

North-South Co-operation

The establishment of the North-South Ministerial Council is intended to enhance co-operation across a range of economically important areas, beginning with those listed in the 18 December agreement. Policy will be jointly developed where it is appropriate given mutual interest.

In the area of North-South trade the continuing success of the Republic's economy offers expanded markets for northern goods and services provided that price and quality are right. Within the North-South Council a special implementation body dealing with Trade Promotion and Business Development will research and direct initiatives aimed at encouraging trade throughout the island and abroad. The body will also develop a co-ordinated training and market research programme to support trade promotion.

The implementation body with responsibility for EU Programmes will be in a position to contribute in highly significant ways to economic development through initiatives such as INTERREG III, LEADER III, EQUAL and any successor to the Peace and Reconciliation programme. The more specific remits of the body for Aquaculture and Marine will focus on the overall development of Lough Foyle and Carlingford Lough in terms of their commercial and recreational potential. In each there is considerable scope for development in both respects, especially in terms of tourism related recreational activities.

In Tourism the establishment of a publicly owned limited company by Bord Failte and NITB will ensure fully co-ordinated international marketing initiatives promoting tourism throughout Ireland within the context of an integrated marketing strategy for the whole island. Tourism is the single industry to have been most adversely affected by the violence and instability of the past thirty years. As a result the potential for expansion in tourism in the North is enormous. Combining with the South which has enjoyed considerable success over this same period to market both parts of the island jointly will realise much of this potential.

Closely related to tourism will be the work of the Inland Waterways Body which will have responsibility for the management, maintenance and restoration of navigable waterways throughout the island. The success of the jointly managed Erne-Shannon waterway provides a model for other initiatives, for example the restoration of the Ulster Canal which once flowed through Counties Armagh and Monaghan. If reopened it would, together with the Erne-Shannon waterway, establish Ireland as a leading location for inland cruising in Europe.

Because of its importance to both economies agriculture will receive considerable attention from the North-South Council. CAP reform is affecting the industry in similar ways while enlargement of the EU will vastly increase Europe's capacity to produce food. The alternatives open to us, both in terms of diversification and specialisation must be jointly examined. Pooling our research and strategic planning resources through the North-South Council will help provide effective answers for the agricultural sector.

Finally the North-South Council will play an increasingly important role in co-ordinating infrastructural development affecting both parts of Ireland. Border areas provide the most immediate contexts for important initiatives in many of these respects. The integration of previously divided local economies, e.g. Derry-Donegal and Newry/South Armagh/Mourne-North Louth, are cases in point, but by no means the only ones.

The North-South Council represents a major political initiative to come to terms with our history and the interdependence of our two economies created by the impact of the European Union and wider globalisation. Despite the differences of emphasis which our two parties bring to North-South relationships there is a firm determination to make this aspect of the Good Friday Agreement work.