



## **COMMUNIQUÉ**

### **16<sup>th</sup> Ministerial meeting of the Environment work sector**

**4 November 2020**

The British-Irish Council Environment work sector held its sixteenth Ministerial meeting today via virtual format, hosted by the UK Government. Ministers were welcomed by the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity, Lord Gardiner of Kimble, on behalf of the UK Government.

The British-Irish Council, established in 1999, is a forum for its members to discuss, consult and use best endeavours to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest within the competence of its Member Administrations. The BIC Environment work sector is led by the UK Government, and has proved a constructive and unique forum for facilitating evidence exchange and practical collaboration since the Council was first established. The meeting held today focused on how the administrations can work together on climate adaptation, tackle invasive non-native species (INNS) and approach the issues connected with the marine environment.

The meeting was chaired by Lord Gardiner of Kimble, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the UK Government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Irish Government was represented by Mr Eamon Ryan T.D. Minister for Transport and Minister for Environment, Climate and Communications. The Scottish Government was represented by Roseanna Cunningham MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform and Mairi Gougeon MSP, Minister for Rural Affairs and the Natural Environment. The Welsh Government was represented by Lesley Griffiths MS, Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs. The Isle of Man Government was represented by Geoffrey Boot MHK, Minister for Environment, Food and Agriculture. The Government of Jersey was represented by Deputy John Young Minister for the Environment. The Government of Guernsey was represented

by Deputy Lindsay de Saumarez, President of the Committee for the Environment and Infrastructure. The Northern Ireland Executive was represented by Minister Edwin Poots MLA, Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and Declan Kearney MLA, Junior Minister in The Executive.

### **Marine Environment**

Ministers re-affirmed their commitment to conserve and sustainably use the ocean, seas and marine resources in accordance with UN Sustainable Development Goal 14. The BIC Environment work sector has set up two subgroups to cover the areas of marine litter and marine environment, including biodiversity, marine protected areas and ocean acidification. Ministers discussed priority areas where the two subgroups have been focussing their work and noted progress to date, including on commitments agreed at the BIC Marine Litter Symposium in February 2019. These commitments are to develop options to help support sustainable end of life fishing gear disposal, support the reduction of plastic pellet loss and raise awareness of marine litter with young people and fishing professionals.

Noting the challenges faced by the marine environment in our shared seas, they agreed to continue the ambitious programme of collaborative work, aligned with macro-regional and international obligations.

### **Climate Change Adaptation**

Ministers discussed key aspects of the work that is being undertaken by the BIC climate adaptation sub group including to:-

- Identify and share adaptation research and evidence, and examine mechanisms to improve linkages between adaptation researchers across the BIC region;
- Foster cooperation and promote shared learning on measuring progress to minimise climate risks to critical infrastructure across the BIC region;
- Identify and share information on best practice regarding community and private sector engagement on climate adaptation, adaptation governance models and monitoring and evaluation of adaptation.

Ministers noted that the subgroup had delivered a virtual Climate Adaptation Symposium on 20 October 2020, which focussed on the topic of critical infrastructure and was hosted by the Irish Government. The Symposium was attended by 80 delegates from the BIC Member Administrations, and that further collaboration and engagement would continue via the BIC Environment work sector and its subgroup on climate adaptation.

### **Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS)**

Ministers were asked to note that the BIC INNS officials have been meeting bi-annually since 2013 to explore and agree areas of cooperation on INNS, and that the fourth BIC INNS workshop was held in Cardiff on 20/21 January 2020 hosted jointly by the BIC Secretariat and Welsh Government. Ministers committed to an ambitious programme of collaboration, including on the *Be Plant Wise* and *Check Clean Dry* communications campaigns, and on marine invasives, such as the carpet sea squirt, as well as establishing an Asian hornet task force.

### **Future work**

Ministers agreed that the seventeenth Ministerial meeting will be hosted in 2022 and that the BIC Environment work sector would continue its focus on the marine environment, climate adaptation and invasive non-native species.

### **BIC Secretariat**

**4 November 2020**