

North South Ministerial Council
Joint Secretariat



An Chomhairle Aireachta
Thuaidh Theas
An Chomhrúnaíocht

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NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

SPECIAL EU PROGRAMMES MEETING

NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OFFICES, ARMAGH

10 MAY 2013

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The fifteenth North South Ministerial Council Special EU Programmes meeting was held at the NSMC Joint Secretariat offices Armagh on 10 May 2013. The meeting was attended by Sammy Wilson MP MLA, Minister for Finance and Personnel, Brendan Howlin TD, Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and OFMDFM Junior Minister Jennifer McCann MLA. Minister Wilson chaired the meeting.

PRESENTATION

2. Ministers received a presentation on the INTERREG IVA Project Irish Scottish Links on Energy Study (ISLES) which aimed to assess the practicality of creating an off shore electricity grid based on renewable energy. The project was awarded INTERREG IVA funding of €1,545,639/£1,286,135.
3. The feasibility study on the project concluded that an ISLES cross-jurisdictional offshore integrated network was economically viable, would be competitive under certain regulatory frameworks, and could therefore

potentially deliver a range of wider economic, environmental and market related benefits.

4. The project was awarded the 2010 European Structural Funds Best Practice Award for 'Best partnership working in the use of European Structural Funds'.

SPECIAL EU PROGRAMMES PROGRESS REPORT

5. The Council received a detailed progress report from the Chief Executive of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), Mr Pat Colgan, who reported on the various activities of the Body including progress on the implementation of the PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Programmes. Ministers noted that at the end of March 2013:
 - In the PEACE III Programme, 214 projects have received Letters of Offer worth €313.7m (£272.8m), representing a 94.2% commitment level. A further 4 projects valued at €20.9m (£18.2m) have been approved by Steering Committee and await issue of Letters of Offer. If all 4 projects are issued Letters of Offer the total commitment will be €334.73m (£291.1m) for 218 projects, representing a 100.5% commitment level. Total expenditure to date is €168.7m (£146.7m). The target for 2012 was achieved; and
 - In the INTERREG IVA Programme, 78 projects have received Letters of Offer at a value of €222.9m (£193.9m) which is a 87.09% commitment level. A further 7 projects totalling €32.34m (£28.1m) have been approved by Steering Committee and are either awaiting approval or are at Letter of Offer stage. If all 7 projects are issued Letters of Offer, a total of €255.3m (£222m) will be committed to 85 projects, representing a commitment level of 99.7%. Total expenditure to date is €108.3m (£94.2m). The target for 2012 was achieved.
6. Ministers noted that it is important that the last remaining projects in both programmes must be approved in a timely manner by the accountable departments to ensure the projects have the required time for implementation. This is particularly important for any large capital projects. In addition, Letters of Offer for successful projects must be issued in a timely manner. Any significant delay in approval or letter of offer, or indeed rejection of the outstanding applications, will have serious implications for Expenditure targets.
7. To date Cross Border Groups have had 35 Letters of Offer issued to the value of €54.9m (£47.7m) in the INTERREG IVA Programme. There are two final projects which have been approved and are awaiting Letters of Offer at a value of €20.5m (£17.8m);
8. The planning process for the new round of EU programmes 2014 – 2020 has commenced. An initial public consultation process was completed during 2012 and preparation for the programmes is progressing well.

9. The Council also noted the work taken forward by the SEUPB to facilitate North South participation in the INTERREG IV transnational and interregional programmes with 66 project partners in a total of 54 individual projects. The financial value of these projects is €10m (£8m).
10. The SEUPB also continues to communicate the positive impacts of the EU programmes. There were two major conferences in September and November 2012 to showcase both PEACE and INTERREG projects. In addition, SEUPB took part in a PEACE conference in Brussels organised by the EU Commission in January 2013.

FUTURE EU PROGRAMMES

11. Ministers were updated on the progress of preparation work for INTERREG V and PEACE IV and noted the intention to present the Operational Programmes to the Executive, the Irish Government and the Scottish Government (INTERREG V only) during 2013, with formal submission to the European Commission taking place following agreement of the relevant Governments.

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SEUPB

12. Ministers noted that the two Sponsor Departments have examined the governance arrangements within the Special EU Programmes Body and have agreed that the existing arrangements are comprehensive and multi-stranded and provide appropriate oversight for the Body.

NEXT MEETING

13. The Council agreed to hold its next Special EU Programmes meeting in November 2013.

**Joint Secretariat
10 May 2013**

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