

Dear Chair and Members of the Environment Committee,

I am delighted to be invited to contribute to your Committee hearing on Brexit today and to speak on behalf of Northern Ireland Environment Link and our colleagues from the Environmental Pillar in the Republic of Ireland. Together, our two networks represent over 100 environmental organisations from across the island of Ireland.

Our organisations share a set of serious concerns about the negative impacts of a hard environmental border post-Brexit. Cross-border environmental cooperation as supported by the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) plays a crucial role in effectively protecting our shared natural heritage. As such, we strongly welcome the European Parliament's recognition in its October resolution of the need to safeguard the agreed areas of cooperation as part of the withdrawal agreement.

I understand that in advance of my comments today you have already received our joint briefing on cross-border environmental cooperation which summarises our concerns and provides specific recommendations. We would welcome your continued political support in emphasising the importance of environmental cooperation for the future of North/South relations, environmental protection and the avoidance of environmental dumping.

Our key recommendations for preventing a hard environmental border in Ireland post-Brexit are that:

- the Article 50 process should recognise and fully address the issue of cross-border environmental cooperation under the GFA and its reliance on the common framework of EU law and policy;
- as the island shares natural assets such as plants, animals, water and air as well as many corresponding environmental problems, the island of Ireland, and its surrounding waters, is considered a single bio-geographic unit;
- preserving cross-border cooperation and preventing unfair competition in relation to environmental protections post-Brexit will require maintenance of the closest possible regulatory alignment between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on all matters covered by the EU environmental acquis;
- appropriate mechanisms will need to be put in place to guarantee at least an equivalent level of environmental protection in Northern Ireland post-Brexit to that provided by the EU *environmental acquis*; and,
- noting the significant role currently played by EU institutions in enforcing compliance and securing access to justice for citizens and civil society organisations, equally robust enforcement mechanisms will need to be maintained on both sides of the border.

I look forward to discussing these issues with you and I would be glad to respond to any queries or questions you may have.