

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

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Northern Ireland
Assembly

Monday 7 December 2015

Ministerial Statement North/South Ministerial Council: Aquaculture and Marine

Summary: Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development) made a statement regarding the twenty eighth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in aquaculture and marine sectoral format, held in Armagh on Wednesday 11 November. The Executive were represented by Minister Storey and Minister O'Neill, and the Irish Government were represented by Joe McHugh TD, Minister of State at the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources. Minister McHugh chaired the meeting.

Ms O'Neill: Ministers welcomed the presentation by Art Niven, fisheries biologist at the Loughs Agency, on Atlantic salmon research in West Greenland. The significance for us is that salmon stock from Ireland can migrate to West Greenland. Ministers noted the importance of international partnerships, such as that with the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organization (NASCO) in developing scientific advice on Atlantic salmon and its application to the Foyle and Carlingford Areas.

Ministers received a progress report on the work of the Loughs Agency from the vice chairperson, Alan McCulla, and the chief executive, John Pollock. We were advised that agency staff have continued to lead environmental protection in the Foyle and Carlingford catchments, working with agencies including the PSNI, An Garda Síochána, the Environment Agency and relevant local authorities. There have been a number of seizures of nets, fishing rods, oyster bags, boats etc. There have been a significant number of successful prosecutions resulting in convictions for a range of offences, such as unlicensed angling; killing salmon on the River Finn, which is a catch and release only area; and obstruction of fishery officers. Whilst organised salmon poaching involving a large number of individuals remains a challenge for the agency, I am pleased to report that there have been no violent attacks on staff this year.

The NSMC noted the position of the survival of the native Lough Foyle flat oyster. Ministers were pleased to hear that the Loughs Agency met fishermen on three occasions prior to the opening of this year's fishery in an effort to fully engage them in the decision-making process. A weekly assessment of the spawning activity in the oyster stocks on the five main oyster beds has been continuing since early June. Unfortunately, the unseasonably cold summer weather has not afforded the population much chance of spawning. The agency continues to monitor the stock for signs of

additional spawning potential, and water samples are being assessed. So far, densities have been low compared with previous years, with good settlements of spat. The autumn stock assessment was completed at the end of September. An assessment of the mortality levels of adults, as well as the survival of the spat from 2014, was made along with the densities and overall biomass levels.

The agency opened the fishery on Tuesday 6 October 2015, and fishing will be on a staggered basis until 18 December 2015, when it will close. This arrangement overcomes the main concerns from 2014 by ensuring that viable and equitable economic opportunities for fishermen are available up to Christmas. It also strikes the correct balance between the economic opportunities and the conservation imperative, while seeking to ensure viability in the fishery for the medium to longer term.

Ministers also discussed how to progress the management agreement. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in the South is still awaiting a response from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Ministers expressed their frustration at the delay as updates from the FCO have been sought on a number of occasions. Minister Storey and I agreed that we will write jointly to the First Minister and deputy First Minister in an attempt to move the matter forward. Meantime, the Loughs Agency continues to progress the operational aspects of the management agreement.

The Greencastle to Magilligan ferry was also discussed. The Loughs Agency has held a number of meetings with Minister McHugh, local councillors and the Lough Foyle Ferry Company to explore the wider operational and development opportunities for the service. The initial discussion focused on its sustainability. The agency has carried out a preliminary scoping exercise aimed at facilitating a broader, more in-depth study of the service by a consultant to be engaged by the local authorities.

The chief executive agreed to facilitate a meeting to discuss the Foyle ferry. As a starting point, he has contacted the CEOs of Donegal County Council, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council, with a view to holding an initial meeting. Ministers commented that it is important for the development of the Wild Atlantic Way and the Causeway coast that we protect the current infrastructure, including the ferry service between Greencastle and Magilligan.

The agency's success in recent awards was acknowledged by the Council. Those awards included employability champion at the Business in the Community awards and the Sentinus Ambassador of the Year Award. The Council also acknowledged the positive comments of Nicholas Martyn, the deputy director-general for regional and urban policy at the European Commission, following his visit to the Loughs Agency to review the integrated aquatic resources management between Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland (IBIS) project. The Council noted that the Loughs Agency has applied the required efficiency savings to the 2016 budget, in accordance with agreed guidance issued by Finance Departments across the island. Ministers approved the Loughs Agency's 2016 business plan and recommended the 2016 budget grant provision of £3.829 million.

The NSMC welcomed the report on the activities of the Loughs Agency in promoting and marketing the Foyle and Carlingford areas, including angling-club development initiatives such as the angling academy, angling hubs and the angling app on Google Play; marine tourism initiatives, including Sailability, which supports participation in sailing by persons who have a disability, and the Celebrate Water event held in Greencastle; and education and outreach events and activities, including the

maritime ambassador programme and the Foyle ambassador project, and events such as World Oceans Day, Biodiversity Day and River Discovery Day. Ministers also welcomed the Loughs Agency's success in securing in excess of €15 million of EU funding for maritime tourism, angling development and the IBIS research project. They noted the agency's plans to avail itself of future funding initiatives such as the European social fund, the Heritage Lottery, INTERREG V and the rural development programme, for the benefit of the Foyle and Carlingford Areas. The NSMC praised the efforts of the chief executive and his team in securing alternative sources of funding in the current economic climate.

Source: <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/plenary-07-12-2015.pdf>

Tuesday 8 December 2015

North/South Ministerial Council: Languages

Summary: Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): made a statement regarding the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) Language Body meeting that was held in the Tyrone Guthrie Centre in Annaghmakerrig, County Monaghan on 6 November 2015

Ms Ní Chuilín: Ministers noted progress reports from the chairpersons and chief executive officers of Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency, which included the following achievements relating to the period from June 2015 to October 2015. The app for the new EnglishIrish dictionary was launched at Oireachtas na Gaeilge, and the Foclóir Beag was added to the online dictionary and language library. The Clár Leabhar Gaeilge 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 is being implemented, and new digital facilities are available from junior infant level to second class. Funding was provided for youth projects, including 92 summer camps to cater for 3,800 children, which is an increase of 200 from 2014, with 74 groups organising youth activities during the year in addition to the 428 Gaeltacht scholarships for young people here.

The promotion of Ulster Scots in education included the award of flagship status to six schools; the enrolment of 12 schools on the flagship starter programme; the delivery of five after-school clubs and 10 workshops; and two further east-west twinning projects between primary schools. Two key events were organised, 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 that had an attendance of 450. Support was provided to 21 summer schools, 12 community festivals and 12 community showcase events. Public awareness of Ulster Scots was increased through 19 group visits to the Discover Ulster Scots Centre, the publication of two editions of the Ulster-Scots newspaper and the establishment of a further three blue plaques around Ulster, celebrating pivotal figures from Ulster-Scots history.

Ministers also noted progress on collaboration between Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency, including two joint events as part of a community relations and cultural awareness week, comprising a lecture on Irish and UlsterScots elements in place names in Northern Ireland and a panel discussion on language traditions in Belfast; engagement in year 2 of a programme to raise

awareness of Irish language and linguistic heritage and UlsterScots culture, heritage and language in postprimary schools; and the 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.

The Council noted that the field audits of the 2014 accounts have been completed, and, following work by the Comptrollers and Auditors General to finalise the accounts of each agency, it is envisaged that the consolidated language body annual report and accounts for 2014 will be laid by spring 2016. Ministers noted that the agencies of the language body continue to engage in the identification of possible opportunities to maximise the benefits of EU funding.

Ministers also noted that the Ulster-Scots Agency is continuing to explore opportunities under the INTERREG transnational programmes — the northern periphery and Arctic programme, and the Atlantic area programme, including the organisation of a workshop for the latter. The agency has applied to join the European route of industrial heritage network, which has 200 members in 43 countries, and is monitoring progress with the development of the LEADER/rural development programme whereby there may be opportunities to promote Ulster-Scots heritage.

Ministers noted developments arising from Foras na Gaeilge's success in securing EU funding for the Other Words literary project under the Creative Europe programme, and that two working groups — one internal and one with the six lead organisations — continue to assess other opportunities, including Slí Cholmcille — the Colmcille heritage trail. Advanced discussions have been held between Foras na Gaeilge, Argyll and Bute Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council with the aim of submitting a preliminary application under the Atlantic area programme. Work is ongoing to identify other eligible partners outside Ireland and the UK.

Larger partnership projects are being explored by the lead organisations EU funding working group. One of those organisations, Conradh na Gaeilge, has submitted an application under the recent round of the ERASMUS+ programme under key action 3 for youth structured dialogue. A larger project focusing on Families and Schools Together (FAST) for Gaeltacht and Irish-medium schools is being investigated.

The Council noted the key features of a revised scéim phobail Gaeilge/Irish language community scheme, which includes transition from a three- to a four-year scheme, the consolidation of progress to date and the facilitation of new communities to avail themselves of the scheme by increasing the number of possible grantees from the current 19 groups to a maximum of 26, which is an increase of 37%. The Council noted a maximum grant level of €37,000 in year 1, rising to €40,000 in year 4, including 80% of the employment costs for development officers, and it noted a new focus on sustainable development in the communities, which will empower groups to retain ownership and stewardship in their target areas and ensure that permanent outcomes result from funding.

The Council noted that Glór na nGael, as the lead organisation in community and economic development through its network of development officers, will have a role in fostering, sharing and encouraging good practice in funded projects and 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 from 1 July 2016. Ministers received a presentation from the CEO of the Ulster-

Scots Agency outlining the agency's cross-border activities, consistent with its legislative remit for the promotion of greater awareness and use of Ullans and Ulster-Scots cultural issues. They noted the wide range of key activities that have been expanded on in both jurisdictions, including music and dance tuition; the Ulster-Scots flagship scheme;

North/South school twinnings; a post-primary curriculum pilot project; annual community picnics; heritage research and the development of heritage trails; continuing support for Monreagh Heritage Centre; blue plaques; touring exhibitions; the organisation of an Ulster-Scots heritage day; and a conference on the Irish-Scottish world in the Middle Ages.

Source: <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/plenary-08-12-2015.pdf>



Tuesday 8 December 2015

Written Answers:

Summary: In a written Question TD Martin asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if a cross-Border group will be set up to prepare for a possible British exit from the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. The Minister advised the Member that the Irish Government is alert to the significance of the UK's members of the EU to Irish national interests, not just to the Irish economy but also for the continuing strength of British-Irish relations and for peace and stability in Northern Ireland. Minister Flanagan stated that "the Government fully recognises that it must be prepared for all scenarios and we are already in regular contact with a wide range of stakeholders, both North and South of the border and across the UK."

Charles Flanagan: The Government is very much aware of the key significance of UK membership of the EU for our national interests. We know how important it is not just for our economy but also for the continuing strength of British-Irish relations and for peace and stability in Northern Ireland. It's also our firm view that the EU is better and stronger as a whole on account of UK membership. That is why our main focus remains on doing all we can to ensure that the UK remains part of the Union, rather than planning for their departure.

At the same time, the Government fully recognises that it must be prepared for all scenarios and we are already in regular contact with a wide range of stakeholders, both North and South of the border and across the UK. This should help identify the many different issues that could arise, including with regard to Northern Ireland.

Further work is also being undertaken across other Government Departments in this regard. The Department of the Taoiseach continues to coordinate cross-Governmental efforts in this area as we move forward with this work. This includes research that the Department of Finance has

commissioned from the Economic and Social Research Institute on macro-economic links between the UK and Ireland in the context of EU membership.

My own Department, given its responsibility for both Foreign Affairs and Trade, is naturally heavily involved. My officials are engaging actively with counterparts across our own system, as well as within the Northern Irish and British administrations and further afield in other EU capitals.

A key aim for us is to ensure that stakeholders in Northern Ireland and across the UK understand why their EU membership matters as much as it does for Ireland. Most recently, on 26 November I joined the Northern Ireland Minister for Finance and Personnel, Ms. Arlene Foster MLA, in addressing a seminar in Belfast which was jointly organised by Queen's University Belfast (QUB), the Institute for International and European Affairs (IIEA) and the Irish Association for Cultural, Economic and Social Relations. This provided a valuable opportunity to stimulate debate on this issue, raising awareness of the potential impacts for Northern Ireland.

I have also addressed influential audiences on this topic in Chatham House, London and most recently in Dublin at a Breakfast Seminar organised by the British-Irish Chamber of Commerce (BICC) and hosted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade at Iveagh House.

At a political level, my recent meeting with Foreign Secretary Hammond in London on 23 November provided an opportunity to re-emphasise the importance of the UK's continued membership of the EU. The Taoiseach has had similar exchanges with Prime Minister Cameron, most recently on 9 November. We have underlined our commitment to supporting the UK's efforts to reach agreement at EU level on reforms that address the broad issues raised by Prime Minister Cameron in his letter of 10 November to European Council President Donald Tusk, while ensuring an outcome that is not only good for the UK, but good for Ireland and good for the EU as a whole.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2015-12-08a.1163&s=cross-border#g1164.q>