

North South Ministerial Council  
Joint Secretariat



An Chomhairle Aireachta  
Thuaidh Theas  
An Chomhrúnaíocht

# **NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

## **INLAND WATERWAYS MEETING**

### **NSMC JOINT SECRETARIAT OFFICES, ARMAGH, AND BY VIDEOCONFERENCE**

#### **21 MAY 2021**

## **JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ**

1. The twenty-seventh North South Ministerial Council Inland Waterways meeting was held in the NSMC Joint Secretariat Offices, Armagh, and by videoconference on 21 May 2021. The meeting was attended by Nichola Mallon, MLA Minister for Infrastructure, Robin Swann, MLA Minister of Health, Darragh O'Brien, TD, Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and Malcolm Noonan TD, Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform. Minister Mallon chaired the meeting.

### **PROGRESS REPORT**

2. Ministers noted the progress achieved in the activities of Waterways Ireland which includes the following:
  - (i) extensive restoration work to repair the Meelick Weir on the Shannon including a new 295m publicly accessible walkway on top of the weirs;
  - (ii) enabling works commenced to Carnroe Weir on The Lower Bann in January 2021 and are due for completion in April 2021. The 'in river works' are due to commence in the Spring of 2022 with completion expected by Autumn 2023;
  - (iii) abandoned and non-compliant non-live aboard boats along the Canals were removed, significantly improving Bye-Law compliance rates across navigations from 56% to mid-80%;

- (iv) work commenced on the 46km Barrow Blueway in the late summer of 2020 in both Kildare and Laois. Completion of this stretch is due in 2022;
- (v) ecology surveys and preparations for planning submissions for 5-year long term maintenance plans along the Barrow and South Shannon are ongoing and will be completed in 2021;
- (vi) some €150,000 was awarded to Waterways Ireland in March 2021 under the Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF) for development options, a viability appraisal and masterplan for Tullamore Harbour;
- (vii) Waterways Ireland, with support from Minister O'Brien and Minister Martin, launched the Shannon Tourism Master Plan in March 2021. Over €70 million in investment will be injected into the Shannon river region by 2030;
- (viii) Waterways Ireland, with support from Minister Noonan and Minister Ryan, launched the Royal Canal Greenway in March 2021 – Ireland's longest greenway stretching over 130 kms;
- (ix) Waterways Ireland is actively progressing plans on Dublin Canals development opportunities and 'living communities';
- (x) the Waterways Ireland Heritage Plan (2016-2020) concluded in 2020 having directly invested over €650,000 in the delivery of heritage projects. Work is ongoing in the formulation and delivery of a new 10 Year Heritage Plan (2021-2030);
- (xi) Waterways Ireland continues to work on its 10-year Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Plan - being one of the first in the public sector to do so;
- (xii) research by Waterways Ireland determined that over half of the population in both jurisdictions visited at least one of its waterways in 2020 (walk/cycling, commercial boating, rowing, angling, sailing, canoeing, activity centres, etc);
- (xiii) progress to improve governance, risk and controls is ongoing. The 2021 Internal Audit Plan and associated reports have been completed and a Business Process Review of Waterways Ireland Finance function is ongoing with an estimated target completion date in June 2021;
- (xiv) the Ten-Year Long-term Plan is nearing completion with final articulation of the Plan ongoing and preparatory work is already underway in preparation for pre-Public Consultation engagement with key stakeholders, including Sponsor Departments, in advance of appropriate screening and public consultation.

## **NEW DECADE NEW APPROACH**

3. Ministers noted the progress achieved in the restoration of the Ulster Canal which included the ongoing work on Phase 2 of the restoration of the Ulster Canal from Clones to Clonfad, the plans for Phase 3 of the restoration of the Ulster Canal from Castle Saunderson to Clonfad, and the plans for the development of the Ulster Canal Greenway.

## **RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

4. Ministers noted the response of Waterways Ireland to Covid-19 and the increase in user numbers along towpaths and trails during the period of Covid-19 related restrictions in 2020. They also noted the increasing popularity of the inland waterways as a holiday destination for the domestic market as demonstrated by the increase in bookings for the 2021 season.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF UK WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EU**

5. The Council noted the impact of the UK withdrawal from the EU on Waterways Ireland in the context of its status as a North South Implementation Body.

## **CORPORATE GOVERNANCE MATTERS**

6. Ministers approved the Waterways Ireland draft 2020-2022 Corporate Plan. They also noted that the Waterways Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2019 have been signed off by both Comptrollers and Auditors General and will be laid before the NI Assembly and both houses of the Oireachtas in the near future and the Waterways Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2020 have been submitted for audit.

## **STAFFING AND ORGANISATIONAL MATTERS**

7. Ministers agreed that options for an independent organisation review of Waterways Ireland will be considered by Sponsor Departments and the Body and noted that draft terms of reference will be submitted to NSMC for consideration at a future meeting.

## **CORPORATE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES**

8. The Council agreed that officials will explore options for the establishment of a Board to oversee the work of Waterways Ireland and noted that an update will be provided to the Council at the next NSMC Inland Waterways meeting.

## **PROPERTY DISPOSALS**

9. The Council consented to a number of property disposals.

## **NEXT MEETING**

10. The Council agreed to hold its next NSMC Inland Waterways meeting in late 2021.

**Joint Secretariat**  
**21 May 2021**

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