

North South Ministerial Council
Joint Secretariat



An Chomhairle Aireachta
Thuaidh Theas
An Chomhrúnaíocht

NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

INLAND WATERWAYS MEETING

NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OFFICES, ARMAGH, AND BY VIDEOCONFERENCE

11 NOVEMBER 2020

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The twenty-fifth North South Ministerial Council Inland Waterways meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh, and by videoconference on 11 November 2020. The meeting was attended by Darragh O'Brien, TD, Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage; Malcolm Noonan, TD, Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform; Nichola Mallon, MLA, Minister for Infrastructure; and Robin Swann, MLA, Minister of Health. Minister O'Brien chaired the meeting.

RESPONSE TO COVID-19

2. Ministers noted the response of Waterways Ireland to the challenges posed by Covid-19. The Council was advised that there had been an increase in user numbers along towpaths and trails during the period of Covid-19 related restrictions and noted the role of Waterways Ireland in leading a user engagement project through the Network of Inland Waterways of Europe to achieve a greater understanding of the increased recreational use of inland waterways since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council also noted the increasing popularity of the inland waterways as a holiday destination for the domestic market.

IMPLICATIONS OF UK WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EU

3. The Council noted Waterways Ireland's preparations for the UK withdrawal from the EU in the context of its status as a North South Implementation Body.

PROGRESS REPORT

4. Ministers noted the comprehensive progress report provided by Waterways Ireland covering matters including the management and maintenance of waterways, capital expenditure projects and an ongoing programme of replacement of existing and installation of new jetties and lockgates along the navigations. Ministers also noted plans for blueways developments and restoration work on the Ulster Canal and that Waterways Ireland successfully hosted the World Canals Conference in Athlone in September 2018.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE MATTERS

5. The Council noted Waterways Ireland's Annual Report and Accounts for 2016, 2017 and 2018, which have been laid before the NI Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas. They also noted that Waterways Ireland's Annual Report and Draft Accounts for 2019 have been submitted to the Comptrollers and Auditors General in both jurisdictions and following certification will be laid before the Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas.
6. The Council approved Waterways Ireland's Corporate Plan for 2017-19 and associated Business Plans that were prepared in accordance with the guidance issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Department of Finance and recommended the budget provision for each.
7. Ministers noted that Waterways Ireland's 2020-22 Corporate Plan and 2020 and 2021 Business Plans have been prepared and, following necessary approvals, will be submitted to NSMC for approval before the end of 2020.

CEO RECRUITMENT PROCESS

8. Ministers noted the process for the recruitment of the Chief Executive Officer for Waterways Ireland.

PROPERTY DISPOSALS

9. The Council consented to a number of property disposals.

NEW DECADE, NEW APPROACH

10. Ministers received a progress report on the restoration of the Ulster Canal and the development of the Ulster Canal Greenway. The Council noted the progress achieved in the restoration of the Ulster Canal, including the completion of Phase 1 of the restoration from Upper Lough Erne to Castle Saunderson, the ongoing work and future plans for the restoration from Clones to Clonfad and the development of the Ulster Canal Greenway.

NEXT MEETING

11. The Council agreed to hold its next NSMC Inland Waterways meeting early in 2021.

**Joint Secretariat
11 November 2020**

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