

IRISH SEA REGIONS PLATFORM



Declaration of Intent

February, 2008

A Declaration of Intent by the Cities and Regions of the Irish Sea to establish a programme of mutually beneficial joint co-operation

INTRODUCTION

The greater integration of the European Union in recent years has seen an increasing emphasis on cross-border links. In terms of EU policy making, the original interest was with land borders, however, growing levels of trade and co-operation between the countries of the European Union has meant that cross-border areas became more significant. Ireland and the United Kingdom, being island states, have a strong dependence on cross-border co-operation and this dependence is even greater since the recent enlargement of the European Union, which has seen the west coast of the United Kingdom and the island of Ireland become, in many respects, more peripheral from mainland Europe.

The Irish Sea provides important links between the island of Ireland, the Isle of Man and the UK. This maritime area is effectively a member state border zone with its own characteristics, very different from those of a land border. The Irish Sea is, therefore, of high importance not only to all surrounding regions but also to the further development of Ireland and United Kingdom in a European context. There are various strategic interests operating in and around the Irish Sea as well as many overlapping uses, and this, together with the fact that there has never been coherent planning of the area forms the context for the development of an Irish Sea Regions Platform.

The Irish Sea Regions Platform, which comprises all of the regions of the Irish Sea working in a collaborative and cohesive manner will address, among other things, the challenges the Irish Sea faces as a result increased urbanisation, tourism, fishing, sporting, energy consumption, economic and port uses, etc. The Irish Sea Platform also offers a valuable and rare opportunity for co-operation to encourage a partnership approach bringing together cities, universities, marine and environmental professionals, transport, fishing, energy, business and public administrations to identify, develop and deliver a range of innovative projects, which taken together, will result in the coherent development of the Irish Sea region.

BALANCED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The European Union is, currently, dominated economically by the London-Hamburg-Munich-Milan-Paris Pentagon which is a zone of global economic

significance. The European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), which aims to encourage the balanced spatial development of the European Union based on polycentric development, argues that other zones should be developed to counteract this Pentagon. The Irish Sea, which is of high economic importance to the surrounding regions, provides a unique opportunity for the collectively development of this zone as a potential counterbalance to this Pentagon. For example, as well as the marine aspect, there are many regions, cities and towns surrounding the Irish Sea who working together could be motors of growth, jobs, innovation and technology for the Irish Sea area, bringing together business, academia and public administrations as well as providing centres of learning and cultural. The Irish Sea area has the potential to be placed at the cutting edge of European competitiveness.

TERRITORIAL AGENDA FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION

Building upon the ESDP principle of an integrated view of the whole European continent the Territorial Agenda will aid the development of a polycentric, competitive, attractive and balanced urban system and strengthening of the partnership between urban and rural areas.

The Irish Sea synergy, in the context of the Territorial Agenda, will contribute to improved and renewed urban and rural partnerships within its own territorial area and thus to a more competitive and sustainable Europe. The Irish Sea Region aim to achieve this through the use of a trans-sectoral and proactive approach to urban-rural relationships and interdependencies across the Irish Sea regions and a framework for joint regional and sub-regional policies and strategies. Through increased cooperation the facilitation of increased competitiveness and innovation will subsequently be fostered across the urban and rural landscape of the Irish Sea area.

OUR PRINCIPLES FOR CO-OPERATION

There is a long history of common activity in and around the Irish Sea such as fishing, transport, migration and culture. Reflecting this, there are various completed and current co-operation projects at EU and Member State level on

particular topics, for example, the DEFRA pilot marine spatial planning project, the INTERREG A Wales-Ireland cross border programme, the NETA (North European Trade Axis) initiative and the Dublin-Belfast-Merseyside initiative.

The Irish Sea Regions Platform provides the opportunity for all regions and sectors in and surrounding the Irish Sea and the Isle of Man, to work together to provide opportunities to, not only develop new projects, but also to be aware of developments in other sectors which may have a wide impact. It is our intention that this initiative will go some way to help resolve areas of conflict or at least to provide the opportunity for a clearer understanding of the issues and difficulties each sector faces, operating in the Irish Sea. Our principles for co-operation are based on the following principles:-

- building on the existing strong links and synergies between the cities, regions and ports
- focusing on shared priority themes for action
- seeking an integrated basis for action through a programme-based approach
- realising tangible and practical benefits to be gained through territorial co-operation
- linking actions to current and proposed strategies/action plans for the respective regions, the Member States and the European Union.

OUR PRIORITY THEMES FOR CO-OPERATION

The Irish Sea can be viewed as a 'common resource' and opportunity for all surrounding regions. The following four strands emerged from discussions and the Irish Sea Regions will develop projects and initiatives under these heading in a strategic and integrated manner, bearing in mind the differing policies, legislation and interpretation by the various administrations:-

1. City-regions Co-operation
2. Transport/Trade Logistics
3. Future Challenges in Coastal and Marine Management
4. Maritime Spatial Resource

OUR DECLARATION OF INTENT

We, the undersigned, declare our intention to work towards a programme of mutual co-operation. In so doing we endeavour to ensure that we maximise the potential benefits to our regions by actively pursuing cross-border initiatives within the Irish Sea region and in the wider European Union.

We are prepared to work closely with our national governments and appropriate sectors, agencies and authorities to further these objectives.

We will continue lobby to support from local and regional interests and bodies; national governments; and the European Union for our efforts to intensify the links between our organisations and to create new opportunities for co-operation across the Irish Sea.

Signed: _____

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Date: _____