



NORTH SOUTH MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

INLAND WATERWAYS MEETING

CANAL STORES, CLONES, CO. MONAGHAN

19 JUNE 2024

JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

1. The twenty-ninth North South Ministerial Council Inland Waterways meeting was held in the Canal Stores, Clones, County Monaghan on 19 June 2024. The meeting was attended by John O'Dowd MLA, Minister for Infrastructure, Darragh O' Brien TD, Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Malcolm Noonan TD, Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and Pam Cameron MLA, Junior Minister at the Executive Office. Minister O'Dowd chaired the meeting.

PROGRESS REPORT

2. Ministers welcomed the achievements of Waterways Ireland since the last meeting and the valuable contribution it makes through its various activities including:
 - i. the launch of Waterways Ireland 10-Year Plan; its Digital Transformation Programme; and its nomination for various awards, including the 'Green Public Sector Organisation of the Year' category at the Green Awards;
 - ii. the success of the Royal Canal Greenway and the ongoing work on the Grand Canal Greenway and the Ulster Canal Greenway; the progression of major projects such as Barrow Navigation, Tullamore Harbour and Depot, Camden Lock, and Connaught Harbour; the ongoing rehabilitation of Carnroe Weir on the Lower Bann; and the delivery of Phase 2 of the Ulster Canal Restoration project;

- iii. Waterway's Ireland's involvement in the development of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan and Erne Visitor Experience Development Programme; the development of its Asset Management Programme; its Business Continuity Framework; its Emergency response Plan; and the implementation of its Health and Safety Programme and pursuit of ISO 45001 accreditation; and
- iv. the introduction of a hybrid working policy, launch of its People Strategy and filling of key posts to enable the organisation to fulfil its statutory remit.

ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE AND LOSS OF BIODIVERSITY WITHIN WATERWAYS IRELAND

3. The Council welcomed the response of Waterways Ireland to Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainability issues, how Waterways Ireland has resourced itself and built capacity to enable success in addressing climate change and biodiversity loss, and how Waterways Ireland seeks to drive cultural change by embedding sustainability in the organisation.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE MATTERS

4. The Council approved Waterways Irelands Corporate Plan 2023-25 and the Business Plans and Budgets/Grants for 2022, 2023 and 2024.
5. The Council noted that the Waterways Ireland Annual Reports and Accounts for the years 2021 and 2022 have been laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas and that the Annual Report and Accounts for 2023 have been submitted to the Comptrollers and Auditors General in both jurisdictions and following certification, will be laid before the Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas.

UPDATE ON BYE LAWS

6. Ministers noted the proposed updating by Waterways Ireland of the Shannon Navigation Bye-Laws and the Canals Bye-Laws involving extensive stakeholder engagement and that the Body is in the process of reviewing submissions received as part of the consultation process.

STAFFING MATTERS

7. The Council noted that the Terms of Reference for an independent Organisational Review of Waterways Ireland have been approved by Finance Ministers and that an update on the position of the Review will be provided to a future meeting.

PROPERTY DISPOSALS AND ACQUISITIONS

8. Ministers consented to a number of property disposals and acquisitions.

UPDATE ON THE ULSTER CANAL

9. The Council noted the progress achieved in the restoration of the Ulster Canal and the plans for Phase 3 of the restoration of the Ulster Canal from Castle Saunderson to Clonfad.
10. Ministers welcomed additional funding of €80 million for Phase 3 of the project from the Government of Ireland and noted an event to mark the completion by Waterways Ireland of the Ulster Canal Restoration Phase 2 was taking place later today at Clones Marina, Co. Monaghan.

NARROW WATER BRIDGE

11. The Council welcomed the commencement of construction of the Narrow Water Bridge, marked at an event in June attended by the Taoiseach, Tánaiste, Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and the NI Minister for Infrastructure.
12. Ministers welcomed that the Government of Ireland approved Shared Island funding for the total cost of the project based on the successful tender price of €102m (plus VAT); and noted that the bridge is a major investment in landmark cross-border infrastructure and will provide for car, cycle and pedestrian traffic, connecting the A2 Newry to Warrenpoint dual carriageway in County Down with the R173 Omeath in County Louth. The NSMC also noted the significant benefits the bridge will bring in better connecting both jurisdictions and in the development of sustainable tourism in the east border region.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

13. The Council agreed to hold its next Inland Waterways meeting in late 2024.

Joint Secretariat
19 June 2024

Website www.northsouthministerialcouncil.org