

North South Ministerial Council
Joint Secretariat



An Chomhairle Aireachta
Thuaidh Theas
An Chomhrúnaíocht

NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT MEETING

NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OFFICES, ARMAGH AND BY VIDEOCONFERENCE

21 OCTOBER 2020

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The twenty-third North South Ministerial Council Environment meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh and by videoconference on 21 October 2020. The meeting was attended by Edwin Poots, MLA, Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Declan Kearney, MLA, Junior Minister, The Executive Office, Eamon Ryan TD, Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications and Darragh O'Brien, TD, Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Minister Poots chaired the meeting.

IMPLICATIONS OF UK WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EU

2. The Council noted the work being carried out to prepare for the end of the Transition Period and the need for continued cooperation in environmental matters, including those of a cross-border nature. Ministers agreed to continue to cooperate on environmental issues in the coming months. They recognise that it is in the common interest of both jurisdictions to work together to minimise disruption to trade and economic activity on the island.

UPDATE ON EU FUNDING

3. Ministers welcomed the continuing cooperation on, and drawdown for, the main sources of EU Funding in the Environment Sector – INTERREG VA, LIFE and

Horizon 2020, including successful delivery of Northern Ireland and Ireland partnership projects, and ongoing collaboration through joint meetings, training and information events.

4. They noted that under the INTERREG VA Environment Objective, nine cross border projects have been awarded funding totalling c €89 million in the 2014-2020 programme period and collaboration is ongoing to maximise drawdown of the available EU monies and continue to implement the programmes as agreed.
5. Ministers noted the commitment to funding INTERREG VA after the UK withdraws from the EU, allowing the projects to be continued until their conclusion in 2023 and that under Horizon 2020 Societal Challenge 5 (SC5), two North-South collaborations on low temperature anaerobic digestion treatment of low strength wastewaters and photo-irradiation and adsorption based novel Innovations for waste treatment were successful and contributed to the drawdown figures, with €2.5 million being shared by 5 organisations in Ireland and €0.55 million shared between two organisations in Northern Ireland.
6. The Council noted that benefits for joint environmental priorities from a small number of LIFE projects have been achieved through ongoing collaboration between government departments, agencies and their partnerships operating in both jurisdictions.
7. Ministers also noted the potential to build on the success of the INTERREG projects through access to the new PEACE Plus programme 2021-2027 and its environment policy objective of achieving a greener, low carbon Europe.
8. Ministers noted the ongoing collaboration between officials in both jurisdictions and submission of joint position papers focusing on a range of holistic clean air, water catchment and nature-based solutions to address future pressures from climate change, support sustainable economic recovery and protect the environment to inform emerging PEACE Plus themes.

REVIEW OF PRIORITIES AND WORK PROGRAMME

9. The NSMC noted that the Work Programme will be kept under review at future NSMC Environment Sector meetings having regard in particular to matters arising from the outcome of the UK Referendum on EU membership.
10. Ministers agreed that within the Work Programme, consideration should continue to be given to opportunities for co-operation on wider environmental issues; such as
 - sustainable development,
 - encouraging cooperation and knowledge sharing in relation to the environmental impact of agricultural activities and related issues,
 - co-operation and exchange information on marine/bathing/shellfish waters,

- co-operation and collaboration on water and urban waste water services areas including implementation of EU measures,
- the promotion of a circular economy,
- a joint programme of enforcement and collaboration on tackling environmental crime, and
- co-operation with a view to maximising drawdown of EU funding.

11. They also agreed the proposed updated work programme.

CROSS BORDER WASTE MANAGEMENT

12. The NSMC noted that both Environment Ministers are continuing to work together and target resources into joint enforcement action against those involved in illegal waste activity including the continued exchange of intelligence and information on problem areas with the continuation of co-ordinated joint inspections.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

13. Ministers noted the efforts of both administrations to increase the quantity and quality of recycling including the publication on 4 September 2020 of Ireland's National Waste Policy 2020-2025 'A Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy' and the publication of the new Northern Ireland Waste Prevention Programme- 'Stopping Waste in its Tracks' and the associated actions and successes.

14. They also noted the ongoing work in Northern Ireland to tackle plastic pollution and the success of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) schemes in Ireland and the opportunities for both administrations to share examples of good practice in this area.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, REPORTING AND RESEARCH

15. The NSMC welcomed the work being undertaken in both jurisdictions to further a clean air strategy and the collaboration between officials working together to identify cross-border research opportunities and to develop proposals.

WATER QUALITY

16. Ministers noted the publication of the second-cycle River Basin Management Plan for Ireland in April 2018 and welcomed the ongoing preparation of the third-cycle River Basin Management Plans in both Ireland and Northern Ireland.

17. They noted that the public consultation on 'Significant Water Management Issues' (SWMI) closed in Northern Ireland on 22 June 2020 and in Ireland on 7 August 2020.

18. They acknowledged the continued support for the Rivers Trusts in cross border areas and welcomed the level of beach awards in both jurisdictions for 2020 and the continued coordination on the Clean Coast and Coastcare Schemes.

19. Ministers acknowledged the engagement of both administrations on the work of the Advisory Group for Ireland's Marine Protected Areas, the final report of which is expected shortly and noted the continued engagement between the Department for Infrastructure, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Irish Water and Northern Ireland Water on exploring opportunities for cooperation including applications to access the funding under the EU's new PEACE Plus programme.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

20. The NSMC agreed to hold its next Environment meeting early in 2021.

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

21. Ministers agreed the Joint Communiqué.

**Joint Secretariat
21 October 2020**