

## **Minister's speech – Strand2@25: Learning from the impact of the North South Implementation Bodies, 12 December 2024**

(Note: this document may not reflect verbatim delivery by Minister Murphy)

Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you Anthony for your invitation to speak with you all today.

The North South Implementation Bodies - established 25 years ago under the Good Friday Agreement - have made a significant contribution to life across this island.

Today's event is a welcome opportunity to reflect on this, and to look ahead at their role in shaping the next 25.

Research being undertaken by the Centre for Cross-Border Co-operation reflects on the collective and cross-cutting impact of our implementation bodies.

I'm pleased, but not surprised, to see that emerging findings from this research is positive.

This research points to economic, but also environmental, cultural and health related impacts which have helped to shape the island we know today.

While SafeFood have invested in the promotion of nutrition and food safety, they have also worked to support our important agri-food supply chains.

Foras na Gaelige and the Ulster Scots Agency have made positive contributions to vital cultural and heritage conservation.

Similarly, Waterways Ireland and the Loughs Agency have helped to promote tourism across the island.

They have also protected the environment and contributed to healthy lifestyles of people who visit our natural assets.

The agencies that work most closely with my own Department -Tourism Ireland and InterTrade Ireland – have also made a huge contribution.

Tourism is rightly hailed as one of the success stories of the Good Friday Agreement.

Our tourism industry has flourished under the peace process and brought more international visitors to our shores.

Tourism supports an increasing number of jobs right across the island. It drives cultural diversity.

It supports entrepreneurial activity and allows us to tell our story.

The industry is also embracing the environmental challenge; with Tourism Ireland playing its part in a new all-island strategic group for sustainable tourism.

Intertrade Ireland has helped over 57,000 businesses across this island to innovate, grow, and export into new markets.

They have delivered over 23,000 jobs and have supported over 1,800 businesses to export for the first time.

With cross-border trade now at a record level of €15bn, the positive impact of this body – not just on the economy, but on people's lives, is plain to see.

I'm pleased to see that both Alice and Margaret are here today and look forward to hearing their reflections.

From my perspective, the impact both organisations have had on this island over the last 25 years cannot be understated.

I'd also like to take a moment to reflect on the work of the Special EU Programmes Body.

With over £3bn invested to date, SEUPB continues to support better lives for over two million people fostering peace and reconciliation.

From the earliest PEACE Programmes, we have seen a commitment to empowering communities.

By building skills, promoting participation, and encouraging cross-community engagement, these programmes have enabled long-term economic and social development.

The INTERREG programmes, meanwhile, have targeted sustainable growth and employment, investing in sectors with high growth potential while addressing key weaknesses such as low research and innovation levels.

25 years on, the collective contribution of our implementation bodies is remarkable.

I'm delighted to be able to celebrate this milestone moment with you all today.

And I'm encouraged to see the theme of co-operation here today.

You have my support as you look to the successes you can deliver in the next 25 years, and beyond.

