

**NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL PLENARY MEETING
ARMAGH, 17 JULY 2007**

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The fifth plenary meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) was held at the Armagh City Hotel, Armagh on 17 July 2007.
2. The Northern Ireland delegation was led by the First Minister, The Rt Hon Dr Ian Paisley MP MLA and Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness MP MLA who jointly chaired the meeting. The Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern T.D. A full list of the members of both delegations is attached as an Annex.
3. Ministers acknowledged the significance of the occasion, the first meeting of the NSMC Plenary since 2002. They welcomed the opportunity to meet in the North South Ministerial Council to consult, promote mutually beneficial co-operation and take a number of decisions on a range of issues within the Council's work programme.

CROSS BORDER CO-OPERATION ON ROADS

4. The Council noted the Irish Government's intention to make available a contribution of £400m/€580m to help fund major roads programmes providing dual carriageway standard on routes within Northern Ireland serving the North West Gateway and on the eastern seaboard corridor from Belfast to Larne.
5. The Northern Ireland Executive confirmed its acceptance, in principle, to taking forward these two major road projects.
6. The road project from Belfast to Larne will be taken forward by the Northern Ireland Executive and its agencies.
7. The route serving the North West Gateway will be taken forward in line with funding and accountability, planning, management and delivery arrangements agreed between the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.
8. Relevant Ministers will take forward the necessary steps to progress this project, including the early commencement of a route corridor study.

**PROPOSED RESTORATION OF THE CLONES – UPPER LOUGH ERNE
SECTION OF THE ULSTER CANAL**

9. The Council agreed to proceed with the restoration of the section of the Ulster Canal between Clones and Upper Lough Erne in the light of the Irish Government's offer to cover the full capital costs of the project.

10. Waterways Ireland, a North/South Implementation Body, will be responsible for the restoration of this section of the Canal and, following restoration, for its management maintenance and development principally for recreational purposes.

11. Relevant Ministers, meeting in the NSMC Inland Waterways Sector will agree plans to take forward this restoration work, including details of funding arrangements, and will report on progress to NSMC Plenary meetings.

WORK OF THE NORTH/SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

12. The Council received a report from the Joint Secretaries on the work of the NSMC since 2002. It noted that the work of the North/South Implementation Bodies and Tourism Ireland had continued and expressed its appreciation to the Boards and staff for their contribution. The Council also noted the mutually beneficial co-operation taken forward between Ministers and Departments in the Areas for Co-operation.

THE ST. ANDREWS AGREEMENT - REVIEW

13. The Council agreed to take forward the review, provided for in the St. Andrews Agreement, of the North/South Implementation Bodies and Areas for Co-operation. The Review will commence in September 2007 and a final report will be presented to the first NSMC Plenary Meeting in 2008. The Review will be undertaken by a group, including senior officials and an advisory panel of four experts/advisers, two to be nominated by the Northern Ireland Executive and two to be nominated by the Irish Government.

INDEPENDENT NORTH SOUTH CONSULTATIVE FORUM

14. The Council noted that the Irish Government will consult the social partners on the North South Consultative Forum. It also noted the review of arrangements for consulting civic society in Northern Ireland and agreed to consider this matter once that review is complete.

NORTH SOUTH PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

15. The Council noted the provisions of the St. Andrews Agreement relating to the North South Parliamentary Forum. It recognised that any development of a joint parliamentary forum is a matter for the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas.

16. Officials from the two administrations will make contact with the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Houses of the Oireachtas and report back to the NSMC at the earliest opportunity on the prospects for the development of such a forum.

PLANNING FOR FUTURE NSMC MEETINGS

17. The Council considered and approved a schedule of NSMC meetings to take place over the coming months and agreed that its next meeting, in Plenary format, will be held in Dundalk towards the end of the year.

Joint Secretariat

17 July 2007