

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

6 DECEMBER 2013

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The sixteenth North South Ministerial Council Special EU Programmes meeting was held at the NSMC Joint Secretariat offices Armagh on 6 December 2013. The meeting was attended by Brendan Howlin TD, Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Simon Hamilton MLA, Minister for Finance and Personnel and OFMDFM Junior Minister Jennifer McCann MLA. Minister Howlin chaired the meeting.

PRESENTATION

2. Ministers received a presentation on the INTERREG IVA Tellus Border (<http://www.tellusborder.eu/>) project which is a regional mapping project collecting geo-environmental data on soils, water and rocks across six border counties and continuing the analysis of existing data in Northern Ireland. The project is a cross-border initiative between the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland, the Geological Survey of Ireland, Queen's University Belfast and Dundalk Institute of Technology.

3. The project was granted £4m funding from INTERREG IVA Environment theme.

SPECIAL EU PROGRAMMES PROGRESS REPORT

4. 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 September 2013:
 - In the PEACE III Programme, 215 projects with a combined value of €310.9m (£265.8m) have been approved which represents a 93.4% commitment level. Of this, 214 projects have been issued with a Letter of Offer to the total value of €299.5m (£256.0m). The cumulative expenditure as of 30 September 2013 is €193.7m (£165.6m). The 2013 expenditure target has been achieved
 - In the INTERREG IVA Programme, there are now 86 approved projects with a combined value of €239.9m (£205.1m) representing a 93.7% commitment level. Cumulative expenditure as of 30 September 2013 is €124.3m (£106.3m). The 2013 expenditure target has not yet been achieved.
5. Ministers noted that it is important that efforts are made to ensure that all EU funding available for both PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Programmes is fully committed and spent.
6. To date Cross Border Groups have had 40 Letters of Offers with a total value of €61.8m (£52.8m).
7. The planning process for the new round of EU programmes 2014 – 2020 continues and preparation for the programmes is progressing. It is intended that the Operational Programme for PEACE and INTERREG will be presented to the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government by early 2014. Formal submission to the European Commission for agreement, will take place following public consultation and the agreement of both Governments. It is anticipated the programmes will be agreed in Autumn 2014.
8. 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 67 project partners with a financial value of €11m (£9m).
9. The SEUPB also continues to communicate the positive impacts of the EU programmes such as the International Peace Conference and International enterprise themed conference both held in Derry-Londonderry in May 2013.

FUTURE EU PROGRAMMES

10. Ministers were updated on the progress of the preparation work for the new EU Programmes for Cross Border Co-Operation (INTERREG V and PEACE IV) and noted that:
 - that EU regulations, which govern the Programmes were approved by the European Parliament on 20 November 2013 and approval of the regulations by the European Council is expected in the week beginning 16 December 2013;
 - In order to simplify the implementation of the new INTERREG Programme and open up new cross border opportunities ,both Member States have requested the EU Commission to amend the eligible area of the Programme to include Belfast;
 - the Member States are working to develop their national Partnership Agreements in conjunction with the EU Commission;
 - that it is intended that Operational Programmes for PEACE IV and INTERREG V will be presented to the Northern Ireland Executive, the Irish Government and the Scottish Government (INTERREG V only) by early 2014, following a formal consultation process, with submission to the European Commission taking place thereafter; and
 - The SEUPB is considering providing support to develop projects during 2014 in tandem with the Operational Programme approval process, therefore enabling programmes to become effective immediately upon approval of the Operational Programmes in late 2014.

STAFFING ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE SEUPB

11. A staffing review of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) has been completed and the draft report makes recommendations on SEUPB staffing for 2013 and 2014.
12. Ministers agreed that the SEUPB staff complement will reduce from 65 in 2012 to 60 in 2013 and to 57 in 2014 and that the SEUPB will explore other opportunities with the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, to gain additional efficiencies through implementation of the staffing review recommendations and the development and implementation of the new programmes.

SEUPB CORPORATE PLAN 2014-16 AND BUSINESS PLAN AND BUDGET 2014

13. The Ministers discussed the main priorities for the Special EU Programmes Body in 2014-16 which includes:

- effectively achieve the objectives of the PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Programmes, by providing guidance and support to the approved projects to enable them to maximise their contribution to society;
- ensure that funded projects are provided with support and guidance to enable their functioning in accordance with EU and Member State Regulatory Framework;
- ensure effective business processes for closure are implemented for the 2007-13 Programmes which will result in a maximisation of EU receipts for both Member States;
- enhance business performance of SEUPB and its staff through the implementation of effective and efficient administrative processes within a corporate governance framework designed to meet accountability requirements; and
- ensure the development of effective administrative structures and processes which will facilitate the implementation of future Programmes for the period 2014-2020, in accordance with the regulatory frameworks of the EU.

14. Ministers also noted the SEUPB draft 2014 Business Plan and recommended the provisional 2014 budget of :

Administration Costs:	£1.969m (€2.290m)
EU Programme Expenditure:	£117.089m (€136.150m)

SPECIAL EU PROGRAMMES ANNUAL REPORTS AND ACCOUNTS

15. The Council noted the Special EU Programmes Body Draft Annual Report and Draft Accounts for 2013.

ADDITIONAL MATTERS

NARROW WATER BRIDGE

16. Ministers remain supportive of the concept of the Narrow Water Bridge and have asked for an urgent analysis of the issues involved. They remain conscious that the priority is not to lose the EU funding involved.

FOOD SAFETY PROMOTION BOARD (SAFEFOOD) BUSINESS PLAN AND BUDGET 2013

17. Ministers approved Safefood's Business Plan 2013 and recommend the budget provision for 2013 of €8.5m.

BOARD MEMBERS FOR INTERTRADEIRELAND

18. Ministers approved the appointments of Professor Terri Scott and Ms Rosemary Delaney to the Board of the Trade and Business Development Body (InterTradeIreland) from 6 December 2013 to 12 December 2015.

NEXT MEETING

19. The Council agreed to hold its next Special EU Programmes meeting in May 2014.

Joint Secretariat

6 December 2013

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