

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

19/05/2017 - 26/05/2017



Northern Ireland
Assembly

The Northern Ireland Assembly was dissolved at 00:01 on Thursday 26 January 2017.



Tuesday 23 May 2017

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

North-South Ministerial Council

Micheál Martin asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the support his Department provides for the North-South Ministerial Council and the British Irish Council.

Charles Flanagan: Established under the Good Friday Agreement, the North-South Ministerial Council (NSMC) has played a key role in developing consultation, cooperation, and action on the island of Ireland on matters of mutual interest and within the competence of the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. My Department works closely with the Department of the Taoiseach in regard to NSMC matters and the Taoiseach co-chairs the NSMC Plenary meetings with the Northern Ireland First Minister and deputy First Minister. The NSMC is supported by a standing Joint Secretariat in Armagh, staffed by members of the Irish and Northern Ireland Civil Services, with staff costs met separately. There are nine officers from my Department currently working there. In addition to servicing the Council which meets in Plenary, Institutional and Sectorial formats, my

officials in the Joint Secretariat also perform other important functions focussed on advocacy for North-South co-operation. They are involved in developing networks of contacts, actively pursuing our priorities for advancing cooperation, as well as analysing and reporting on the progress of such cooperation, including the work of the North-South Implementation Bodies. My officials in Armagh also play a co-ordinating role in Government activity on North-South issues, attending and chairing meetings of the North-South Interdepartmental Coordinators, and encouraging and advancing cross-border co-operation at official level. As the formal means for bilateral discussions between the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, the NSMC has a crucial role to play in the Brexit discussions and the negotiations ahead. The most recent NSMC Plenary meetings in July and November 2016 saw the Government and the Northern Ireland Executive agree on a number of important common principles for dealing with Brexit on an all-island basis, scoping out the sectorial implications of Brexit for Ireland, North and South, and agreeing to work together to optimise North-South planning in the phases preceding and following Brexit. For this reason especially, I hope that a new Executive can be formed soon and that the NSMC discussions can resume quickly thereafter so that the Executive can represent Northern Ireland's interests, including in relation to the upcoming EU-UK negotiations. the Government provides support in a number of ways, with lead responsibilities for the BIC held by the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

In terms of practical support, my Department seconds an experienced diplomat to the permanent secretariat of the BIC, based in Edinburgh. This officer jointly heads the secretariat along with an official nominated by the UK government in London. As well as funding the salary and related costs for this official, my Department also makes a financial contribution towards the secretariat's running costs.

At the Department's headquarters at Iveagh House in Dublin, responsibility for the British Irish Council is placed with the Ireland, UK and Americas (IUKA) Division. This is supported further through engagement as appropriate by our diplomatic missions and offices in London, Edinburgh and Belfast, given that the BIC's membership consists of Ireland, the UK, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man.

My Department works closely with the Department of the Taoiseach, which provides Ireland's representatives to the BIC's central co-ordination group and leads on preparations for BIC Summit meetings, at which Ireland is represented by the Taoiseach. At these summit meetings, the Taoiseach is always accompanied by a minister or ministers responsible for the policy areas being discussed, along with officials from his Department and my own. Throughout the year, ministers and officials also participate in meetings related to the BIC's twelve policy work streams, which involve direct engagement by a number of different Government Departments.

Established in the context of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, the British Irish Council provides Ireland and all member administrations with valuable opportunities to engage with each other and make progress on the various policy work streams. The summit meetings since the UK referendum of June 2016 have also included specific and valuable sessions on the UK's exit from the EU, thereby reflecting a clear capacity for discussion of key strategic issues.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-05-23a.877&s=cross-border+2017-05-19..2017-05-26#g879.r>

Tuesday 16 May 2017

Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources

North-South Interconnector

Niamh Smyth the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources if he will include the concerns of communities in counties Cavan and Monaghan in the terms of reference for the North-South interconnector, particularly about health, land devaluation, property devaluation, tourism and heritage; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Denis Naughten: On 19 December 2016 An Bord Pleanála granted planning permission for the North-South Interconnector project in Ireland. The decision concluded a lengthy planning process which included an Oral Hearing completed over eleven weeks from March to May last year. The planning decision is currently the subject of Judicial Review proceedings. The planning process for the section of the project in Northern Ireland is ongoing with an oral hearing concluding on 27 February 2017.

In light of the motions passed by Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann, I have had proposals prepared for an updated independent study that will bring further clarity to the relative cost and technical merits of overhead and underground solutions for the North South Interconnector. I approved the Terms of Reference for the study and published them on my Department's website on Monday 8 May.

Following the publication of the Terms of Reference, I met with the Deputy and a number of other Oireachtas members from Cavan, Monaghan and Meath on Tuesday 16 May. This meeting provided me the opportunity to update the members on progress in relation to the proposed study and for the members to provide feedback.

As discussed at that meeting, it is not proposed to include external factors (such as local tourism, health, landscape, agriculture, heritage). These were examined as part of the statutory planning process which is the appropriate method by which such impacts are assessed and evaluated.

The impact on land and property values and the level of compensation paid in lieu of such impacts was also discussed at the meeting with Oireachtas members. Whilst it would not be appropriate for me to intrude on settled processes for addressing these issues between developers and affected landowners, in light of the concerns that have been voiced, I am considering how greater information could be made available on international comparative practice on the approach to and levels of compensation provided to land and property owners in proximity to high-voltage power lines.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2017-05-23a.1510&s=north-south+2017-05-19..2017-05-26>