

The Irish Association for Cultural, Economic and Social Relations

‘A Vision for NorthSouth Co-operation?’

Strand 2 – a generation on’

Report from Symposium Three on health and the environment

Royal Irish Academy, 18 February 2025

The third symposium consisting of a diverse group of policymakers, academics, and civil society representatives discussed the topics of health and the environment discussed the evolving landscape of cross-border collaboration in the health and environment policy realms, with a vast array of perspectives demonstrating the richness of discussion.

Report Structure comprised *the following sections:*

1. Keynote Address by the two Chief Medical Officers on the island of Ireland - Prof. Sir Michael McBride and Prof. Mary Horgan.
 2. Panel 1: Health Practitioners’ Perspectives - Suzanne Costello, Tom Daly and Prof. Deirdre Heenan.
 3. The Special EU Programme’s Body - Gina McIntyre, CEO:
 4. Panel 2: Environment Practitioners’ Perspectives – Senator Malcolm Noonan, Dr. Ciara Brennan, Prof. Mark Emmerson.
 5. Panel 3: Summing Up – Analysts’ Perspectives – Turlough O’Donnell SC, Ian Marshall OBE, Prof. Brian O Gallachóir, Caitriona Mullan.
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Section One - The two Chief Medical Officers on the island of Ireland.

In his keynote address, Prof. Sir Michael outlined his view, that although there had not been a North/South health body established under the BGFA, this had not prevented meaningful North/South health cooperation. He outlined how ageing populations as well as resourcing and workforce pressures were constraining the health services in both jurisdictions. He discussed a number of areas where mutual cooperation was seeking to overcome such difficulties.

In Public Health, Prof. Sir Michael highlighted how suicide and self-harm prevention was a mutual priority. Existing cooperation had seen the 'self-harm registry' extended on a North/South basis, and North/South research is underway to develop guidance on suicide surveillance, and to examine ways to support those bereaved.

In cancer services and research, the North-South Policy and Strategy Group, established in March 2023, meets regularly, considering opportunities for closer cooperation in treatment. Proposals for widening the range of specialist cancer services on a North/South basis are also under consideration. Such proposals are orientated towards maximising the utility of resources, given the shortage of specialist staff in oncology and radiology. In this regard, Prof. Sir Michel insists that *"by working together, we can plug those gaps. Where we're not able to attract them into one jurisdiction, we can make attractive jobs by actually looking at a network service across the North and South"*. The North-West cancer service at Altnagelvin also provides cancer services to patients from the South. In cancer research, there is work ongoing under the All-Island Cancer Consortium, to *"discuss opportunities for cross-border research, including opportunities to establish a cancer research fund, which would be available to academics North and South"*.

In cardiovascular care, the All-Island Pre-Congenital Heart Disease Network, provides North/South cardiology services and cardiovascular surgery to children., now becoming a *"fully embedded, all-island service, providing children and young people with access to paediatric cardiac surgery, wherever they live on the island. He said "that network is a model of service delivery, and an exemplar of what we can do on a North/South basis in other areas"*.

Concerning potential future developments, Prof. Sir Michael outlined how he and Prof. Horgan are reviewing broadening the scope of cooperation in several areas, including paediatric pathology and trauma management.

Regarding workforce challenges, Prof. Sir Michael recognised that *"there is a growing interface between both jurisdictions"* and acknowledged that there were *"some interesting challenges to face"* with paediatric cardiology and cardiac surgery network, caused by Brexit. Recognition of the qualifications of nurses and doctors was one such issue that has since been resolved through *"pragmatic solutions"*. He highlighted growing collaboration on education and training, with the Irish government funding pre-registration training in the North being regarded as *"a win-win for us all"*, as it enhances the Southern workforce, and ensures Northern Irish training capacities are maintained, with potential recruitment opportunities into the Northern health service.

In closing, Prof. Sir Michael stressed that *while we don't have a single cross-border body that addresses the totality of Health and Social care, I think you can see that we've been very busy identifying synergies and further areas that lend themselves to further enhanced cross-border cooperation". "Discussions at the North South Ministerial Council are but one strand of that cooperation" at the end of the day we have one common aim... and that's to provide the best services that we possibly can."*

Prof. Horgan outlined the importance of 'One Health', which is policy orientated towards preventing the spread of infections and pandemics that *"don't respect borders"*. The two CMOs have monthly meetings, where information is exchanged, such as sharing ideas on mental health and suicide prevention. The Institute of Public Health plays a key role in facilitating North-South research on public health, such as in obesity prevention and management, smoking and alcohol consumption.

She outlined how many issues are common to border counties, North and South, such as deprivation and vaccine uptake, with extra resources invested in one jurisdiction likely to have cross-border effects.

In relation to workforce challenges, Prof. Horgan discussed how Ireland was seeking to learn from the UK in optimising the utility of its existing workforce, such as by expanding the pharmacist's role, following the North's 'Pharmacy First' example, to offset access issues and referred to the work of the All-Island Cancer Research Forum, which is based jointly between QUB and UCC.

Prof. Sir Michael discussed increasing the visibility and awareness of ongoing North/South health cooperation, stressing how *"the real grunt work, the real detail, probably isn't highlighted enough but key messaging is still the same: "you're working on the same population and achieving) the same net benefit."* Andy Pollak (Former Director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies) expressed disappointment on the lack of new major developments over the past 12/13 years, further querying whether the two CMOs believed the Covid-19 pandemic was *"a missed opportunity"* for closer North/South cooperation: Prof. Sir Michael suggested that there was extremely close cooperation between the two CMOs during Covid, but cautioned that North and South are separate jurisdictions, each with their own government and ministers, who have discretion on policy decisions. He cautioned, . He outlined how there was a range of new initiatives, such as around obesity and palliative care support *"Do not underestimate how difficult it is to put in place a service on a cross-jurisdictional basis, there are huge challenges... but I think that my experience is that... where there is mutual benefit to the population North and South, ministers will support that and officials will get behind that, and deliver"*.

Prof. Horgan agreed that there was mutual research cooperation and shared learning during the Covid pandemic, which informed policy makers. On whether Brexit has affected Mutual Recognition of Qualifications (MRQs), and the impact on health cooperation Prof. Horgan suggested that there was *"seamless"* MRQs between the two jurisdictions, with the UK Medical Council recently recognising Irish membership, alleviating potential problems in MRQs. Prof. Sir Michael added *"it did take us a little bit of time for us to navigate our way through it and secure the agreement of all parties to that, but that agreement has been secured."*

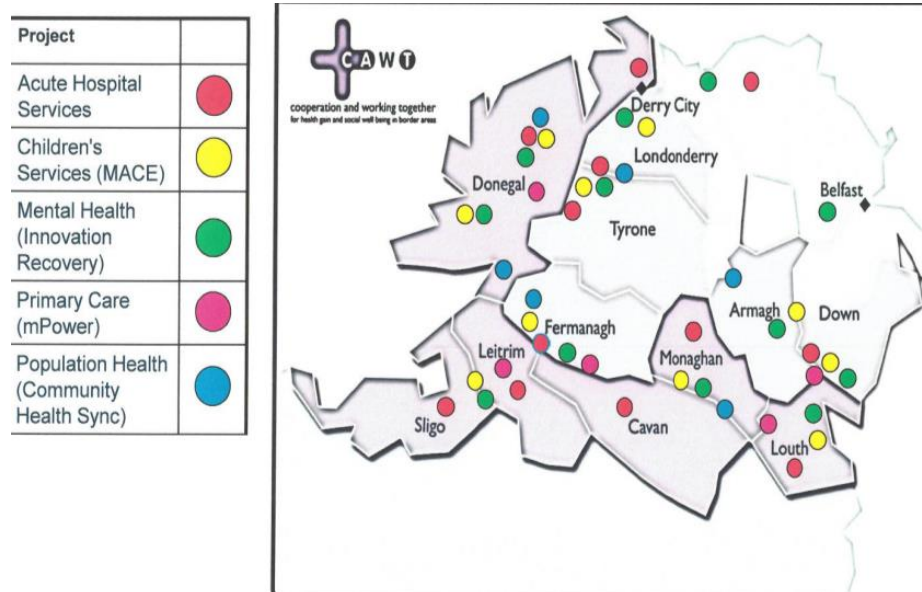
On whether more visible cooperation might undermine support, Prof. Sir Michael mentioned that highlighting successful cooperation often copperfastens support for it, and aids further resourcing – with paediatric cardiac surgery being one such example. Thus, it's about being selective with the timing of when issues go into the political and public domain.

Disappointment was expressed that neither speaker discussed economics: economies of scale, proximity and conditions. Mr. D'Arcy argued this was an area that required more attention, including possibly within the NSMC and Mr. D'Arcy noted that due to problems in the NHS, Northern residents were increasingly having to turn to private healthcare provision in the South. On this basis, he suggested that greater attention and visibility could be given to *the effective combination of resources to feed what are current and future needs.* .

Prof. Horgan argued that more focus should be on prevention, and less on treatment, with only 3% of budget resources allocated to prevention. Prof. Sir Michael accepted the validity of exploring economies of scale on resources, with specific reference made to the new Children's Hospitals both North and South presenting such opportunities. Nonetheless, caveated this with the need for the CMOs to *'stay in our lane'*, and leave finer details to health economists.

Section 2 Health Practitioners' Perspectives

Tom Daly (Former Director General, CAWT: Co-Operating and Working Together) discussed grassroots North/South health cooperation. Institutionalised cooperation dates back to the 1992 Ballyconnell Agreement, which established CAWT; the cross-border health and social care partnership between the HSE in Ireland and the Southern and Western Health and Social Care Trusts. It facilitates North/South service cooperation on acute hospital, mental health, primary care, population health and children's services; in border counties, Sligo and Belfast.



Mr. Daly identified SEUPB funding as being fundamental in getting cross-border health cooperation projects initiated, but also cited departmental support in Dublin and Belfast as being crucial for success.

Mr. Daly focused on three areas to exemplify the nature of practical cross-border health cooperation: Ambulance services, North-West Cancer Care; and PPCI (Primary Percutaneous Coronary Intervention).

Ambulance Services: Two memorandums of understanding are in place between the Northern and Southern services, centring on (a) emergency calls, and (b) the routine transfer of critically ill patients; which enable ambulances from one jurisdiction to be deployed in the other *“without any fuss”*. This *“happens regularly”*, and in certain cases, the patient may be brought to a hospital in the other jurisdiction. In 2023, 136 emergency cases featured an ambulance responding to a cross-border call.

North-West Cancer Care Network (Centre): Mr. Daly outlined pragmatic cooperation that ensured the provision of satellite radiotherapy services at Altnagelvin hospital. Population figures were insufficient in the Northern Irish regional area of Fermanagh, South Tyrone and Derry alone, so 160,000 of the Southern population in the North-West were included in the overall population catchment area, enabling the service's provision. In turn, the Irish government funded the one third of the construction costs, with radiotherapy patients in both jurisdictions now able to avail of the service.

PPCI Service: The CAT-lab in Altnagelvin is available for use by Donegal residents, on account of a cross-border agreement that involves sharing in the resourcing of ‘on-call’ consultant cardiologists.¹

In concluding, Mr. Daly emphasised that several other examples could have been discussed, and mentioned that cross-border work was continuing to identify areas possible areas for cooperation. Prof. Deirdre Heenan (Professor of Social Policy, Ulster University) outlined how progress on cross-border health collaboration has been slow and often merely project specific masking the absence of a policy specific, more widespread agenda for North/South health cooperation. Prof. Heenan highlighted the general dearth of cross-border healthcare research and comparable data (including detailed planning and feasibility studies) which undermines prospective collaboration towards achieving mutual objectives. Prof. Heenan suggested that political sensitivities don’t tell the full story here, as in her experience, DUP ministers approached health pragmatically, and were open to North/South collaboration that improved outcomes.

Prof. Heenan argued that the absence of an overarching strategy undermines cross-border cooperation capacity and limits potential for better outcomes. To exemplify, she cited the 2021 publication of Northern Ireland’s Mental Health Strategy which made no mention of the Republic of Ireland, or North/South collaboration. Prof. Heenan emphasised that long-term collaboration is not sustainable unless it becomes a policy priority. Its continuation is subject to committed personnel, but once they fall away, cooperation becomes vulnerable. Thus, leadership and a shared vision of what collaboration could look like, are required. Alongside the lack of strategic vision, she said there is no vehicle where policies on best practice are discussed. In Northern Ireland, long-term pilots make it harder to discover what works in effective time. She said that opportunities exist for greater collaboration in orthopaedics, transplant services, and mental health, to deliver enhanced outcomes but , *“there is a lack of impetus for this type of working. Policy development in the North suffer(s) from chronic inertia”*. . *We reviewed our social care system in 2014, we still have a draft response to that.*

Suzanne Costello (CEO, Institute for Public Health) outlined how the Institute of Public Health predates the BGFA, having been the brainchild of the two CMOs at the time; and tries to take a whole government response to reduce health inequalities on an all island basis and that the BGFA provides scope for health cooperation which hasn’t been explored. Ms. Costello argued that prior cooperation had been driven by ad-hoc actions of committed individuals, but an overall vision of

¹ **Ambulance Services:** Two memorandums of understanding are in place between the Northern and Southern services, centring on (a) emergency calls, and (b) the routine transfer of critically ill patients; which enable ambulances from one jurisdiction to be deployed in the other *“without any fuss”*. This *“happens regular”*¹, and in certain cases, the patient may be brought to a hospital in the other jurisdiction. In 2023, 136 emergency cases featured an ambulance responding to a cross-border call.

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what we are seeking to achieve this is needed to build sustained cooperation. This is especially pertinent for public health, where policy interventions take longer periods to bear fruit.

The same problems are faced in both jurisdictions², creating a huge opportunity for cooperation and alignment beyond establishing Memoranda of Understanding and a degree of friendly interregional competition on health outcomes having the potential to drive progress. On institutional specifics, Ms. Costello discussed the benefit of the Institute for Public Health not being a North/South joint body; that their work persists during Stormont collapses but more needs to be done to codify institutionalised networks that harness cooperative spirits, to prevent impetus being lost once individuals leave their roles;. Ms. Costello expressed concern that institutional memory from pre-1998 cooperation risks being lost: *"She said the platform is there for us, but nobody is articulating the vision.... There are a lot of people in the room who could be brought together at events like these, and more formal events, feeding perhaps into both governments"*,

Ms. Costello also highlighted *"the commercial determinants of health"* - declaring that collaborative policymaking, beyond merely the health sphere was needed to address the challenge of actors *"whose interests don't align with making things better"*. She said *"That doesn't require new intergovernmental agreements. It just requires cooperation and alignment, which is probably more realistic to achieve in the next 5-10 years"*.

Prior to initiating the discussion, Prof. Walker highlighted the role of the Food Safety Promotion Board (SafeFood), one of the six implementation bodies established under BGFA, to promote food safety and nutritional advice on the island of Ireland and drew attention to its ongoing public awareness campaigns on obesity and alcohol consumption. Environmental health and food safety were important issues. He noted that SafeFood ran eleven community food safety workshops in conjunction with Northern Ireland district councils during the year.

During discussion, Prof. John FitzGerald queried the speakers on how they felt IT systems work together on a North/South basis. He also sought perspectives on whether enough research had been done to explore North-South differences in health policy implementations and outcomes, to try and enhance mutual learning. Mr. Tom Daly outlined how initial barriers to sharing data on I.T systems cross-jurisdictionally had been overcome within the cross-border PPCI service. Ms. Suzanne Costello drew attention to a joint study exploring differences and similarities in the suicide and self-harm cases between Limerick and Derry but lamented the lack of ringfenced research funding to explore public health challenges over the long run, arguing for a ring-fenced public health research fund. Prof. Heenan opined that there is a problem with the sharing of data and ensuring it's comparable. Further, there is a culture that needs remedying sees the five health trusts in Northern Ireland perceiving themselves as being in competition with each other, instead of embracing a sharing, co-learning mindsets. On where the development of overall strategy and vision could arise from, Prof. Heenan suggested that the problem lies in the enormous pressures that healthcare systems are currently under, which causes them to focus solely on addressing their own problems. , thus closing the space for collaborative discussions on wider visions. Prof. Heenan raised the example of a trust in England that was comparable in size to Northern Ireland, with ten people waiting over a year to see a consultant. In Northern Ireland, 120,000 people were over a year on consultant waiting lists. Thus, Prof. Heenan suggested that accountability, efficiency, productivity, and transparency would be fundamental to creating an overall vision, with academics and media needing to push back against narratives that more money was the simple solution. She noted how Northern Ireland gets

² Identified by Ms. Costello as 'globalisation driven social determinants of health' – tobacco, alcohol, processed food, digitalisation.

more money per capita for health than any other region in the UK, with the worst outcomes. Suzanne Costello opined that more needs to be done to change narratives in health, to shift focus away from crisis, towards prevention, as this would allow politicians the space to make long-term investments in prevention, resulting in better outcomes over time. On the scope for interaction between public and private health sectors Prof. Heenan mentioned how the 'free at the point of delivery' model of the NHS is highly valued but ... *I think in the North we absolutely have to challenge the dichotomy that public is good, private is bad, because there is a role for the private sector.* The private sector could deliver many of the more routine procedures, for which there is a long waiting list, more cheaply and more efficiently than the NHS.

Amanda Daly (Programme Manager, Health Research Board) outlined the role of the Health Research Board, which supports academic and public policy research applications on population health and health service research, open to applicants from North and South. It also envisages the creation of an all-island mental health research network. In Ms. Daly's assessment: "*we are very active in driving collaboration from North/South on the key issues here, to look at where we can benefit*". Ms. Daly thus stressed that the avenue exists to support researchers to undertake critical work.

Section 3 – Gina McIntyre, CEO Special EU Programme's Body (SEUPB)

Ms. McIntyre outlined how conflict related psychological factors create continued need for peace programmes, with suicide rates in Northern Ireland disproportionately higher than in other comparable European regions. Intergenerational trauma linked to paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland and Southern border counties underpins modern social problems.

She charted how EU special programmes have supported cross-border healthcare initiatives for the last ten years, beginning with Interreg. Priorities have included: increasing resilience, equality of access, economies of scale and maximising technology - with €3.39 billion invested across 23,000 projects over 25 years³ positively impacting over two million citizens.

She outlined how the current Peace Plus programme has sought to "*find the bit in the middle*" between the Northern Ireland and Irish programme for government target areas. Launched in September 2023, Peace Plus, valued at €1.1 billion, features contributions from the executives in Dublin, London, Belfast and Brussels. Among six themes and twenty-two investment areas, are 'health and inclusive communities', and 'supporting a sustainable cross-border and better connected future'; encompassing €97 million in healthcare, and €303 million in environmental commitments. She said "*the Peace Plus programme is a really good example of an ecosystem of practical peace-building in all areas*".

On governance, Ms. McIntyre discussed how "*it's really important to have a formal cross-border body, to have a programme like this which is agreed by everybody.... when it's on this scale, you're bringing both government administrations into that picture... and they have to find some way to agree about how we deliver these programmes.... That formal aspect is really important.. that they do have a bit of a vision for (deciding) what can we do together.*" She also outlined how civil servants from Dublin and Belfast are involved in the procedural management of the programme, so that it follows a joint-design, joint-management, joint-staffing, joint-delivery format.

³ SEPUB Funding has furthered economic growth, Improved access for patients, sustained service delivery Helped to retain scarce healthcare professionals, and boosted the confidence of healthcare systems to embrace bigger challenges and produce joint solutions.

Section 4 Environment Practitioners' Perspectives.

Chair: Conor O'Malley, Secretary, The Irish Association

Senator Noonan (former Minister for Heritage) discussed the trajectory of Irish state biodiversity policy since 2020, which centred on the State's own working in this area and so that it is better enabled to manage habitats and engage accurate climate reporting; He said the EU Nature Restoration Law *"puts us into a whole other new challenging space in terms of inter-governance in Ireland as we embark now on a new Nature Restoration Plan.... to be submitted to the (EU) Commission by September 2026."* This plan will be expansive covering areas like urban tree cover, forestry, native woodlands and grasslands, the role of local authorities and public bodies, and which *"has huge implications from an all-island perspective"*. In summary, Senator Noonan discussed how the reforms to the NPWS and the Nature Restoration Plan's statutory footing, *"sets us in good stead for a really ambitious programme of nature restoration, conservation... but I do think that it is important that trajectory continues, not just into this cycle of government, but into the next ten, twenty and thirty years"*.

Dr. Ciara Brennan (Director, Centre for Environmental Justice Network Ireland (EJNI)) outlined how EJNI came together as an informal network of grassroots activists, NGOs and lawyers, on a North-South basis, for advocacy and noting. Subsequently, EJNI produced in a 'Linking the Irish Environment' report on the North-South environmental issues and areas for cooperation. Dr. Brennan alluded to several examples demonstrating shared environmental governance challenges: the pollution of Lough Neagh; peat slide in Donegal which collapsed a bog, affecting Tyrone drinking water; and the lack of transboundary consultation (in accordance with the Aarhus convention) on a public enquiry pertaining to a goldmine in the Sperrin Mountains which ultimately dissolved the enquiry. Additionally the Northern Ireland Climate Change Act 2022 stipulates that Northern practitioners must consider advice from the South's Climate Change Advisory Council. She identified the different departmental organisational structures North and South as a barrier to cooperation—with DEARA's remit spread across several Southern departments. Differences in legal and regulatory systems make cooperation strenuous. She said that North/South environmental cooperation was often seen as a positive optional add-on, rather than something fundamental to working practices.

Dr. Brennan saw Brexit as negatively impacting North/South environmental governance, given how the EU produced most environmental law, but also as it has removed *"an overall direction of travel that both jurisdictions had as part of the EU."* Accordingly, significant complex regulatory divergence has emerged, creating *"a difficult landscape to work in."*

Lastly Dr. Brennan set out five key a new joint political or legal UK-Ireland environmental agreement; that BGFA Institutions (such as the BIIGC) have a bigger role to play in environmental governance; more robust avenues for civil society engagement; transboundary environmental rights complied strenuously; sufficient funding of North/South environmental cooperation. Prof. Mark Emmerson (Co-Centre for Climate, Biodiversity and Water, QUB) discussed the recent trajectory of North/South research collaboration⁴, culminating in the establishment of the North/South Co-Centre for Climate

⁴ This emanated from the establishment of the All-Island Climate and Biodiversity research network (a grassroots collaboration amongst researchers), which developed a collective vision for all-island research cooperation, manifesting ultimately in the establishment of the North/South Co-Centre for Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss and Water Quality Declines.

Change, Biodiversity Loss and Water Quality. The Co-Centre incorporates East/West cooperation dimensions, with mixed funding from Research Ireland(€20m) DEARA (£8.4m), UK Research and Innovation (£6m). He discussed how the Co-Centre has partnered several actors in the co-design of technological, engineering-based, nature-based, and social solutions to nature and biodiversity problems - working with industry to harness innovation; public bodies and civic society groups, to enhance understandings and offer just-transition platforms; and governments, to provide an evidence base for policy formation. Governmental cooperation is assisted by the Co-Centre's policy response unit, who have collaborated with the UK Office for Environmental Protection, and the NPWS on nature restoration legislation. Meanwhile DEARA has also appointed a policy liaison officer to work with the Co-Centre.

Prof Emmerson believes cooperation needs scaling up: *"What's not happening, are the joint funding initiatives that would cascade down out of those departments. And there's still a challenge, in Northern Ireland in particular, where we are mandated to have a coalition government under the terms of the BGFA, that there is a fragmentation within government as well, that individual ministers... may not necessarily play ball when looking at joined-up funding approaches.... What there needs to be is more of an attempt to join-up cross-cutting strands of government, both North and South, for climate change.... It's (currently) relying on individual departments to do their own thing.... A joint-funded pot would enable trans-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research to take place....., in terms of PhDs. Post-Docs, research programmes; across all areas of the sector".*

On the scope for establishment of a specific environmental court, including the possibility of the court having a trans-boundary basis across Britain and Ireland, Senator Noonan and Dr. Brennan supported the idea of establishing an environmental court, arguing that given levels of non-compliance with the Aarhus convention in both the North and South, the court would provide the public with a *"meaningful engagement in environmental law."*

Perspectives on Irish regulation, which do not sufficiently incentivise farmers to plant trees and as to whether a Northern Irish EPA was required and to independently monitor environmental compliance, were debated. Prof. Emmerson outlined how a review was underway to explore establishing a Northern Irish EPA with Dr. Brennan arguing that further review was pointless, given that six previous reviews had already occurred. Senator Noonan, on tree coverage, discussed the worrying decline in other parts of land that support carbon sequestration, such as semi-natural grasslands, which have reduced by *"80% in the last 30/40 years.... the nature restoration plan (if applied on an all island basis) does give opportunity to look at expanding native woodlands and wet woodlands."*

Section 5 Summing Up Analysts' Perspectives

Chair: Dermot O'Doherty, Vice President, The Irish Association

Turlough O'Donnell praised the spirit of conducive and cooperative discourse. Ian Marshall OBE cautioned against having a single cross-border body with responsibility for health, arguing that messiness can sometimes be created through mergers. Prof O Gallachóir noted the widespread extent of collaboration but also acknowledged the repeated theme of trying to increase collaboration without an overarching policy framework. Caitriona Mullan (International Centre for Local and Regional Development) also noted some common themes, specifying the need for Ireland to act in Europe to monitor and work to counteract regulatory divergence, especially in phytosanitary health.

On health, Catriona Mullan believed that opportunities exist to work in a more structured, focused way, with further progress possible if supported by strategic remit from Belfast and Dublin. In her view, scope exists for the two health departments to formulate an outcome based all-island health strategy, exploring availing of practicalities, shared services and economies of scale. e.g. on skill-mix issues, increased role for pharmacists and advanced nurse practitioners, to alleviate demands on doctors. Ms. Mullan cited the Basque region, where investments in community nurse practitioners have demonstrated enhanced long-run outcomes. Ms. Mullen agreed with earlier arguments, that a culture change was needed to move towards investment in primary care and focusing less on seeking more money for crisis intervention. To assist this, Ms. Mullan emphasised the need for an increased focus on using data to facilitate analysis and shape policy.

On environment, Ms. Mullan emphasised the importance of central governments embracing trans-boundary planning consultation to facilitate proper planning. Further, as in health, Ms. Mullan accentuated the virtue of promoting a data driven culture. In her view, this would involve de-emphasising identity politics and a diplomacy mindset, shifting towards a governance of cooperation development mindset, driven by science and pragmatics; maximising economies of scale and envisaging mutually enhanced shared services.

Prof. Brían O Gallachóir (University College Cork) focused on four areas as follows:

The Emergence of Bottom-Up Initiatives In his Gallachóir's view, the organised collective body of cross-border researchers have come together in three main ways recently; through the 'All-Ireland Climate and Biodiversity Research Network', 'The Sustainable Development Solutions Network Ireland' and 'The Climate Justice Universities Union. These are driven more by researchers than institutions, but have represented practical cross-border cooperation.

Co-produced Research and how co-production has borne fruit for community based environmental initiatives, fostering the knock-on 'diffusion of sustainability' in the area.

The Interplay between Politics and Progress in relation to the Single Electricity Market, Prof O Gallachóir noted that invisibility, stemming from its European Single Market roots, helped progress by not initially arousing political sensitivities. This led to support for the project being sustained over time. However, He said recently there has been an emphasis on policy divergence as politics has become more fractious. On gas supply, recent energy security policy documents, published in both the South and North, have ignored each other, suggesting divergence and isolated solutions in gas

storage⁵.

Building Stronger Bridges between Research and Policy Eco-Systems and the importance of building the policy system's absorptive capacity, to better harness insights from research.

Ian Marshall outlined how *"climate change, energy security, and decarbonisation, are cross cutting and relevant to most areas of government... serving) as a crucial bridge across all areas of North-South cooperation in Ireland, transcending political and administrative boundaries."* Bearing this in mind, Mr. Marshall outlined his belief that more productive work can be undertaken to manage environmental challenges. Pointing to two reports - the 2013 the NI Agri-Food Strategy Board 'Going for Growth' Plan, and, the QUB-based Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy (CASE) 2023 'Pathway to our Renewable Future' document, Mr. Marshall highlighted insufficient implementation of environmental recommendations as a major barrier to progress, lambasting procrastination as *"the thief of time... implementation is key."*

To increase ambitions, Mr. Marshall suggested that the BGFA - the areas of cooperation and the functions of the implementation bodies - should be reviewed, and evolve to reflect how life has changed since 1998. He also proposed that a *'mission-based whole of government(s) approach'* must take root within the NSMC, with an immediacy applied to everything they do. Mr. Marshall proposed that the BGFA review must engage with civil society to produce an action plan for greater cooperation towards shared goals. However, noting the importance of public perceptiveness to messaging, he cautioned that *"any action plan must centre on a proactive strategic communication and education programme using digital and social media to place the people in civic society in the heart of the conversations, in both jurisdictions"*. Only then could North and South cooperate fruitfully. "

Turlough O'Donnell focused his address on the theme of dialogic cooperation, 'neighbouring' and the potential of the common law legal system to offer a pathway towards necessarily flexible legal solutions to complex environmental problems. In his view, North/South cooperation represented no trojan horse or pathway to unity, but merely a process of "neighbouring" or "meitheal." Such neighbouring is facilitated by both jurisdictions sharing common law systems (emphasising the role of legal precedent, not merely codified legislation), which develops a legal culture of emphasising people's evolving lived experience. Mr. O'Donnell alluded to cases where in Ireland and New Zealand, where the judiciary have demonstrated pragmatic flexibility to their legal interpretation in environmental cases, to broaden environmental rights and manage climate change threats. Thus, the shared common law culture and the elasticity of the common law, in Mr O'Donnell's view, offers a pathway to continued neighbouring, including on environmental issues, as it allows 'common sense' understandings to unfold, rooted in lived human experience. Mr. O'Donnell cited two examples of such 'neighbouring' spirit bearing legal fruit: the endorsement of the 'All-Island Pollinator Plan' by the Ulster Farmers Association, and lawyers working pro-bono in Northern Ireland, to enhance environmental legislation on hedge-rows.

On future cooperation, Mr. O'Donnell emphasised the importance of dialogic as opposed to adversarial discourse, as a means of 'neighbouring' across sectors and jurisdictions: *"We should neighbour with each other on the climate change issues... but the adversarial discourse will destroy us, because as you see, it's creating oppositions, and the oppositions are feeding off it"*.

⁵ Prof O Gallachóir noted that the island averted the worst effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine by being able to draw on UK and Norwegian gas supply, via the UK system.

On what nationalists should say to unionists who feel threatened by North/South cooperation, Caitriona Mullan said unionists are being misrepresented by being assumed to be opposed to North/South cooperation. She believed this is not the case. Brian O Gallachóir suggested that demonstrating successful effects of North/South cooperation would be key. Ian Marshall alluded to the importance of Northern Ireland being prosperous, as this would in theory enable both unionists and nationalists to argue for their preferred constitutional outcome. Turlough O'Donnell re-emphasised how North/South cooperation represented merely 'neighbouring', not a constitutional trojan horse, arguing that ordinary unionists have been 'misrepresented' if led to believe differently.

Prof. Emmerson questioned Mr. Marshall on whether he'd advocate for an all-island civic forum or civic assembly, to review the BGFA. Ian Marshall cautioned that such a civic forum may be unrepresentative of the population as a whole, as certain cohorts will simply not engage, even if invited. As a first step, Mr. Marshall proposed that political leaders in Dublin and Belfast outline a framework for conversation, and convene a civic dialogue thereafter. Ms. Mullan argued that local councillors have a role to play. She also suggested that "*a suite of things*" in an overall democratic governance framework ought to be considered.

Brian O Gallachóir had two final reflections. He endorsed the need for an EPA-type organisation to be established in Northern Ireland, to independently monitor and evaluate environmental matters and that support was needed to foster bridging mechanisms between research and policymaking communities.

Symposium #3 proceedings account:
James McElearney. apprentice rapporteur,
as edited by The Irish Association