

Taskforce on Article 50 negotiations with the United Kingdom
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Brussels

5th July 2017

Re: Brexit and the Environment – Impact on the island of Ireland

Dear M. Barnier and Mme. Weyand,

We are writing to you to express our shared concerns regarding the potentially serious impacts of Brexit on crucial cross-border cooperation to protect the environment on the island of Ireland. As you know, this is one of six key areas of cooperation outlined by the North South Ministerial Council as established under the Good Friday Agreement.

The Environmental Pillar and Northern Ireland Environment Link, who together represent almost 100 environmental organisations from across the island of Ireland, are working together to draw attention to the environmental challenges and opportunities of Brexit.

As set out in our joint evidence to the Irish Parliament's Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, the natural environment does not respect borders and its protection needs to be addressed on an all-island basis.¹

A key message to emerge at a recent conference – held in the border town of Dundalk and organised in conjunction with the European Parliament Information Office in Dublin – was that the island of Ireland and its surrounding seas represent a single biogeographic unit that has benefited hugely from the common set of environmental standards in place as a result of our shared membership of the EU.

Working together within this common legislative framework, with its associated funding and compliance arrangements, has allowed us to more effectively and efficiently address issues such as biodiversity loss and climate change than would have been possible if acting alone.

Not only has this delivered significant environmental benefits, it has also played a crucial role in providing a level playing field in relation to cross-border trade, minimising competitive distortions and the potential for cross-border environmental dumping to occur.

In light of these “*unique circumstances*”, we believe it is essential to ensure that future cooperation on the environment is not put at risk as a result of Brexit and that the negotiations on the UK's withdrawal fully address these issues.

It is in the interests of both parties to ensure that environmental standards remain aligned following the UK's exit from the EU.² Any future divergence or lowering of standards on either side of the border would be bad for the environment, bad for citizens, and bad for business.³

It is only by avoiding a hard environmental border that we can ensure our joint efforts to protect and enhance the environment for the benefit of all are not undermined. Indeed, action in this area is strongly supported by citizens, with over 100,000 people from across these islands participating in the European Commission's public consultation on the fitness check of the Birds and Habitats Directives.

¹ Northern Ireland Environment Link and the Environmental Pillar. (2017). *Brexit and Shared Environmental Issues between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland*. Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

² For example, see: Seanad Special Select Committee on the Withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union. (2017). *Brexit: Implications and Potential Solutions*.

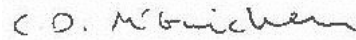
³ As stated by Mairead McGuinness MEP (Vice-President of the European Parliament) at the recent all-island event in Dundalk: “*Brexit poses many challenges but the threat to environmental progress, which the EU has championed, is alarming...when the UK leaves the EU...environmental standards must not be diluted and progress must not stall... it is important to have the same high standards north and south of the border and a divergence of standards would be bad for citizens and for business.*”

We will be bringing a small delegation to Brussels later this year for a number of engagements with the different EU institutions and we would very much welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with you in more detail.

Yours Sincerely,



Michael Ewing
Coordinator, The Environmental Pillar



Craig McGuicken
Chief Executive, Northern Ireland Environment Link