How to respond and when

Responses

You can respond to this consultation online by accessing the consultation at the following link:
www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/bEID

If you wish to respond in writing, you can request a copy of the written response template by e-mailing: FarmedAnimals.IRM@daera-ni.gov.uk

Written responses should be sent to: e-mail: FarmedAnimals.IRM@daera-ni.gov.uk

Postal address: Livestock Identification and Germinal Products Policy Branch,
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Jubilee House
111 Ballykelly Road
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When responding, please state whether you are doing so as an individual or representing the views of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, please make it clear who the organisation represents, and where applicable, how the views of its members were assembled.

Closing date

Responses should be submitted by **23 February 2026**.



Confidentiality

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, the Department in this case. This includes information provided in response to this consultation.

The Department will publish a synopsis of responses to the consultation. This will include a list of names of organisations that responded but not personal names, addresses or other contact details.

The Department cannot automatically consider information supplied to it in response to a consultation, to be confidential. However, it does have a responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to a consultation, including information about your identity, should be made public or be treated as confidential. If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public, please include an explanation in your response. Please be aware that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, except in very particular circumstances. Please note, if your computer automatically includes a confidentiality disclaimer, it won't count as a confidentiality request.

Should you respond in an individual capacity; the Department will process your personal data in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. This means that your personal information will not be disclosed to third parties should you request confidentiality.

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office (see its website at: www.ico.org.uk)



Appendix 1: List of Consultees

This consultation document has been sent to statutory consultees and the following organisations:

Aberdeen Angus Society	Crumlin Livestock Mart
ABP (Newry) Ltd	Dairy Council
Agri-Food & Biosciences Institute	Dairymaster
AI Services (artificial insemination)	Dale Farm
Albert J Jones	Dalton Tags
Allflex	Datamars
Animal Health & Welfare NI	Doherty & Gray
Armoy Livestock Mart	Downpatrick Co-op Marketing Ltd
Armstrong Meats	Draperstown Market
Association of Veterinary Surgeons Practising in NI	Dunbia
ATL software	Dungannon Farmers Market
Atlas Tek	Electromech
Ballymena Meats	Etherson Meats
Belfast Hills Farmer Group	European Angus Cattle Registration Company
Belfast Zoological Gardens	Eurostock Foods
British Veterinary Association	Fanevalley Stores
C & J Meats	Farmers for Action
Caisley Tags	FC Robinson
Camlough Livestock Market	Food Standards Agency (FSA)
Clogher Valley Livestock Mart	Forester-Technik
Countryside Alliance Ireland	Foyle Meats
Countryside Services	Fullwood
Cox Agri	GCD Tech
Cranswick Country Foods	GEA
Crossgar Meats	Hewitt Meats
Crossmaglen Livestock Sales	



Hilton Meats (Cookstown) Ltd
Holden Agriculture
Holstein/Holstein UK
Humane Slaughter Association
International Fund for Animal Welfare UK
JA McClelland & Sons
JFC Tuam
Joseph Walls
Karro Cookstown
Ketchums
Kettyle Irish Foods Ltd
Kilrea Livestock Mart
Lely robots
Linden Foods
Lisnaskea Livestock Sales
Livestock & Meat Commission for NI
Markethill Livestock and Farm Sales
MC Dairy Services
McKees Meats
Mid-Ulster Dairy Services
National Beef Association
National Milk Records
National Trust
NI Agricultural Producers Association
NI Beef Shorthorn Breeders Club
NI Blonde Club
NI Blue Cattle Club
NI Charolais Club
NI Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group
NI Food and Drink Association

NI Grain Trade Association
NI Hereford Breeders Association
NI Holstein Friesian Breeders Club
NI Limousin Cattle Club
NI Livestock Auctioneers Association
NI Meat Exporters Association
NI Shows Association
NI Veterinary Association
Northern Ireland Simmental Club
Omagh Auction Mart Ltd
Organic NI
P Traynor Quality Meats
Piedmontese Society
Plumbridge Livestock Market
Primestock Meats
Quicktag
Rathfriland Farmers Co-op Society
Retail NI
Ritchey
Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
Royal Ulster Agricultural Society
Ruminant Health and Welfare Group
Rural Action
Rural Support
Saintfield Livestock Mart
Salers Cattle Society
Shearwell
South Down Hill Farmers Association
The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives



Topping Meats
Ulster Ayrshire Breeders Club
Ulster Farmers' Union
Ulster Jersey Cattle Club
Vegetarian Economy & Green Agriculture
VSSCO
W D Meats Ltd
Waikato Milking Systems
Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster
Retail NI
Ritchey
Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
Royal Ulster Agricultural Society
Ruminant Health and Welfare Group
Rural Action
Rural Support
Saintfield Livestock Mart
Salers Cattle Society

Shearwell
South Down Hill Farmers Association
Sperrin and Bann Valley Mart
Sustainable Genetics Programme
The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives
Topping Meats
Ulster Ayrshire Breeders Club
Ulster Farmers Mart
Ulster Farmers' Union
Ulster Jersey Cattle Club
Vegetarian Economy & Green Agriculture
Volac
VSSCO
W D Meats Ltd
Waikato Milking Systems
Young Farmers Clubs of Ulster

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