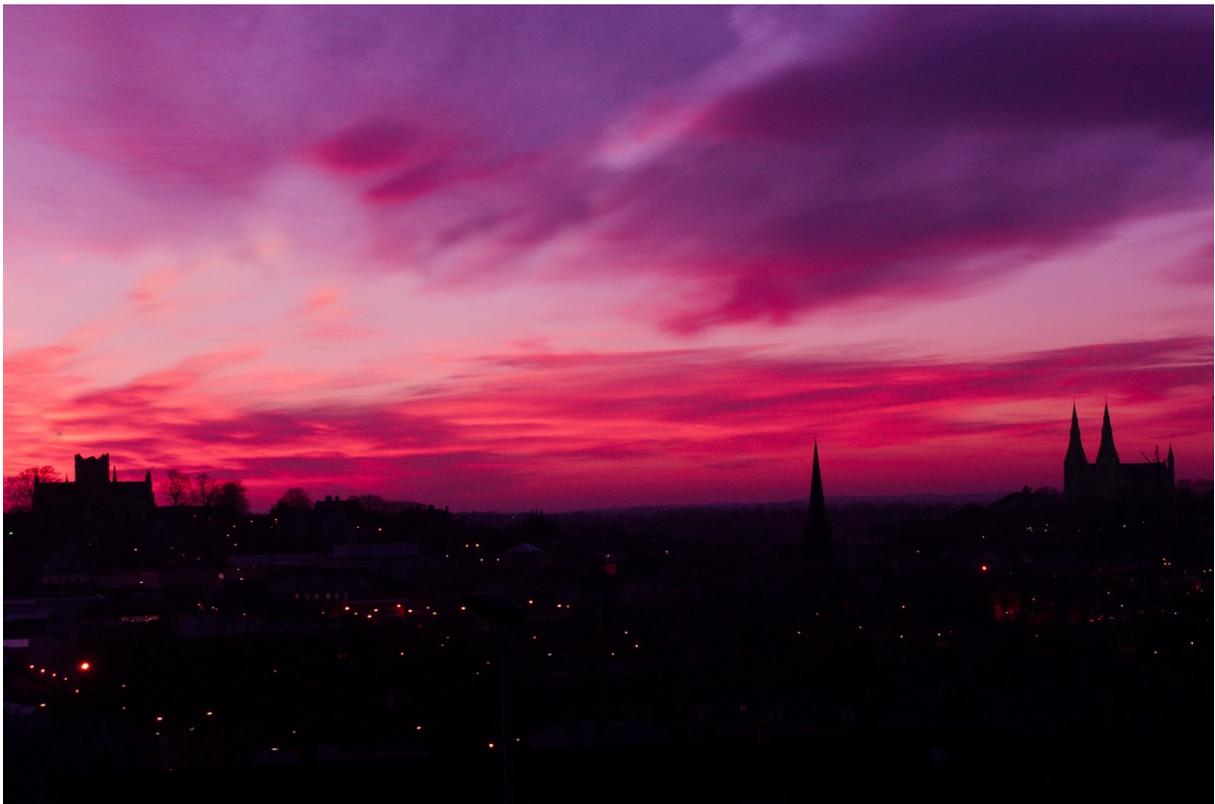


NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL 2015 ANNUAL REPORT



North South Ministerial Council
An Chomhairle Aireacht;
Thuaidh Theas

Front Cover: Armagh City skyline

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FOREWORD

A key theme of NSMC meetings in 2015 was the continuing focus on economic growth and job creation.

In its work the Council continues to recognise the strong value of co-operation for mutual benefit. During the year there was real progress in a number of key areas. In particular, the Council welcomed the progress with the construction of the new Radiotherapy Unit at Altnagelvin. Health has always been an important area of co-operation. When it opens in 2016 the new £66.1m unit will deliver real improvements in health services for people in the North West, on both sides of the border. Also, it will represent a tangible benefit of the cooperation between both governments.

Infrastructure improvements are also an important outcome of good co-operation. At the end of the year the Council welcomed the refurbishment of the Belfast to Dublin Enterprise Service and the improvements to the Boyne Viaduct. Funded by the EU INTERREG Programme, the work represents a significant investment in the transport corridor between Dublin and Belfast.

The Council also welcomed the commencement of work on the 2.5km stretch of the Ulster Canal between Lough Erne and the International Scout Centre at Castle Sanderson on the Cavan-Fermanagh border. The growth of water based tourism has delivered real value, particularly in rural communities. Once completed in 2017, the improvement to this stretch of the canal will be a welcome boost to the economy in the Cavan -Fermanagh border area.

The investment in our railways, the new Radiotherapy Centre at Altnagelvin and the work on the Ulster Canal are just some examples of the work being taken forward by North/South bodies and by the Departments through the agreed areas of co-operation. The work of the Bodies and Departments remains focused on the Council's agenda to prioritise efforts on economic recovery, job creation, and the best use of public funds and the most effective delivery of services for our citizens. The Fresh Start Agreement, agreed at the end of the year, also provides for an opportunity to review North/South infrastructure projects and a report on this will be considered by the Council in 2016.

European funding remained an important agenda item for Ministers during 2015. At the end of the year the Council welcomed the approval of the new INTERREG V and PEACE IV Programmes. Combined both programmes represent an investment of €550m over the next seven years.

During the year Pat Colgan retired as Chief Executive of the SEUPB. In his eleven years as Chief Executive Pat made an invaluable contribution to North/South Co-operation. We wish Pat well in his retirement and Gina McIntyre, his successor as Chief Executive, every success in her new appointment.

Finally we would like to thank officials in the departments of the Irish Government and Northern Ireland Executive, the North/South bodies, the agencies that support our work and, in particular our colleagues in the Secretariat, for their support and co-operation during 2015.



Colm Shannon
Joint Secretary (North)



Shane O'Neill
Joint Secretary (South)

CHAPTER ONE

NSMC PLENARY MEETINGS

NSMC Plenary meetings involve Northern Ireland Executive Ministers meeting with their counterparts in the Irish Government to take an overview of co-operation on the island and of the North South institutions. There were two NSMC Plenary meetings in 2015, the first on 5 June in Dublin Castle and the second on 11 December at the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices in Armagh.



The NSMC Plenary in Dublin Castle, 5 June 2015

On both occasions the Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD. At the June meeting the Northern Ireland Executive delegation was led by Finance Minister, Arlene Foster MLA, and the deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness MLA. At the December meeting the Northern Ireland Executive delegation was led by the First Minister, the Rt Hon Peter Robinson MLA, and the deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness MLA.

The Joint Communiqués issued after both meetings are available at www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org.

Financial and Economic Matters

Both meetings opened with a wide discussion on the financial and economic performance of both jurisdictions. The Council welcomed the positive signs within each economy whilst recognising that challenges remain. Actions being taken forward within each jurisdiction to promote economic growth, business supports and job creation were discussed. The importance of tourism, trade and support to companies to access overseas markets were recognised.

Sectoral Priorities/Review of Work Programmes

At both meetings the Council noted the position on Sectoral Priorities and the ongoing review of Work Programmes across the six areas of co-operation. It was agreed that this topic would be kept under active review.



Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD, First Minister Rt Hon Peter Robinson MLA and deputy First Minister McGuinness MLA at presentation to outgoing First Minister Robinson at his last NSMC Plenary in Armagh on 11 December 2015

EU Matters/ EU Funding Opportunities

At both meetings, Ministers discussed the various opportunities for collaboration to maximise drawdown of EU funds and reports outlining the various opportunities identified were considered. The Council agreed to continue with this important work throughout the next round of sectoral meetings.

The EU's Horizon 2020 Programme was also discussed and the Council noted the progress being made towards meeting the joint cross-border target of €175 million for drawdown under this Programme. The work of InterTradeIreland and the All Island Steering Group in raising awareness of the Programme was recognised.

The status of the new INTERREG V and PEACE IV Programmes was also discussed at the December Plenary meeting. The Council welcomed the fact that both Programmes had been adopted by the European Commission and that the INTERREG V Programme had opened for funding calls.

Cross Border Smuggling and Fuel Laundering

At the June meeting the Council had a discussion on cross-border smuggling and fuel laundering. Ministers noted the ongoing efforts by both jurisdictions to tackle these serious

problems and in particular noted the introduction of a new fuel marker to combat fuel laundering on both sides of the border.

The Council recognised the importance of close co-operation between law enforcement agencies from both jurisdictions in tackling these criminal activities and agreed to re-visit this topic at a future meeting.

Boards of the North South Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland Ltd

At the December meeting the Council approved the appointment of Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons and members to the Boards of the North South Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland Ltd. Ministers expressed their appreciation for the work of outgoing Board members.

Joint Secretaries' Progress Report

At both Plenary meetings the Council considered a report prepared by the NSMC Joint Secretaries on the work taken forward by the North South Bodies and in the other NSMC Areas of Co-operation.

The Progress Report contained summaries of key discussions from each NSMC meeting that had taken place since the previous Plenary.

At the June meeting the Council noted that a very successful information sharing and networking event on Greenways and Blueways had been hosted by the Joint Secretariat on 30 April 2015.

At the December meeting the Council was advised that the process of finalising 2016 Business Plans and Budgets for the North South Bodies was underway and that these final Business Plans would be presented to NSMC at the next opportunity.

North West Gateway Initiative

The North West Gateway Initiative was discussed at both Plenary meetings. The Council noted the ongoing engagement between officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister with stakeholders in the region.

The Council also noted the work by Donegal County Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council to develop a collaborative framework aimed at placing cross-border co-operation on a more formal basis within local government structures.

At the December meeting the commitment by the Irish Government to provide €2.5m to a North West Development Fund to support the initiative and the Executive's commitment to provide match funding, as contained in the fresh Start Agreement, were welcomed

The Council was also advised that the Irish Government and Northern Ireland Executive remained committed to a meeting of Ministers in the North West.

North South Consultative Forum

The current position of the North South Consultative Forum was discussed at both Plenary meetings.

CHAPTER TWO

NSMC INSTITUTIONAL MEETINGS

NSMC Institutional meetings involve the Northern Ireland Executive represented by the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Irish Government represented by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. At these meetings, institutional and cross-sectoral issues are considered.

The NSMC met in Institutional format on 25 February 2015 in Stormont Castle, Belfast. The First Minister the Rt Hon Peter Robinson MLA, deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness MLA, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Charlie Flanagan TD and Minister of State for Development, Trade Promotion and North-South Co-Operation, Seán Sherlock TD attended the meeting. A copy of the Joint Communiqué that issued after the meeting is available at <http://www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org>.

Ministers discussed a range of issues including the economic outlook for both economies. The importance of connectivity in encouraging economic growth was particularly highlighted.



First Minister Rt Hon Peter Robinson MLA, Minister Charlie Flanagan TD, Minister of State Seán Sherlock TD, and deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness launching the NSMC 2014 Annual Report at the NSMC Institutional Meeting in Stormont Castle in February 2015.

Sectoral Priorities/St Andrews Agreement

In line with the Stormont House Agreement of December 2014, Ministers noted a report presented on New Sectoral Priorities. Ministerial discussions at sectoral level had focussed on areas of mutual benefit including economic recovery, job creation and improving service delivery. It was agreed that Ministers would be asked to formally review the work

programmes in their respective sectors and that an update paper on these discussions would be brought to the June 2015 Plenary meeting. It was also agreed that a paper would be brought to a future Institutional meeting on longer term sectoral priorities and that 'New Sectoral Priorities' would be a standing agenda item at future NSMC Institutional Meetings.

EU Matters

Ministers noted discussions which had taken place across all NSMC sectors on exploring opportunities for collaboration to maximise drawdown of EU funds, particularly from competitive EU funding streams. Ministers agreed that these discussions on pursuing opportunities in order to maximise the drawdown of EU funds should continue. Ministers noted that a joint target of €175 million has been set for drawdown under the EU Horizon 2020 Programme.

North South Bodies Issues

The Council discussed a range of matters relating to the North South Bodies, including progress in respect of their 2015 Business Plans which would deliver the agreed efficiency savings of 8% compared to the 2013 budget. Ministers noted that the Boards of the Bodies are fully operational, and that there had been staffing changes at a senior level across a number of Bodies. Ministers agreed an amendment to the North/South Pension Scheme and noted that the Scheme was in the process of being reformed.

The Council also noted that the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform were taking forward a joint review of the Bodies' Financial Memoranda and that the outcome of the review would be brought to a future NSMC meeting.

Ministers noted that the terms of appointment for some board members of North South Bodies were due to expire in the year and considered a proposal on the terms of appointment for new and existing board members. It was agreed that the Joint Secretariat should investigate this proposal and that a paper on board member appointments would be brought to the next NSMC Plenary meeting.

North West Gateway Initiative

The Council noted that following engagement with key stakeholders in the region on the future direction of the North West Gateway Initiative, officials had consulted with relevant government departments. Ministers also noted developments in relation to local government in the North West, and agreed that a meeting of relevant Ministers should be held in the North West, in line with a commitment in the Stormont House Agreement.

NSMC Annual Report 2014

The Council noted the NSMC Annual Report for 2014 which would be published before the end of March 2015.

CHAPTER THREE

NSMC MEETINGS IN SECTORAL FORMAT

The North South Ministerial Council meets in Sectoral Format to oversee co-operation in the agreed 12 Areas of Co-operation or Sectors. In six of these Sectors, co-operation is taken forward by means of the North South Implementation Bodies and in the six Areas of Co-operation by means of existing mechanisms in each jurisdiction separately, generally through appropriate Government Departments or Agencies.

The six Areas of Co-operation are Agriculture, Education, Environment, Health, Tourism (including Tourism Ireland) and Transport.

The six North South Implementation Bodies comprise Waterways Ireland, Food Safety Promotion Board, Trade and Business Development Body, Special European Union Programmes Body, The Language Body and the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission.

At these Sectoral meetings of the NSMC, the Irish Government is represented by the Minister or the Minister of State responsible for that Sector, and the Northern Ireland Executive is represented by two Ministers, one normally being the Minister with responsibility for that Sector within the Executive and the other nominated by the First Minister and deputy First Minister on a cross-community basis.

The Joint Communiqués from these meetings are available at www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org

There follows a summary of NSMC meetings in Sectoral format which were held throughout 2015 and further details on the North South Bodies can be found in Annex 3.

AGRICULTURE



An NSMC Agriculture meeting took place on 25 February in Armagh and was attended by Simon Coveney TD, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM); Ann Phelan TD, Minister of State, Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG); Michelle O’Neill MLA, Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and Jim Wells MLA, Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety.

EU Funding Opportunities

The Council discussed the opportunities that exist for the Agriculture sector under the various EU funding streams and welcomed the ongoing collaboration and co-operation in this area. It was agreed that every effort should be made to maximise the drawdown from these funds where it is mutually beneficial to do so.

Common Agriculture Policy (CAP)

Ministers noted the recent developments in plans for implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy reforms agreed in 2013, including administrative measures for Direct Payment Schemes and welcomed the ongoing co-operation between DAFM and DARD.

Co-operation on Animal Health

The Council welcomed the continuing work on the delivery of the All-Island Animal Health & Welfare Strategy Action Plan and noted:

- The ongoing high level of co-operation between both jurisdictions as demonstrated by participation in:
 - a successful and useful epizootic disease contingency planning exercise dealing with African Swine Fever in November 2014; and
 - a whole-house gassing exercise undertaken in October 2014.

- Parallel applications to the OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) for Classical Swine Fever disease-free status.
- The introduction of a Common Chapter in the event of an outbreak of African Horse Sickness on the island.
- Progress made by DARD in relation to the submission of an application to the Commission seeking that Northern Ireland be granted “Officially Brucellosis Free” status.

Co-operation on Plant Health and Pesticides

The Council noted that the DARD/DAFM Plant Health Sub Group had commissioned a scientific appraisal of further actions to implement the policy to eradicate and contain ash dieback in both jurisdictions. The Group concluded that the eradication of ash dieback was still possible and it recommended a continued programme of surveillance and eradication.

The Council also noted that the EU Standing Committee of Plants, Animals, Food and Feed (SCoPAFF), Plant Health Section had met on the 19-20 January 2015 with the UK and Ireland. At this meeting agreement was secured from Member States and the Commission that national measures to address ash dieback should remain in place for 2015 whilst efforts continue to eradicate the disease.

Rural Development

Ministers agreed that in addition to the planned proactive support by DARD and DECLG for LEADER Co-operation activities - including the provision of appropriate staff resources - there should also be a focus on wider opportunities for accessing support from other EU Funding programmes (non-European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development).

They also agreed the provision of funding for 2015/16 to support the further development and promotion of Social Farming. Ministers also welcomed the continued ongoing co-operation of officials in the development of rural recreation opportunities and in closing respective current Rural Development Programmes, in preparation for the 2014-2020 Programmes.

EDUCATION

NSMC Education meetings took place on 25 March and 11 December in Armagh. John O’Dowd, MLA, Minister for Education, Jan O’Sullivan, TD, Minister for Education and Skills and Mervyn Storey, MLA, Minister for Social Development, attended the March meeting. Damien English, TD, Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills, John O’Dowd, MLA, Minister for Education and Michelle McIlveen, MLA, Minister for Regional Development attended the December meeting.



Education Ministers O’Sullivan and O’Dowd meet with staff at the Middletown Centre for Autism

Review of Work Programme

The Council welcomed the results of a review of the Education Sector North/South work programme, carried out by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the Department of Education (DE) at a joint workshop held in June 2015, which confirmed the validity and relevance of the current work programme. Ministers noted that officials had agreed actions to further develop joint working and co-operation.

EU Funding Opportunities

Ministers noted the ongoing co-operation between the Education Departments on funding opportunities within the Shared Education theme of the Peace IV Programme.

Ministers also welcomed the on-going collaboration and engagement of the National Agencies in both jurisdictions in exploring the potential for collaboration on the EU’s ERASMUS+ programme.

Education Underachievement

Ministers agreed to commission, through a competitive tendering process, external expertise covering experiences in both jurisdictions in relation to addressing educational

underachievement. The commission will cover an 18 month period from date of award of contract to final report to the Departments.

Co-operation between Inspectorates

At the March meeting, Ministers received a joint presentation covering the main conclusions from the continuing work of the Inspectorates on Literacy and Numeracy. Two North/South Inspectorate reports on good practice in literacy and numeracy were subsequently published in May 2015 and disseminated to practitioners.

Ministers welcomed the continuing collaborative work of the Inspectorates covering:

- the ongoing programme of inspection exchanges, joint working on inspections and co-operation between management of both Inspectorates; and
- the quality assurance carried out by the DES Inspectorate of the Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI) review of the outcomes of its programme: 'Promoting Improvement in English and Mathematics'; and
- capacity-building for ETI inspection of Irish-medium education; and
- the ETI's assistance with the DES Inspectorate's development of expertise in pre-school/early years inspections.

Special Education Needs

Ministers noted the progress being made by the two Departments and the Middletown Centre for Autism in facilitating the expansion of the Centre's range of services which was completed in March 2015. They also noted the plans for the Centre to continue to deliver a similar range of services in each jurisdiction in 2015-16 as was delivered the previous year. Ministers also noted that Departments are making arrangements for a follow-up inspection of the Centre, to be carried out during 2016.

Ministers also visited the Centre to add their support to ensuring the Centre continues to play an important role in the support provided to children with autism, their parents and education professionals.

The Centre hosted a major international conference in 2015 on the theme of 'Enabling Education' targeted towards professional staff and parents of children with autism. The event, which was opened by Ministers O'Sullivan and O'Dowd, was attended by in excess of one thousand delegates and featured a range of eminent speakers from across the globe.

The Education Departments, North and South, are continuing to share information and experiences across the broader Special Education Needs agenda.

Teacher Mobility

Ministers welcomed the on-going co-operation between the Teaching Councils in both jurisdictions on measures to reduce obstacles to the mobility of teachers. This includes the waiving of fees for the assessment of qualifications of teachers accredited by the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland and the simplification of the process for applying for teaching posts in the South.

The Education Departments have asked the Teaching Councils to provide a qualitative assessment covering any remaining issues impacting on teacher mobility. This will include the impact of the introduction of the 2 year Postgraduate Certificate in Education in the South and the impact of the European Directive 2005/36/EC. The Directive provides for the mutual recognition of professional qualifications between member states across a range of professions including teaching.

Irish Language Requirement

A joint proposal received from St Mary's University College, Belfast and Marino College, Dublin, to support access to the Scrúdú le hAghaidh Cáilíochta sa Ghaeilge (Irish Language Requirement) by applicants from Northern Ireland is under consideration by both Education Departments.

North/South Project: History and Digital Storytelling

The continuing commitment to a cross border professional learning collaboration between the Professional Development Service for Teachers and Curriculum Advisory and Support Service was welcomed by Ministers. Their joint project, which began in late 2015, involves the cross curricular use of Digital Storytelling in a small number of schools from both jurisdictions using History as a basis for promoting the skills of storytelling and chronology.

Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS)

Both Education Ministers officiated at the 13th Annual SCoTENS Conference on the theme of 'Teacher Education and Social Justice' that took place in Limerick in October 2015.

School, Youth and Teacher Exchanges

Ministers noted the ongoing activities of the North South Education and Training Standards Committee for Youth Work. The Council welcomed the on-going involvement of the National Youth Council of Ireland and the Youth Council of Northern Ireland in the group which was established and supported by funding from an ERASMUS+ programme in order to optimise ICT for effective youth work.

ENVIRONMENT



Environment Ministers Durkan and Kelly at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris in December 2015

An NSMC Environment meeting was held on 13 May in Armagh. Mark H Durkan MLA, Minister of the Environment, Danny Kennedy MLA, Minister for Regional Development and Ann Phelan TD, Minister of State at the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) attended the meeting.

Review of Work Programme

Ministers had a discussion on the review of the agreed NSMC Work Programme for the Environment Sector. They agreed that an update paper on the matter will be brought to the next NSMC Environment meeting.

EU Funding Opportunities

Ministers noted that a joint €72m INTERREG VA bid covering the terrestrial, freshwater and marine environment had been adopted by the EU Commission. This bid involved relevant Departments from both jurisdictions.

The Council noted that the official launch of the Northern Ireland (NI) EU Horizon 2020 Strategy took place on 31 March 2015 at the EU Commission Offices in Belfast.

The Council also noted that the Commission was expected to announce EU LIFE 2015 calls on 1 June 2015 and that potential applicants from both jurisdictions had attended the EU LIFE application writing training course that was held in the Customs House in Dublin.

The Council noted that it was proposed to hold cross-border road show events on the EU's Horizon 2020 'Societal Challenge 5' at the end of May 2015.

Environmental Protection, Reporting, and Research

Ministers noted that the first stage of the air quality research study into the issue of airborne pollution from residential fuel combustion, in particular, smoky coal had been completed and that the key findings had been noted. The interim report was then subject to consultation with a group of stakeholders and will inform the next phase of the study.

Ministers noted the establishment across both jurisdictions of a collaborative evidence programme known as 'ShARE'. This programme will enable stakeholders to deliver evidence to underpin their activities as regulators, thus deriving maximum benefit from the funding and resources invested.

The Council noted that the all island research project into the Environmental Impacts of Unconventional Gas Exploration & Extraction (UGEE-fracking) is ongoing.

Waste Management

On 19 January 2015, the DOE (NI) carrier bag levy was extended to low cost reusable carrier bags. It was noted by the Council that the DOE (NI) consultation on a Quality Action Plan for Recycling closed on 6 March.

Ministers welcomed the introduction on 22 January of the Food Waste (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2015 which will restrict the amount of food waste going to landfill sites.

Ministers noted the proposed reform of waste enforcement in Ireland and the proposal to establish three lead authorities for waste enforcement. They also noted proposed regulatory changes to be introduced by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) to provide for regulatory controls on 'Type 8' plants and the successful co-existence of these and composting plants within the overall waste treatment infrastructure in Ireland.

The Council also noted that the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government intended to introduce a full Producer Responsibility Initiative (PRI) for tyres and waste tyres. DOE officials continue to attend the DECLG Tyres Working Group and the Council noted that this will assist in assessing the desirability and feasibility of introducing a PRI scheme for waste tyres in Northern Ireland.

Cross Border Movements of Waste

The Council noted that DECLG and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) had agreed to excavate two illegal waste landfill sites under the Repatriation Programme during 2015.

It was also reported that the Environment Ministers and their Departments were continuing to target resources into joint enforcement action against illegal operators, including the exchanging of intelligence and information on problem areas and the carrying out of co-ordinated inspections.

Ministers again expressed concern at the impact of fuel laundering and stressed the importance of closer co-operation between agencies to tackle the issue. They agreed that

relevant officials would provide an overview of the issues at a future NSMC Environment meeting.

Water Quality

In relation to River Basin Management Plans (RBMP), the Ministers welcomed the publication in Northern Ireland of the consultation documents on the new draft RBMPs (2015-2021) and they noted that in Ireland the consultation period in relation to the Timetable and Work Programme for the development of the Second Cycle RBMP had closed on 31 January and that the responses received were being considered.

Ministers welcomed the continued cross border collaborative work on development of the River Trusts, including the provision of funding by Ireland to the River Trusts organisation in Northern Ireland which would assist with the development of River Trusts in Ireland.

The Council noted the support given in principle by DECLG to a DOE proposal to seek INTERREG funding for a cross border pilot initiative to provide electronic signs that would give “real time” data on bathing water quality in certain designated bathing areas.

The Council also noted that there had been initial engagement between the Department for Regional Development and DECLG to discuss areas within the water sector which offers an opportunity for mutual co-operation.

The continued co-ordination on the ‘Clean Coast and Coastcare Schemes’ was welcomed by the Ministers.

HEALTH



Health Ministers Varadkar and Wells inspect progress at the new Radiotherapy Unit at Altnagelvin

An NSMC Health meeting was held at Altnagelvin Area Hospital on 15 April. Jim Wells MLA, then Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Leo Varadkar TD, Minister of Health and Michelle O'Neill MLA, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development attended the meeting.

Review of Work Programme

Ministers had a discussion on the review of work programmes for the Health Sector and noted that an update paper on the review will be brought to the next Health and Food Safety sectoral meeting.

Cancer and Health Research Co-operation

Ministers welcomed the opportunity to visit Altnagelvin Area Hospital to discuss co-operation in health care. Representatives from the Western Health and Social Care Trust gave a presentation on the development of the Radiotherapy Unit at Altnagelvin. The Ministers were advised that construction of the Unit was on target for completion within the agreed timeframe, with the operational date for the Unit being Autumn 2016. After the meeting, Ministers had the opportunity to view the construction underway on the Unit.

Ministers welcomed the continued progress of the Ireland - Northern Ireland - National Cancer Institute Cancer Consortium and looked forward to the Consortium Conference which was being held in Belfast on 10-13 May. They also noted the ongoing work of the US-Ireland R&D Partnership.

Ministers welcomed the update on the ongoing work of the *All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care (AIIHPC)*.

Health Promotion

Ministers discussed a range of health promotion issues. They noted the progress on strategies to prevent harm related to alcohol misuse in both jurisdictions including the work of the *North/South Alcohol Policy Advisory Group* and the *North/South Hidden Harm Group* facilitated by Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT).

The Council noted that decisions on the introduction of Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) for alcohol had been announced in both jurisdictions. Ministers agreed to work together, as far as possible, to ensure a coordinated approach to MUP in terms of timing and appropriate MUP levels in order to ensure that health impacts would be maximized and the impact on cross-border trade minimized.

The Ministers discussed Tobacco policy measures in both jurisdictions. It was noted that legislation to introduce standardised packaging of tobacco products had been enacted in Ireland and the United Kingdom with the provisions due to come into force in May 2016.

Ministers also welcomed the developments on the control of rare diseases and the plans to establish mechanisms for future collaboration.

Suicide Prevention

An update was given on the development of the two new suicide prevention strategies and on all-island actions on suicide prevention. The Ministers undertook to work more closely together on this important issue.

The Ministers were pleased to note that the Self Harm Registry, which has an all-island basis, has been commended by the World Health Organisation and is now an internationally recognized model of best practice.

Child Protection

Ministers noted that the work programme agreed at a previous NSMC meeting continues to be progressed by the cross-border Steering Group of officials. This Group (co-chaired by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs) had most recently met on 1 April. Ministers noted that progress on work undertaken on the work programme would be reported at future NSMC meetings.

TOURISM



Tourism Ireland Chair Brian Ambrose, Ministers Donohoe, Ni Chuíln and Bell with Tourism Ireland CEO Niall Gibbons at the NSMC Tourism meeting in Armagh in December 2015

Two NSMC Tourism meetings took place in Armagh in 2015. The first meeting on 5 March was attended by Minister Paschal Donohoe TD, Minister Arlene Foster MLA, Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, and Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure. At the second meeting on 2 December, Ministers Donohoe and Ní Chuilín and newly appointed Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment Jonathan Bell MLA attended.

At both meetings, Ministers were updated on the work of Tourism Ireland including progress in the implementation of the 2014-2016 Corporate Plan.

Review of 2014 and Look Ahead

There had been strong growth in tourism to Ireland and Northern Ireland which Ministers welcomed, noting that ambitious targets had been set for further growth from all main markets.

Ministers received presentations on Tourism Ireland's performance throughout 2014 and 2015. These presentations contained highlights of Tourism Ireland's marketing campaign throughout 2014 including the Wild Atlantic Way and Causeway Coastal Route; the British Irish Visa Scheme; and Overseas Publicity. Ministers also noted highlights of Tourism Ireland's 2015 marketing campaign, in particular, the Wild Atlantic Way and Causeway Coastal Route, Global Greening, Game of Thrones, the Irish Open and further overseas publicity promotion including the British-Irish Visa Scheme.

Ministers noted the promotional themes for 2015, in particular Coastal Driving routes and offerings to Social Energisers and the Culturally Curious and were also updated on emerging promotional themes identified for 2016 including in particular *Ireland's Ancient East*, *Northern Ireland's Year of Food and Drink 2016*, *Wild Atlantic Way* and *Causeway Coastal Route* and *Dublin – A Breath of Fresh Air*

Ministers noted joint work being undertaken to develop a compendium report on tourism statistics and that the preparation of an 'All Island Cruise Tourism Strategy' should be completed early in 2016.

EU Funding Opportunities

Ministers agreed that the relevant tourism stakeholders in both jurisdictions would continue to closely monitor developments at EU level to ensure that tourism may benefit from all suitable collaborative funding opportunities.

Rugby World Cup

Ministers noted ongoing work by relevant Departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland to host the Rugby World Cup in 2023. Preparations to host the Women's Rugby World Cup in Belfast and Dublin in August 2017 were also welcomed by Ministers.

TRANSPORT



Minister Pascal Donohoe TD, Minister Michelle McIlveen MLA and SEUPB CEO Gina McIntyre at the opening of the EU INTERREG funded refurbishment of the Drogheda Viaduct in December 2015

An NSMC Transport meeting was held on 22 April in Armagh. Minister Mark H Durkan MLA, Minister of the Environment, Minister Danny Kennedy MLA, Minister for Regional Development and Minister Paschal Donohoe TD, Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport attended.

Review of the North South Transport Work Programme and Strategic Transport Priorities

As part of a strategic review of all NSMC Work Programmes, Ministers noted the potential benefit of further development of co-operation in the Transport Sector and officials are continuing their examination of the programme in light of departmental reorganisations planned through 2016.

Ministers noted the potential for further co-operation in developing the strategic road network on the island, enhancing east-west and north-south connections, driving a shift to more sustainable forms of transport and potential for shared cross border public transport services.

EU Funding Opportunities

Ministers welcomed the strong level of co-operation between relevant departments on EU related Transport issues. The development of Co-operation Statements to support applications for Trans-European Network funding was a significant development throughout the year which also saw the roll-out of the new INTERREG V Sustainable Transport pillar.

Ministers noted the significant INTERREG IVA investment in refurbishing the Dublin-Belfast Enterprise Service and upgrade works on the Boyne Viaduct which were carried out throughout the year.

Cycling/Cross Border Greenways

Ministers noted significant progress in terms of cooperative work on the development of cross-border Greenway routes, including scoping eligibility for funding under the new INTERREG V Sustainable Transport pillar. Ministers also noted the update on the work being undertaken by the Northern Ireland Greenways Working Group in terms of the development of cross border Greenways.

Major Roads

On major road projects, Ministers noted the conclusion of the A5 public consultation which was informing the new Environmental Statement and confirmed their commitment to the A5 road scheme. Good progress was also noted by Ministers on the A8 road project which opened later in the year.

Mutual Recognition of Penalty Points

The Council noted the good progress made by the joint Steering and Working Groups on the mutual recognition project. While complex issues have been identified, Ministers noted the continued efforts to carry forward the work.

Road User and Vehicle Safety

Ministers welcomed progress and the continued sharing of knowledge and experience between officials from both jurisdictions on the delivery of road safety measures including enactment of various legislative measures in both jurisdictions and measures and proposals to address drug driving and to reform the learner driver regime.

Against a continued tragic backdrop of increasing road traffic fatalities across the island, Ministers noted the various road safety campaigns that were adopted throughout the year, including in enforcement operations and promotional campaigns. Ministers also welcomed the continued sharing of knowledge and experience between officials on the delivery of road safety measures.

Ministers welcomed continuing co-operation targeting a wide range of illegal activity within the goods haulage and passenger transport industries and noted the the work of the Tripartite Enforcement Planning Forum.

AQUACULTURE AND MARINE



Participants on the Loughs Agency's Foyle Ambassador Programme

NSMC Aquaculture and Marine meetings took place on 27 May and 11 November in Armagh. The meetings were attended by Michelle O'Neill MLA, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mervyn Storey MLA, Minister for Social Development and Joe McHugh TD, Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources.

At both meetings the Council received progress report updates on the work of the Loughs Agency. Ministers welcomed the update on the activities and noted the Agency's:

- ongoing conservation and protection efforts;
- continued participation in the Climate Change Adaptation Initiative;
- continued contribution to international fisheries research and community outreach initiatives; and
- successful completion of the IBIS project in partnership with the Queen's University of Belfast and Glasgow University.

The Council also noted the position on the survival of the Native Lough Foyle Flat Oyster and the Management Agreement.

The Loughs Agency's Sustainable Development Fund

Ministers welcomed the presentation on the Fund and acknowledged the community benefits of this programme for the Foyle and Carlingford Areas. Another presentation was delivered on Atlantic Salmon Research in West Greenland.

Atlantic Salmon Research in West Greenland

Ministers received a presentation by Art Niven, Fisheries Biologist at the Loughs Agency, on Atlantic salmon research in West Greenland and noted the importance of international partnerships in developing scientific advice on Atlantic salmon and its application to the Foyle and Carlingford Areas.

Marketing the Lough's Resources

Ministers welcomed a report on the Loughs Agency's activities in promoting and marketing the Foyle and Carlingford Areas including angling and development initiatives such as the academy, the hubs and the App on Google Play; marine tourism initiatives including Sailability and Celebrate Water; and education and outreach activities including the Maritime Ambassador Programme, the Foyle Ambassador Project and events such as the World Oceans Day, Bio-diversity Day and the River Discovery Day.

EU Funding Opportunities

Ministers noted the Loughs Agency's success in securing EU funding and its plans to avail of future funding initiatives for the benefit of the Foyle and Carlingford Areas. They welcomed its success in securing in excess of €15 million EU funding for Marine Tourism and Angling Development and the IBIS project.

Ministers noted the Agency's plans to avail of future funding initiatives, including the European Social Fund, the Heritage Lottery, INTERREG V and the Rural Development Programme for the benefit of the Foyle and Carlingford Areas.

Renewal of Framework for Emergency Regulations

Ministers approved the continuation of the Emergency Regulations Framework designed to support the Loughs Agency in dealing with emergencies such as a serious pollution incident for a further period of one year with effect from 20 July 2015. They agreed to review the operation of this procedure, including its possible renewal, based on a report from the Loughs Agency and the Sponsor Departments, before 20 July 2016.

Annual Report and Draft Financial Statements 2014

The Council noted the Loughs Agency's Annual Report and Draft Financial Statements for 2014. Following certification of the Financial Statements by the Comptrollers and Auditors General they would be laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas.

FOOD SAFETY



“Food detectives” take a closer look at food nutrition labels using the “What’s on a Label” Education Resource

An NSMC Food Safety meeting was held at Altnagelvin Area Hospital on 15 April. The meeting was attended by Leo Varadkar TD, Minister for Health, Jim Wells MLA, Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and Michelle O’Neill MLA, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Report on *safefood* Business Plan and Budget

safefood CEO Ray Dolan introduced the new Chair Paul Gibbons who was warmly welcomed by Ministers. The Chair and CEO reported on the high level achievements and updates on campaigns against 2014 Business Plan targets. The targets and objectives for 2015 were also discussed and progress to date was noted.

Food Safety and Traceability

Professor Chris Elliott of the Institute for Global Food Security, Queen’s University Belfast presented to Ministers on the topic of “*Food Safety and Traceability - an all island imperative*”. Ministers agreed that food traceability was important and was an area for which the island had a worldwide reputation.

Campaigns

Childhood Nutrition

safefood commenced the third year of its integrated all island advertising and awareness campaign “Let’s take on Childhood Obesity” in partnership with Healthy Ireland and the Health Service Executive (IRL) and the Public Health Agency (NI). The aim of the campaign is to communicate practical solutions that parents can take on in order to tackle everyday habits associated with excess weight in childhood. The campaign in 2015 focused primarily on the importance of adequate sleep for children. The campaign also reiterated the messages of cutting down on treat foods for children and offering more age-appropriate portion sizes.

Operation Transformation – TV sponsorship

safefood continued its sponsorship association with ‘Operation Transformation’, an independently produced primetime television series aired on RTE1 during January and February 2015. During 2015, the show had an average consolidated audience of 470,000 viewers. The series also attracted an additional average audience of 270,000 viewers on RTÉ One +1 channel and there were more than 280,000 online streams of the series via the RTÉ Player. The show also plays an inspirational role in motivating groups and communities to participate in weight loss.

Folic Acid

safefood launched a campaign in July 2015 to address the increasing rates of Neural Tube Defects (NTDs) and the behavioural barriers to taking folic acid. Entitled ‘Babies Know the Facts about Folic’ the campaign began on 20 July and ran for four weeks until 16 August. During the campaign, sales of folic acid supplements increased on average by 26% from the same period in 2014.

Food Safety campaign – ‘Foresee the Risks’

A new food safety campaign was launched in November 2015 entitled ‘Foresee the Risks – Remember the four C’s’. Supported by television, radio, outdoor and digital advertising over three weeks, the aims of the campaign are to prompt our target audience to reconsider their domestic food habits in relation to the basic principles of food safety and why they might need to change these habits; communicate well-established/well-known advice in a way that will overcome our audience's resistance/apathy/complacency; and support our target audience in making these changes to their habits.

Balmoral Show, May 2015

safefood’s Childhood Obesity campaign formed the basis for the stand at the Balmoral show with a focus on physical activity and sugar in drinks messages. Footfall increased on the previous year with over 2,500 visitors over the three days.

Research Projects

safefood completed several research projects during 2015, on the following topics:

- Food safety risk registers
- Iodine status as a public health issue
- Antimicrobial resistance ESBL
- Shift work – healthy eating
- Cooking skills - impact on healthiness of diets
- VTEC (non-O157)
- Hand sanitizers - consumer behaviour & efficacy
- Food sensitivity

Community Food Initiatives

2015 was the third and final year of the Community Food Initiatives Programme 2013 – 2015 (CFI). The main aim of the CFI programme was to promote greater access and availability of healthy and safe food in low-income areas through a programme of local projects using a community development approach and ten CFIs were based in areas of socio-economic disadvantage across both jurisdictions.

The next three-year CFI Programme runs from 2016-2018 and aims to positively influence eating habits of families. It will focus on developing skills that will help people put a nutritious meal on the table such as planning, budgeting and cooking.

INLAND WATERWAYS



Participants at the Waterways Ireland sponsored Killaloe Water Festival on the Shannon in September 2015

NSMC Inland Waterways meetings took place in Belfast and Monaghan on 10 June and 6 November respectively. Heather Humphreys TD, Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Joe McHugh TD, Minister of State with special responsibility for Gaeltacht Affairs, Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, Minister of Culture Arts and Leisure attended both meetings, while OFMDFM Junior Minister Michelle McIlveen MLA Junior Minister Emma Pengelly, MLA attended the June and November meetings respectively.

At both meetings the Council noted key achievements for Waterways Ireland in 2015 which included:

- management and maintenance of the 1,000 km of navigation in its care, with over 95% of waterways open for navigation for the period April to October;
- a draft Waterways Ireland Heritage Plan launched for its final publication consultation process on 14 August 2015;
- awarding of the ‘Lakelands & Inland Waterways Sport Tourism Innovation Award’ to The Shannon Blueway at the Shannon Airport Sport Tourism European Summit;
- 112 events offered support under Waterways Ireland 2015 Sponsorship Programme, highlights included Killaloe Water Festival on the Shannon, Dublin Dragon Boat Regatta in the Grand Canal Dock, Row the Erne Columbanus Day and the Big Splash Triathlon and Riverfest on the Lower Bann;

- 74 Schools participated in the Schools Education programme to date; and
- 6 new businesses licensed to operate on the inland navigations since April. These include a new barge hire operation, a new passenger vessel and other outdoor activities and an IT workspace.

Update on the Restoration of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne to Clones



Dredging on the River Finn to create navigation for the Ulster Canal

At the November meeting, Ministers noted that the first phase of the work, the dredging of the River Finn to create navigation was nearing completion. Detailed site investigation of the canal route and the new bridge at Derrykerrib had identified extremely poor and challenging ground conditions. Work will continue to progress this element of the project in 2015.

Development of a Greenway along the route of the Ulster Canal

Ministers approved a proposal by Waterways Ireland to facilitate the development of a greenway along the route/linear corridor of the Ulster Canal from Castle Saunderson, Co Cavan to Charlemont, Co Armagh. Waterways Ireland will undertake the role of lead partner on this project with the support of relevant Councils and other stakeholders.

EU Funding Opportunities

Ministers noted that Waterways Ireland continues to actively identify and examine opportunities to secure both Competitive and Non-Competitive funding that will assist in the development of key strategic programmes going forward.

One element of the INTERREG VA programme Promoting cross-border intermodal and sustainable mobility in the cross-border region has been identified as a feasible funding opportunity. This call topic has 2 targets: provision of 80km of cross border Greenway in total; and ability to achieve 10% of cross-border commuter traffic by bicycle or foot by 2023. Waterways Ireland is currently working on the preparation of a funding application to develop a greenway along the Ulster Canal from Smithborough, Co Monaghan to Armagh city, in partnership with local authorities and other stakeholders.

On the environment side, one of Waterways Ireland's main priorities is to control the growth of invasive alien species and pathogens that cause significant native biodiversity loss and seriously degrade ecosystem services in and adjacent to waterways on the island of Ireland. In pursuance of this objective, Waterways Ireland is working on an application for

submission to the EU LIFE programme 2014-2020.

Ministers noted that Waterways Ireland has joined the Network for Inland Waterways Europe (NIWE), which comprises European navigation and inland waterway management authorities, and attended a meeting in Amsterdam on 11 September. The focus of the network is to identify funding programmes for the future, develop collaborative bids and leverage the value of members' shared knowledge and skills to create new project opportunities.

THE NORTH SOUTH LANGUAGE BODY



Minister Joe McHugh, TD, Minister Heather Humphries, TD, Minister Carál Ní Chuilín, MLA and Minister Emma Pengelly, MLA at NSMC Language meeting held in the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Monaghan in November 2015

NSMC Language Body meetings took place in Belfast and Monaghan on 10 June and 6 November respectively. Heather Humphreys TD, Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Joe McHugh TD, Minister of State with special responsibility for Gaeltacht Affairs, Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, Minister of Culture Arts and Leisure attended both meetings, while OFMDFM Junior Minister Michelle McIlveen MLA and Junior Minister Emma Pengelly, MLA attended the June and November meetings respectively.

At both meetings Ministers received progress report updates from Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency. Key developments noted by the Council included:

Foras na Gaeilge

- continuing progress on the new funding arrangements, including 12 meetings to date of the Partnership Forum and 3 meetings to date of the Language Development Forum; the recruitment of staff and the establishment of offices by the 6 lead organisations in Belfast, Newry, Dublin, Ráth Chairn, Athenry, Casla, and Dungarvan;
- publication of new guidelines for best practice in serving the Irish language community were issued to the new super councils at a conference held in Armagh on 25 March 2015;

- the app for the new English-Irish dictionary was launched at Oireachtas na Gaeilge and the Foclóir Beag (small dictionary) was added to the online *Dictionary and Language Library* (www.teanglann.ie);
- the Love Leabhair Ghaeilge (Love Irish Books) campaign under the auspices of the Marketing Support Scheme for the Irish language publishing sector is progressing well, with branded stalls in place in 15 shops;
- the Irish language scheme for primary schools (www.seideansi.ie) is being implemented and new digital facilities are available from junior infants level to second class; and
- funding was provided for youth projects, including 92 summer camps to cater for 3,800 children (an increase of 200 on 2014), with 74 groups organising youth activities during the year, in addition to 428 Gaeltacht scholarships for young people in Northern Ireland.



Students celebrating the launch of the new app for the English-Irish dictionary at the Halloween Oireachtas na Gaeilge event

Foras na Gaeilge – Dictionary Project

The Council approved, within the existing budget, a revised timetable for the English/Irish dictionary project to ensure provision of a more comprehensive end product, including a choice of print, online and app formats.

The Council noted the updated targets, comprising publication of 120,000 sense units in 2015, publication of a further 10,000 sense units in 2016, with particular emphasis on the primary and secondary curricula in both jurisdictions, and publication of the print version of the dictionary for the start of the academic year in 2017.

Foras na Gaeilge – Sceim Phobail Gaeilge/ Irish Language Community Scheme

The Council noted the key features of a revised Scéim Phobail Gaeilge/Irish Language Community Scheme which included:

- transition from a three year to a four year scheme;
- consolidation of progress made to date and facilitating new communities to avail of the scheme by increasing the number of possible grantees from the current 19 groups to a maximum of 26 groups (37% increase);
- maximum grant level of €37,000 in year 1 (rising to €40,000 in year 4), including 80% of the employment costs for the development officers; and
- a new focus on sustainable development in the communities themselves which will empower groups to retain ownership and stewardship within their own target areas and ensure that permanent outcomes result from the funding.

The Council also noted that, as the lead organisation in the area of community and economic development and through its own network of development officers, Glór na nGael will have a role in fostering, sharing and encouraging good practice in funded projects. In addition, Glór na nGael will provide a mentoring, support and advice service to organisations whose applications do not meet the required standard for a grant offer.

Ministers approved the revised Scéim Phobail Gaeilge/Irish Language Community Scheme for implementation with effect from 1 July 2016.

Ulster-Scots Agency

- organisation of the Burns Night Concert, in partnership with the Ulster Orchestra, in the Belfast Waterfront Hall in January which was subsequently broadcast on BBC 2;
- launch of the new Ulster-Scots web portal for visitors, www.discoverulsterscots.com, which includes an ever expanding range of visitor attractions, including Bushmills Distillery, First Derry Presbyterian Church and St. Anne's Cathedral, Belfast;
- the new Ulster-Scots gallery at North Down Museum, Bangor, funded by the Agency, opened on 14 May 2015;
- funding provided for delivery of Ulster-Scots music and dance tuition in 42 primary schools, in addition, to delivery of 24 Ulster-Scots after school clubs and 11 Ulster-Scots school workshops;
- promotion of Ulster-Scots in education, including award of flagship status to 6 schools, enrolment of 12 schools on the Flagship Starter Programme, delivery of 5 after-school clubs and 10 workshops in addition to 2 further East/West primary school twinnings;

- organisation of two key events, comprising a conference in Trinity College Dublin to mark the 700th anniversary of the arrival of the Bruces in Ireland with an attendance of 300 and an Ulster-Scots Heritage Day in Raphoe with an attendance of 450;
- support provided to 21 summer schools, 12 community festivals and 12 community showcase events; and
- increasing public awareness of Ulster-Scots through 19 group visits to the Discover Ulster-Scots Centre, publication of 2 editions of the Ulster-Scot newspaper and establishment of a further 3 blue plaques around Ulster celebrating pivotal figures from Ulster-Scots history.



New Discover Ulster-Scots Centre, Corn Exchange Building, Belfast

Ulster-Scots Agency - Community Impact Programme

Ian Crozier, the CEO of the Ulster-Scots Agency, delivered a short presentation outlining the work being progressed by the Agency in building capacity and supporting community development through its Community Impact Programme. The programme involves supporting a small number of full-time development posts in an effort to provide more targeted and sustained support to community groups.

Ulster-Scots Agency – Cross Border Activities

Ministers received a presentation by the CEO of the Ulster-Scots Agency outlining the Agency's cross border activities which are consistent with its legislative remit in regard to promotion of greater awareness and use of Ullans and of Ulster-Scots cultural issues, both in Northern Ireland and Ireland.

Ministers noted the a wide range of key activities which has been expanded on in both jurisdictions, including music and dance tuition, Ulster-Scots Flagship Scheme, North/South

school twinnings, post-primary curriculum pilot project, annual community picnics, heritage research and development of heritage trails, continuing support for Monreagh Heritage Centre, Blue Plaques, touring exhibitions, and organisation of an Ulster-Scots Heritage Day and a conference on the Irish-Scottish World in the Middle Ages.

Collaboration between Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency

Ministers noted progress on collaboration between Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency, including:

- the Safeguarding Policy and Code of Practice for funded bodies had been reviewed and updated by external advisors;
- under the joint project for Integrated Schools, 6 workshops were delivered to Priory Integrated College, Holywood during November-December 2014, providing 25 Year 8 students with an insight into the Irish language and Ulster-Scots culture and language. The rollout of the programme continued with Shimna Integrated College, Ballymena in May-June 2015 and plans are underway in regard to other school;
- two joint events as part of a community relations and cultural awareness week, comprising a lecture on Irish and Ulster-Scots elements in placenames in Northern Ireland and a panel discussion in relation to language traditions in Belfast;
- engagement in year two of a programme to raise awareness of Irish language and linguistic heritage and Ulster-Scots culture, heritage and language in post-primary schools; and
- ongoing evaluation of the possibilities of participation in the United Youth Programme under OFMDFM's Strategy "Together Building a United Community" which seeks to provide an outlet for 10,000 young people who are not in training, education or employment.

EU Funding Opportunities

Ministers noted that the Agencies of the Language Body are continuing to engage in identification of possible opportunities to maximise the benefits of EU funding.

Ministers noted that the Ulster-Scots Agency is in exploratory discussions with a number of interested parties in relation to the potential for a project relating to entrepreneurship with young people in isolated communities under the Northern Periphery and Arctic Programme. The agency is monitoring progress with the development of the LEADER/Rural Development Programme where there may be opportunities to promote Ulster-Scots heritage.

Ministers welcomed Foras na Gaeilge's success in securing EU funding under the Creative Europe Programme for a literary project entitled "Other Words", in co-operation with Spain, Slovenia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Sweden. The project, was launched in July, and intended to raise the profile of minority language literature throughout Europe, both in the original languages and in translation.

SPECIAL EU PROGRAMMES BODY



Delegates at an SEUPB led Workshop exploring new funding opportunities

An NSMC SEUPB meeting was held in Armagh, on 11 December. The meeting was attended by Richard Bruton TD, Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, Arlene Foster MLA, Minister for Finance and Personnel, and OFMDFM Junior Minister Jennifer McCann MLA.

Ms. Gina McIntyre was appointed to the position of CEO of the SEUPB in 2015 following the completion of a competitive public appointment process on the retirement of Mr. Pat Colgan.

At the meeting, Ministers received a detailed progress report update on the status of the PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Programmes which are coming to an end. Ministers were informed how key programme targets had been achieved and, in some instances, surpassed:

- **PEACE III Programme** - funding to a value of €29.67m had been committed to 215 projects representing a 99% commitment level. €11.5m of cumulative expenditure had been incurred representing 94% of the Programme value. Remaining expenditure to process by the end of 2015 is €1.4m. All previous years expenditure targets had been met;
- **INTERREG IVA Programme** - this Programme was fully committed by December 2015 with 88 projects issued letters of offer at a combined value of €63.35m; €33.95m of cumulative expenditure had been incurred representing 91% of the Programme value and €2.05m expenditure remained to be processed by the end of 2015 in order to meet EU expenditure targets. It was confirmed that all previous years N+2 targets had been met; and

- **Transnational and Interregional** - the SEUPB continued to facilitate North/South participation in the INTERREG IV Transnational and Inter-regional Programmes. During the 2007-13 Programme period 69 project partners were secured across the four relevant programmes and these projects leveraged in an additional ERDF contribution to Northern Ireland amounting to approximately €1.3m (£8.9m).

New 2014-2020 EU Programmes

The Council noted that the INTERREG VA Co-operation Programme had been officially adopted by the European Commission on 13 February 2015 and that the SEUPB had already issued five funding calls under the Programme.

Ministers approved the agreed PEACE IV Co-operation Programme which had been officially adopted by the European Commission on 30 November 2015. PEACE IV will open for calls in 2016.

Annual Reports and Accounts

Ministers noted the SEUPB Annual Report and Accounts for 2014 had been certified by Comptrollers and Auditors General in both jurisdictions and will be laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Houses of the Oireachtas shortly.

TRADE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT



Thomas Hunter McGowan, CEO InterTradeIreland and Daniel Emerson, Stonewell Cider, Cork launch the Elevate Micro Business Programme in May 2015

NSMC Trade and Business Development meetings took place on 5 March and 2 December in Armagh. The meetings were attended by Richard Bruton TD, Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and John O’Dowd MLA, Minister for Education. Arlene Foster MLA, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation and Jonathan Bell MLA, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Innovation attended the March and December meetings respectively.

At both meetings Ministers heard that there was strong demand for InterTradeIreland Programmes in 2015 and received Progress Reports updates on the activities of InterTradeIreland. These included:

- InterTradeIreland’s performance for 2014 during which targets were exceeded and the Body delivered a 10:1 return on investment; assisted 64 first time innovators; assisted 127 first time exporters; delivered 4% efficiency savings; and delivered a total business value of £67M/ €78M; and
- InterTradeIreland’s activities in the first ten months of 2015, during which time InterTradeIreland had delivered assistance to 65 First Time Innovators; assistance to 44 First Time Exporters; 4% efficiency savings; a jobs impact of 916; and a total business value of £67m/ €84m.

Business and economic research activities carried out by InterTradeIreland included continued production of the InterTradeIreland quarterly *Business Monitor*, a report on ‘*SMEs, Credit Constraints and Growth*’ – *A Cross Border Study relating to Access to Finance* and most recently ‘*Mapping the Potential for All-Island Sectoral Ecosystems*’ which examines opportunities for developing the potential of clusters across both jurisdictions.

EU Horizon 2020 Programme

Ministers received presentations on the Horizon 2020 Programme and noted the progress that had been made towards meeting the joint target of €175m for drawdown for specific North South projects.

The Council welcomed the Horizon 2020 support structures that had been put in place by InterTradeIreland to support achievement of this target.

EU Funding Opportunities

Ministers also considered various EU funding opportunities which may offer opportunities for co-operation to maximise drawdown of funds. A presentation was delivered which previewed the Research and Innovation theme of the new INTERREG VA Programme.

US-Ireland R&D Partnership

The US Ireland R&D Partnership was discussed and the Council received a presentation on the work of the Partnership to date. Ministers welcomed the work being undertaken to expand the scope of the Partnership to include Agri-food research.

All Island Retail Study

Ministers received a joint presentation from the Northern Ireland Retail and Trade Association (NIIRTA) and Retail Excellence Ireland (REI) on their joint study into the retail sector across both jurisdictions. The Council noted the findings of the study including that the two agencies intend to establish a Retail Forum comprising representatives from both jurisdictions.

CHAPTER FOUR

NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

During 2015, the Joint Secretariat arranged various outreach activities.

Cross Border Schools Outreach involving the PSNI and An Garda Síochána

On the 16 January, the Joint Secretariat hosted a Schools Outreach Seminar involving 50 students in the 16 to 17 year old age group from secondary schools in Armagh, Monaghan and Louth. The theme of the seminar was 'Road Safety and it was run in co-operation with the Armagh PSNI and An Garda Síochána from Monaghan Traffic Unit. Presentations were given by both the PSNI and An Garda, followed by student group discussions on ways to reduce the number of road accidents and how road users may be educated in the promotion of road safety. In order to develop the participating students' knowledge of the work of the NSMC, the final session of the half day interactive seminar consisted of a mock NSMC Plenary meeting which saw students enthusiastically playing the role of Ministers of the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive at which they discussed road safety issues and put forward key action points. The event provided an excellent opportunity to enhance inter-agency and cross-jurisdictional relationships in this field.



Students discuss road safety in mock NSMC Plenary format at a schools outreach seminar

Blueway/Greenway Information Sharing and Networking Seminar

On 30 April, the Joint Secretariat hosted an information sharing and networking seminar on Greenways and Blueways for the North South Bodies. The purpose of the event was to provide a forum primarily for North South Bodies to share practical experience and best practice, network and develop new partnerships for the purpose of facilitating a more ‘joined-up/co-ordinated’ approach to the provision of a cross-border network of Greenways/Blueways. Department of Regional Development and Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport officials also gave a joint presentation.



Section of the Ulster Canal Greenway on the outskirts of Monaghan town

Politics Plus-International Exchange Visit to Armagh

On 25 June, the Joint Secretariat hosted a visit by a group of graduate students from De Paul University in Chicago who were being hosted in Northern Ireland by PoliticsPlus. The Joint Secretariat provided a briefing on the work of the North South Ministerial Council and on North/South co-operation.

Joint Oireachtas Committee for the Implementation of the Good Friday Committee meeting with the Joint Secretaries

The Committee led by its Chair, Deputy Frank Feighan, visited the Joint Secretariat on 18 June. The Committee members and the Joint Secretaries had a wide-ranging discussion which touched on transport infrastructure in the border region, the possibility of a cross-border air ambulance service, all-island co-operation in the health sector, the implications of the BSE case, and the obstacles to all-island labelling of food products. The opportunities presented for North/South co-operation by Horizon 2020 and other EU funding sources were discussed, and the importance attached to tackling cross-border smuggling, particularly as regards alcohol and cigarettes. The recent work of Foras na Gaeilge and the implications of ‘Brexit’ for the island were also raised

Kenyan Parliamentary delegation visit to Armagh

On 7 December, the Joint Secretariat hosted a visiting Kenyan Parliamentary delegation (Joint Committee on National Cohesion) on an FCO-organised visit. The Joint Secretariat provided a briefing on its work and the extent of ongoing cross-border co-operation between

the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. The Secretariat also arranged a briefing for them on PEACE funding by the Special EU Programmes Body.

Habitat for Humanity

Joint Secretariat volunteers from both jurisdictions assisted with renovation and refurbishment work as part of the Habitat for Humanity Northern Ireland project. Habitat for Humanity Northern Ireland's project in partnership with Windsor Presbyterian Church, Belfast is situated in the most ethnically diverse area of Northern Ireland. The project aims to develop the church hall into a welcoming social hub for everyone in the local community and to build strong community relationships in South Belfast.



Reverend Ivan Steen, Windsor Presbyterian Church with volunteers from the North South Ministerial Council Joint Secretariat

Work Experience

The Joint Secretariat continued its engagement with Lisanally Special School in Armagh. The work experience project provides the pupils with the opportunity to assist with arrangements and delivery of a number of NSMC meetings. This included being present for the arrival of Ministers and assisting with a diverse range of preparation duties and helping with the catering.

The programme provides Lisanally pupils with a busy environment with new people and a functional task which allows them the opportunity to transfer the skills they learn at school and college to a workplace.



Pupils from Lisanally Special School serving refreshments to Ministers at the NSMC Transport meeting

Premises Usage

The Joint Secretariat premises are also used for a variety of additional activities in support of cross community and cross border co-operation. Armagh Child Contact Centre held its AGM in the premises on 19 October. Additionally the premises facilitated a number of cross-border events including meetings hosted by Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT), Border People Project, SEUPB Call Workshop, Fab Foundation Ireland, EU Peace Programme coordinators and officials progressing North South Pension matters.

ANNEX 1

NSMC MEETINGS IN 2015

NSMC Meeting	Date	Location
Plenary	05/06/15	Dublin Castle
	11/12/15	NSMC Joint Secretariat Building
Institutional	25/02/15	Stormont Castle, Belfast
Agriculture	25/02/15	NSMC Joint Secretariat Building
Education	25/03/15	NSMC Joint Secretariat Building
	11/12/15	NSMC Joint Secretariat Building
Environment	13/05/15	NSMC Joint Secretariat Building
Health and Food Safety	15/04/15	Altnagelvin Area Hospital
Tourism	05/03/15	NSMC Joint Secretariat Building
	02/12/15	NSMC Joint Secretariat Building
Transport	22/04/15	NSMC Joint Secretariat Building
Aquaculture & Marine	27/05/15	NSMC Joint Secretariat Building
	11/11/15	NSMC Joint Secretariat Building
Inland Waterways	10/06/15	Ulster-Scots Agency HQ, Belfast
	06/11/15	Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Monaghan
Language	10/06/15	Ulster-Scots Agency HQ, Belfast
	06/11/15	Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Monaghan
Special EU Programmes	11/12/15	NSMC Joint Secretariat Building
Trade & Business Development	05/03/15	NSMC Joint Secretariat Building
	02/12/15	NSMC Joint Secretariat Building

ANNEX 2

NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL JOINT SECRETARIAT

The North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) is supported by a standing Joint Secretariat staffed by members of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Irish Civil Service. The Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) is the parent Department of the Northern Ireland civil servants and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is the parent Department of the Irish civil servants.

Colm Shannon is the Joint Secretary (North) and Shane O'Neill Joint Secretary (South).

FUNCTIONS

The functions of the Joint Secretariat include:

- arranging the schedule of Council meetings in different formats;
- securing prior political agreement to agendas for meetings of the Council;
- preparing or commissioning papers for meetings of the Council, including in relation to its work programme;
- drafting Joint Communiqués and Records of Decisions of the Council;
- communicating decisions of the Council and monitoring their implementation;
- drafting an annual report on the proceedings of the Council;
- acting as a channel of communication with Implementation Bodies;
- liaising, where appropriate, through the designated Department or Office in either jurisdiction, with the Secretariat of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, the Secretariat of the British-Irish Council and with the North/South joint parliamentary forum and independent consultative forum when established; and
- carrying out such other tasks as the Council may direct.

FUNDING

Staff costs are met by OFMDFM and DFAT. All other costs associated with the Joint Secretariat and the NSMC are shared between the two administrations. The cost of running the Joint Secretariat in 2015 amounted to £1,432,240 /€1,969,123.

ANNEX 3

NORTH SOUTH IMPLEMENTATION BODIES

Each of the six North South Bodies operates on an all-island basis. All have a clear operational remit and all operate under the overall policy direction of the North South Ministerial Council, with clear accountability lines back to the Council and to the Oireachtas and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The functions of three of the Bodies, InterTradeIreland, the North South Language Body and the Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission, are exercised by Boards of Management appointed by the NSMC. The Food Safety Promotion Board has an Advisory Board, also appointed by the NSMC, and the functions of the Body are exercised by the Chief Executive. The remaining two Bodies, Waterways Ireland and the Special European Union Programmes Body, do not have Boards, and the functions of the Body are exercised by the Chief Executive.

A brief summary of the Bodies and their main functions and contact details are below.

Waterways Ireland



www.waterwaysireland.org

Waterways Ireland's primary function is the management, maintenance, development and restoration of the inland navigable waterway system throughout the island, principally for recreational purposes. Waterways Ireland is responsible for the following navigation systems:

- The Shannon-Erne Waterway
- The Erne System
- The Grand Canal
- The Barrow Navigation System
- The Lower Bann Navigation System
- The Royal Canal
- The Shannon Navigation System
-

The Chief Executive for Waterways Ireland is Dawn Livingstone. Waterways Ireland's Headquarters is in Enniskillen with Regional Offices in Scarriff, Co Clare, Carrick on Shannon, Co Leitrim and Dublin.

Food Safety Promotion Board



www.safefood.eu

The Food Safety Promotion Board is principally charged with tasks involving food safety awareness - through public campaigns, conferences, training and advising professionals and the general public. It is also involved in supporting North South scientific co-operation, and links between institutions working in the field of food safety - laboratories, statutory food safety enforcement agencies, international and domestic research bodies. Its remit also includes the promotion of specialised laboratory services, North and South. Cross-border co-operation in all of these areas, between organisations working in these fields, is central to the work of the Body.

The Chief Executive for The Food Safety Promotion Board is Ray Dolan. The Body operates from its offices in Cork and Dublin.

Trade and Business Development Body (InterTradeIreland)



www.intertradeireland.com

InterTradeIreland exercises a valuable range of functions in the trade and business sector. Under the overall policy direction of the NSMC, InterTradeIreland works in close collaboration with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Belfast, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Dublin, and with the existing development agencies, North and South. It has a focus on promoting North South trade and business co-operation by building enterprise capability, competitiveness and developing networks. InterTradeIreland aims to add value to the work being carried out by the existing trade and business development agencies.

The Chief Executive of InterTradeIreland is Mr Thomas Hunter McGowan. InterTradeIreland is located in Newry.

Special European Union Programmes Body



www.seupb.eu

The principal responsibility of the SEUPB is as Managing Authority for various EU Programmes. The managerial functions of the SEUPB hold provide for administration, grant-making and oversight roles in relation to the Community Initiatives under the European Structural Funds. Previous and current fund titles include the INTERREG I, II, III and IV. LEADER+, URBAN II, EQUAL the EU Programmes for Peace and Reconciliation, PEACE I, II and III and the Territorial Co-operation Programme.

The Body's Chief Executive is Ms Gina McIntyre. The majority of the Body's staff are based in the Belfast Headquarters, with offices also in Monaghan town and in Omagh, Co Tyrone.

Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission



www.loughs-agency.org

The Foyle, Carlingford and Irish Lights Commission consists of two Agencies - The Loughs Agency and Lights Agency. The Loughs Agency has responsibility for the promotion and development of Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough for commercial and recreational purposes in respect of marine, fishery and aquaculture matters. It was intended that the Lights Agency, when established, would replace the Commissioners of Irish Lights as the General Lighthouse Authority for Ireland. However, given the complexities that have arisen in terms of pursuing such a transfer of functions, the matter is under review at present.

The Chief Executive Officer of the Loughs Agency is John Pollock. The Agency's HQ is located in Derry~Londonderry.

The Language Body/An Foras Teanga/North-South Body o Leid



www.forasnagaeilge.ie

www.ulsterscotsagency.com

The Language Body is a single body composed of two agencies - Foras na Gaeilge and Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch. Foras na Gaeilge is responsible for the promotion of the Irish Language throughout the island and Tha Boord o Ulster-Scotch is responsible for promoting the study, conservation, development, and use of the Ulster-Scots as a living language: to encourage and develop the full range of its attendant culture; and to promote an understanding of the history of the Ulster-Scots.

Ferdie Mac an Fhailigh is the Chief Executive of Foras na Gaeilge. The Agency has established its main office in Dublin and has subsidiary offices in Belfast and Donegal.

Ian Crozier is the Chief Executive of the Ulster-Scots Agency. The Agency has established its main office in Belfast and has a subsidiary office in Donegal.

ANNEX 4

TOURISM IRELAND LIMITED



<https://www.tourismireland.com>

Tourism is one of the “six areas of co-operation” under the framework of the Belfast Agreement of Good Friday 1998 and co-operation in this area is taken forward by Tourism Ireland Limited, a publicly owned limited company established to promote the island of Ireland overseas as a tourist destination. Its remit is to increase tourism to the island of Ireland and to support Northern Ireland to realise its tourism potential.

Tourism Ireland operates under the auspices of the North/South Ministerial Council through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in Northern Ireland and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in Ireland. Its functions are exercised by a Board of Management appointed by the NSMC.

Tourism Ireland works closely with Fáilte Ireland and Tourism Northern Ireland in strategic partnership. Each agency has a distinct role and remit, and each complements the work of the other to support the tourism industry in both jurisdictions.

The Chief Executive is Niall Gibbons. The Body operates from its Headquarters in Dublin and regional office in Coleraine.