

European Union Programme for
Territorial Cooperation



EU Programme for Cross Border Territorial Cooperation 2007 - 2013 (INTERREG IV)

2007 – 2013

Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland

Consultation Document





*Special EU Programmes Body
Foras Um Chláir Speisialta An AE
Boord O Owre Ocht UE Projecks*

SEUPB is a North South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland and the Department of Finance in Ireland. Its principal functions are to manage certain European Union Structural Funds and to support a range of development and regeneration programmes in the North and South of Ireland

Published by the

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February 2007

Foreword

We would welcome your views on the proposed Operational Programme for Cross Border Territorial Co-operation 2007-2013 (INTERREG). The programme is part of the European Regional Development Fund's European Territorial Objective 2007-2013.

The consultation on the Operational Programme for the INTERREG Programme will be from 5 February 2007 and will conclude on **30 April 2007**.

The full Draft Operational Programme for INTERREG can be downloaded from the consultation web site www.seupb.eu/consultation. A summary of the draft programme is included in this publication.

We would like your views on the questions outlined in this document and any other comments you may wish to make by the **30 April 2007**. Details of how you can send your comments to us are included in this publication.

We have asked some of our stakeholder organisations to organise a series of consultation events amongst their members and members of the public. Details of these events are available on our website or on request from our office.

Towards the end of the consultation period, we will hold a major conference when we will share the comments from each stakeholder sector. Attendance at this conference will be by invitation only and 40% of the places will be available to members of the public on a first come first served basis. We will publish details of how to apply for places at this conference in the Public Notice sections of the Belfast Telegraph, Irish News, News Letter, Irish Times and Irish Independent. A PowerPoint presentation outlining the Draft Operational Programme is available on request for use by any organisation wishing to consult with its members.

We look forward to receiving your comments.

Purpose of the consultation

The purpose of this document is to invite comment from the general public and from key stakeholders on the European Union Programme for Cross Border Territorial Co-operation 2007 – 2013 (INTERREG).

This document consists of three parts.

Part 1 contains a general introduction to the consultation process, with information on

how it will be conducted and how to participate.

Part 2 contains a summary of the Draft Operational Programme.

Part 3 contains a guide to the consultation questions.

Part 1:

Introduction

The SEUPB is one of the six cross border Bodies set up under the British-Irish Agreement of 1999*. The two Member States requested the SEUPB to advise them as to the content of the Cross Border Territorial Co-operation (INTERREG) Programme 2007-2013.

The Draft Programme is a successor to the current EU Programme for Cross Border Territorial Co-operation (INTERREG III) Programme 2000-2006.

A preliminary consultative exercise was carried out in May 2006. Informed by the submissions of that consultation, the SEUPB has prepared an Operational Programme.

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation,
- between men and women generally,
- between persons with a disability and persons without, and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

How to respond

You may respond to as many of the questions included in Part 3 of this document as you wish. There is no requirement to respond to all the questions unless you wish to do so. When you respond, you should state clearly which organisation (if any) you represent and the questions to which you are responding.

Without prejudice to the obligations set out above, the SEUPB is also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial group.

The consultation process will consist of the following elements:

1. Members of the public and key stakeholders are invited to respond in writing to the questions raised in this consultation document. Responses can be made directly to the SEUPB or online at www.seupb.eu/consultation
2. Representative organisations of social partners will be invited to consult with their members and to submit written responses to the SEUPB. Representatives of the SEUPB will be available to assist with this task if requested to do so.
3. Submissions from individuals and organisations as part of this consultation exercise will be considered in the preparation of the final draft of the INTERREG Operational Programme.

* The Agreement was given domestic effect, North and South, by means of the North/South Co-operation (Implementation Bodies) (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 and the British-Irish Agreement Act 1999 respectively.

We will automatically publish all responses to this request for submissions on the SEUPB website, unless specifically requested not to do so.

However you should be aware, even if you request non-publication of your response, all responses may be subject to release under the SEUPB's Code for Freedom of

Information, a copy of which is available on our website www.seupb.eu .

If you are sending your response by email, please send it to: consultation@seupb.eu

While responses by email are preferred, you may also respond by letter or fax to:

Ciaran Rice
Special EU Programmes Body
6 Cromac Place
Belfast
BT7 2JB
Fax: +44 (0) 28 9026 6692

The deadline for receipt of responses is **30 April 2007**

You may make more copies of this document without seeking permission. You will find an electronic version at www.seupb.eu/consultation.htm

Documents will also be made available on request in a range of accessible formats. You can let us know your requirements by using the contact details below.

Help with queries

You may send questions about the policy issues raised in the document to:

Ciaran Rice
Special EU Programmes Body
6 Cromac Place
Belfast
BT7 2JB

Email: consultation@seupb.eu
Telephone: +44 (0) 28 9026 6681
Fax: + 44 (0) 28 9026 6692

If you have complaints about the way this consultation has been conducted, these should be sent to:

Director of Programmes
Special EU Programmes Body
6 Cromac Place
Belfast
BT7 2JB

Email: consultation@seupb.eu
Telephone: +44 (0) 28 9026 6681
Fax: + 44 (0) 28 9026 6692

We aim to publish a response to this consultation within three months following the close of the consultation. This will include a summary of the responses and a statement of the SEUPB's position on the issues raised in the responses.

In order to assist you in preparing your response, we have provided access to a number of important policy, evaluation and research documents on our website at

<http://www.seupb.eu/consultation> where you will also find the relevant EU Regulations. You may wish to consider these before responding.

If you are aware of other documentation that you believe would inform the consultation process, please forward the documents to us at the correspondence addresses provided above and we will add them to the website.

Part 2: Executive summary

Overview

1. The Cross-Border Territorial Co-operation Programme for Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland 2007-2013 (hereafter the INTERREG Programme) is a European Union supported Structural Funds Programme which seeks to address the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders.
2. The overall theme of the INTERREG Programme is to strengthen and deepen cross-border co-operation with an emphasis on supporting strategic plans and projects which will maximise the impact of the funds throughout the eligible area. More specifically, the Programme aims to support strategic cross-border co-operation for a more prosperous region and improve access to services so as to enhance the quality of life for those living in the eligible area.
3. The Programme is supported under the European Territorial Co-operation Objective and has been allocated a budget of €192m ERDF for the 2007-2013 programming period.

Presentation of the region

4. With a view to enhancing co-operation and building on the existing historical, cultural and economic links between the UK and Ireland, Western Scotland has been included in the INTERREG Programme. In this regard, the two Member States have taken forward the opportunity outlined in Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, which extends the area of eligibility to include land and maritime borders that are separated by a maximum of 150 kilometres¹. This represents a

¹ Under the European Territorial Co-operation Objective, the area of eligibility for cross-border co-operation has been extended under European Article 7(1) of Regulation (EC) No

significant change from previous INTERREG Programmes between Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Programme is targeted at the following eligible areas:

- Three NUTS III² areas in Northern Ireland, namely the North, East, and West and South areas;
 - The NUTS III Border Region of Ireland, consisting of the six necklace counties along the border with Northern Ireland, i.e., Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan and Sligo³. This area covers the same boundaries as the Border Regional Authority⁴;
 - Regions in Western Scotland that include: Lochaber, Skye and Lochalsh, Argyll and the Islands, Dumfries and Galloway, and East, North and South Ayrshire.
5. In addition, in accordance with Article 21(1) of Regulation (EC) 1080/2006, adjoining NUTS III areas are eligible to participate in the Programme under the 20% flexibility rule. This means that 20% of Programme funding may be made available to adjoining NUTS III areas in Northern Ireland (i.e. Belfast and Outer Belfast), the Border Region (West, Mid-East and Midlands) and Western Scotland (Inverclyde, Dunbartonshire and

1083/2006. The Regulation states that all regions of the Community along all internal and certain external land borders and along maritime borders, which are separated by a maximum of 150 kilometres, are eligible for financing under the Co-operation Objective.

² The NUTS Boundaries data set (Nomenclature des Unites Territoriales Statistiques) shows sub-national administrative areas within the EU. Every EU Member State has different levels of administrative subdivisions, designated as NUTS-I, NUTS-II and NUTS-III. In the UK and Ireland, local authority areas are generally aggregated into NUTS III regions, to define sub-regional areas.

³ This area covers the same boundaries as the Border Regional Authority Border Regional Authority, the Irish Regions Office, www.iro.ie

⁴ The Irish Regions Office, www.iro.ie

Western Isles). Adjoining NUTS III areas and the flexibility rule is also discussed in the next section as part of project selection.

6. A summary of the socio-economic conditions in Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland is outlined below:

- **Productivity and employment:** while the productivity and employment in Northern Ireland, the Border Region and Western Scotland have improved over the last number years, this positive growth needs to be qualified when comparisons with national averages are made;
- **Sectoral employment:** an analysis of sectoral employment has demonstrated that there are a number of structural problems in the economies of the Border Region, Northern Ireland and Western Scotland, these include:
 - Continuing over dependence on agriculture, which is undergoing some critical changes at present, and reliance on traditional manufacturing industries which are coming under pressure from low cost producers;
 - Continued overdependence on the public sector for output and employment in Northern Ireland and parts of Western Scotland.
- **Education:** both Northern Ireland and the Border Region have much lower levels of population trained to third-level than Western Scotland or Ireland. The Border Region, however, has higher numbers of students in further education than both Northern Ireland and Western Scotland which suggests that the knowledge gap in relation to the

attainment of third level education is likely to close in the coming years;

- **Innovation and the knowledge economy:** the eligible area is underperforming in relation to the potential to achieve successful knowledge-based local economies;
- **Enterprise and entrepreneurship:** the levels of enterprise and entrepreneurship in Northern Ireland and Scotland are below average for the UK and Ireland. Indeed, Northern Ireland is ranked 9th out of 12 UK regions in terms of entrepreneurial activity. In addition, there is current lack of cross-border networking between Northern Ireland and Ireland which is potentially hindering economic development;
- **Tourism:** although the eligible region contains high quality landscapes and has generally experienced a growth in tourism in recent years, the performance of the sector still remains below the national averages;
- **Infrastructure and communication:** deficiencies in transport infrastructure and connectivity to the European economic heartland present a major challenge for the eligible region. In addition, there is a high dependency on landfill with low household recycling rates relative to the other EU countries;
- **Environment:** the Border Region, Northern Ireland and Western Scotland have high quality natural landscapes. This landscape and the coastal environment, however, is coming under pressure. The inclusion of Scotland in the Programme presents opportunities to develop and manage this natural resource in new ways.

- **Energy:** compared to other EU Member States, the utilisation of renewable energy in Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland is considerably lower; Situated on the western seaboard of Europe, the natural environment offers the region unique opportunities to further develop renewable energy production particularly in the areas of wind, wave and biomass energy. This thus enhances the sustainable development of the region at a local level;
- **Cross-border co-operation:** the border areas in Northern Ireland, Western Scotland and Ireland share a number of common features with other peripheral border areas across the European Union where the problems of development are most accentuated. In particular, the high level of militarisation of the border and resulting road closures has had a long-term damaging impact. The region, for instance, contains communities which have been affected by the conflict through isolation or marginalisation resulting from the severing of social and economic links.

Evaluation results of the INTERREG Programmes

7. Some of the key findings from evaluation and research reports on previous INTERREG Programmes involving Ireland, the Border Region and Western Scotland outlined below:

- **Facilitating a high level of cross-border / transnational engagement:** under the INTERREG IIIA Programme in Northern Ireland / Ireland, there was strong evidence of cross-border co-operation in relation to establishing the 'joint' identification of need, project development and

implementation arrangements and involving beneficiaries from both jurisdictions. In a similar vein, transnational INTERREG Programmes have worked to facilitate relationships on a transnational basis involving a range of partners⁵ and created a culture of co-operation between States⁶;

- **Promoting economic and social development:** by supporting a range of projects in areas of business, skills training and infrastructure, the INTERREG Programmes have made an important contribution to cross-border economic and social development⁷;
- **Building on previous skills and experience:** while the INTERREG Programmes have encouraged participation in cross-border co-operation and developed new linkages between partners for the first time, a key feature has also been utilising the skills and experience developed under previous INTERREG Programmes. This reflects the cumulative effect of building cross-border relationships which provides the basis for future partnerships between individuals and groups and the creation of a 'partnership' asset;
- **Contribution to broader national and EU objectives:** transnational INTERREG Programmes have closely corresponded to, and made a contribution towards, the core elements of the Lisbon and

⁵ European Policies Research Centre (2005) Update of the Mid-term Evaluation, INTERREG IIIB Northern Periphery Programme, Final Report to NPP Managing Authority, 19th December 2005.

⁶ EDATER (2003) Mid-Term Evaluation of the INTERREG IIIB Atlantic Area Programme 2000-2006, December 2003

⁷ PricewaterhouseCoopers (2005) *Update of the Mid-Term Evaluation of the INTERREG IIIA Ireland / Northern Ireland 2000-2006, Final Report*, October 2005.

Gothenburg agendas⁸. In addition, the INTERREG Programme IIIA in Northern Ireland / Ireland has made a contribution to overarching EU policy objectives and has also operated more closely within a coherent North-South strategic framework⁹;

- **Supporting innovation:** the INTERREG Programme has supported a range of projects which have developed innovative ways of overcoming obstacles to cross-border co-operation and addressing some of the needs of those in border areas.

Lessons from INTERREG

8. Drawing on research and evaluation reports, some of the key lessons from previous INTERREG cross-border and transnational Programmes are as follows:

- **The importance of an early start:** the INTERREG IIIA in Northern Ireland / Ireland was not officially launched until November 2002. This meant that almost three years had been lost which placed immediate pressures on N+2 targets (it takes time to establish new organisations, locate partners and develop cross-border linkages) and put additional pressure on Programme stakeholders to get the Programme up and running;
- **Achieving the correct balance of administrative structures and processes:** the inclusion of new structures and processes to assess and scrutinise project applications has raised concerns of the

complexity of some administrative arrangements.

- **Adopting a more strategic approach to investment:** although the INTERREG Programmes have supported a range of projects which have encouraged broad participation in cross-border co-operation and initiated a culture of territorial development and planning, concerns have been raised in some areas that activities have been project led and that outcomes have been spread 'too thinly'. In this regard, it is considered that more attention should be given to promoting a number of strategic investments that will increase critical mass and impact;
- **Developmental work:** as a means to improve the quality of applications among groups / organisations that have limited capacity and experience of funding Programmes, the experience of INTERREG Programmes shows that developmental support can provide added benefits. This can create a more level playing field, help potential applicants with strong project ideas articulate their views, facilitate promotion and encourage more participation within the Programme;
- **Multi-lateral meetings:** multi-lateral meetings with implementing bodies can provide a valuable opportunity for Programme stakeholders to network, share experience build cross-border relations and to focus attention on monitoring spend to meet N+2 targets;

⁸ European Policies Research Centre (2005) Update of the Mid-term Evaluation, INTERREG IIIB Northern Periphery Programme, Final Report to NPP Managing Authority, 19th December 2005.

⁹ PricewaterhouseCoopers (2005) *Update of the Mid-Term Evaluation of the INTERREG IIIA Ireland / Northern Ireland 2000- 2006, Final Report*, October 2005.

Programme strategy

9. Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland share a number of common features with other border areas across the European Union where the problems of development are

compounded by geographical isolation, and the fragmentation of markets and service delivery along territorial lines, reducing economic interaction and the opportunity to develop economies of scale and strong indigenous industries. In Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland, these problems have exacerbated the peripherality of the eligible region and given rise to a number of problems that have been deepened and made more difficult to resolve due to the existence of borders. Furthermore, unlike most other regions in Europe, the conflict in Northern Ireland and the associated political problems which are particular to the region has also severely restricted co-operation and the development of border areas.

10. In essence, therefore, the eligible region has suffered all the disadvantages that arise as a result of the land and maritime borders and this is evidenced in two main ways:
 - **Economic and social development:** in general, Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland experience lower levels of economic and social development than the national averages for the UK and Ireland;
 - **Limited infrastructure:** borders distort and disrupt networks and movement and this has impacted on the development of transport, communication linkages and energy and utility networks in the border areas. Separate and differing policy approaches adopted in areas such as health, education and economic development have also limited cross-border opportunities and relationships and made it more difficult to address the common problems of border regions.
11. With a view to addressing the economic and social problems which have resulted

from the existence of land and maritime borders, the primary objective of the INTERREG Programme is “to support strategic cross-border co-operation for a more prosperous region and improve access to services so as to enhance the quality of life for those living in the eligible area”.

12. Taking this overall aim forward, the Programme will focus on two strategic objectives outlined as follows:
 - **Priority 1: Co-operation for a more prosperous cross-border region:** this Priority aims to diversify and develop the economy of the eligible region by encouraging innovation and competitiveness in enterprise and business development and promoting tourism;
 - **Priority 2: Co-operation for a sustainable cross-border region:** this Priority aims to support activities that promote cross-border cooperation in policy development and improve access to services so as to improve the quality of life for those living in the eligible area.

Cross-cutting themes

13. The cross-cutting themes will act as strategic guidelines for those engaged in the implementation of the Programme and include:
 - Equality;
 - Sustainable development;
 - Partnership;
 - Impact on poverty.

Project selection

14. Joint project development, assessment and selection processes will be established. Project applications will be accessed according to the following criteria:
 - Efficiency;

- Effectiveness;
- Positive impacts on equality and environmental sustainability;
- Management capacity of promoters.

15. In addition, the joint or cross-border nature of the project will be assessed. In line with Regulation (EC) No 1080 / 2006, activities will be deemed cross-border if they involve co-operation in at least two of the following four elements:

- Joint development;
- Joint implementation;
- Joint staffing;
- Joint financing.

16. The Programme will fund two types of projects between;

- Ireland / Northern Ireland;
- Ireland / Northern Ireland / Scotland

17. 20% of Programme funding may also be made available to adjoining NUTS III areas of the eligible area. That includes NUTS III areas adjoining Northern Ireland (i.e. Belfast and Outer Belfast), the Border Region and Western Scotland. However, given the integral role Belfast has in the economic and social development of the eligible region, it is anticipated that the majority of funding under the 20% flexibility rule will be centred on Belfast. The Western Isles have similar strong cultural, linguistic and social ties with other parts of the eligible region. Only in exceptional cases will investments be approved for other adjoining NUTS III areas.

Promoting strategic project development

18. To ensure a targeted focus on areas and groups, the INTERREG Programme will place an emphasis on supporting strategic project development. Under this approach, the Monitoring Committee will request the Steering Committee(s) to outline a number of potential strategic projects and then inviting calls for tenders to deliver specific requirements.

Programme Priorities

19. In the INTERREG Programme, the two strategic objectives will be implemented by two key Priorities that include:

- Priority 1: Co-operation for a more prosperous cross border region
- Priority 2: Co-operation for a sustainable cross-border region

20. **Priority 1: Co-operation for a more prosperous cross border region** will have a budget in the range of €60m - €105m ERDF and will focus on two key areas, as follows:

- **Regional co-operation for enterprise:** with a view to creating a more diverse and dynamic economy, this aims to provide support to new and existing business to promote innovation, encourage competitiveness and create a more sustainable economic base;
- **Tourism:** this aims to support the development of tourism products that will attract domestic and overseas visitors and contribute towards improving the performance of the tourism industry in the eligible region.

21. **Priority 2:** Co-operation for a sustainable cross-border region will have a budget in the range of €75m - €115m ERDF and will focus on two key areas, as follows:

- **Co-operation for development:** this aims to promote cross-border co-operation and the exchange of expertise, information and best practice between public bodies and other relevant stakeholders. In particular, the Priority will fund strategic collaborative approaches that will promote innovative ways of addressing specific cross-border problems, delivering services within border areas and promoting sustainable communities;

- **Infrastructure:** this aims to support a number of selected cross-border infrastructure projects in the areas of telecommunications, transport, energy, waste and utilities and the environment.

22. In addition, the Programme will contain a third Priority, **Priority 3: Technical assistance**. This Priority will have a budget of €11.5m ERDF and will support the management, monitoring and evaluation of the Programme as well as programme information and publicity.

Programme implementation

23. The Programme will be implemented by the following structures:

- The designated Managing Authority of the INTERREG Programme will be the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). In carrying out its functions, the SEUPB will work in close liaison with the relevant government departments, which are accountable for expenditure;
- SEUPB will be the Certifying Authority for the INTERREG Programme. To ensure adequate separation of responsibilities, the functions of Certifying Authority will be carried out by the Director of Corporate Services and will be functionally independent of the staff of the Managing Authority;
- In accordance with Article 14 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1080/2006 the Internal Auditor of the SEUPB, will be the audit authority for the INTERREG Programme. The Internal Auditor is functionally independent from the SEUPB;
- In accordance with Article 63 Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, a Programme

Monitoring Committee will be established.

Implementation arrangements

24. The following implementation structures for the Programme are proposed:

- The principal delivery mechanisms for the Programme will be a Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS). The SEUPB shall be the Joint Technical Secretariat (JTS) for the Programme as defined by Article 14 of Council Regulation (EU) 1080 / 2006. This secretariat will be responsible for:

- Creation of a project pipeline by issuing calls for proposals in line with the criteria defined in the Operational Programme and agreed by the Monitoring Committee;
- Assessing project proposals for consideration by the relevant Steering Committee;
- Providing secretariat services to the Steering Committees;
- Issuing letters of offer to successful project applicants;
- Maintaining monitoring records on behalf of the programme and entering these into the database;
- Processing claims for payment from project promoters.

25. The Steering Committee(s) will be constituted on a cross-border basis, including Scotland, will reflect the principles of partnership and will have the necessary technical expertise and independence to assess operations for funding. The Steering Committee (s) shall be responsible for approving projects for funding and will be supported by the Joint Technical Secretariat. It is envisaged that a number of Steering Committees will be formed reflecting the sectoral areas of the Programme.

Part 3:

A guide to the consultation questions

The INTERREG Programme 2007-2013 will build on the successes and lessons of the previous INTERREG Programmes.

This document provides a summary of the Draft Operational Programme which is currently the subject of consultation and submissions should be made by **30th April 2007**. Details of how to make a submission can be found in Part 1 of this document. People requiring more specific or in-depth information on any point within this document should refer to the full Draft Operational Programme document available from www.seupb.eu/consultation

Chapter 2: Presentation of Region

Chapter 2 of the Operational Programme describes the eligible area and presents key statistics, and an analysis of economic and social issues. This information is then summarised in the form of a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). This section also provides a breakdown of the key findings arising from the evaluation of the previous INTERREG Programmes.

We request that you consider the following question;

Question 1:

What are your views on the description of the region and the main evaluation findings and lessons from the previous Programme as presented in this section of the Operational Programme?

Chapter 3: Programme Strategy

Chapter 3 outlines and identifies the issues that the Programme is trying to address. The overall Programme objective is:

“supporting strategic cross-border co-operation for a more prosperous region and

improving access to services to enhance the quality of life.”

Building on the lessons of the previous INTERREG Programmes and taking forward the specific problems identified in the SWOT analysis, the INTERREG Programme will focus on the following two strategic objectives;

- **Co-operation for a more prosperous cross-border region:** This aims to diversify and develop the economy of the eligible region by encouraging innovation and competitiveness in enterprise and business development, and promoting tourism
- **Co-operation for a sustainable cross-border region:** This priority aims to promote cross-border cooperation in policy development and improve access to services and the quality of life for those living in the eligible area.

In addition, there are a number of themes that are relevant across all the Programme objectives and priorities. This chapter outlines its approach to the following three cross-cutting themes;

- Equality
- Sustainable Development;
- Partnership.

These themes will act as strategic guidelines for those engaged in the implementation of the Programme to ensure that the activities to be funded are coherent not only with the Programme Strategies but with the wider aims and objectives of Government policy in Northern Ireland, Ireland and Scotland.

Chapter 3 also explains the criteria for Project Selection and introduces the concept of strategic projects

We request that you consider the following questions;

Question 2: What are your views on the overall objective and strategic objectives of the Programme? Is this the correct focus for the INTERREG Programme?

Question 3: What are your views on the Programme's approach to the three cross cutting themes and the development of strategic projects?

Chapter 4: Programme Priorities and Areas of Intervention

The overall objective of the INTERREG Programme is to support strategic cross-border co-operation that will support a more prosperous region and improve access to services to enhance the quality of life. Building on the successes and lessons of the INTERREG Programmes, and reflecting on the SWOT analysis and outcomes from the consultation process, the INTERREG Programme will specifically focus on developing a dynamic economy and supporting cross-border infrastructure to improve access to services and the quality of life for those living in the eligible region. These strategic objectives will be grouped into the following priorities;

Priority 1: Co-operation for a more prosperous cross border region

Priority 2: Co-operation for a sustainable cross-border region

Chapter 4 includes details of the rationale, aims, targets and indicators, relevant target groups and areas, and budgetary allocations for each priority.

We request that you consider the following questions;

Question 4:

What are your views on the content of each priority?

Question 5:

What are your views on the indicative budget proposals? These are presented as a potential range of budgets. In your view, what is the correct funding balance between the two main priorities?

Chapter 5: Programme Implementation Provision

Chapter 5 outlines the provision for Programme Implementation. Much of this chapter is concerned with ensuring compliance with the relevant EU regulations. The roles and responsibilities of the Managing Authority, Certifying Authority, Audit Authority and Monitoring Committee are defined in regulation and cannot be changed. The Financial Arrangements are informed by requirements for handling public funds. This information is included in the Operational Programme for completeness. Therefore the consultation aspect of this chapter is restricted to those issues in which there is a degree of flexibility in implementation, namely paragraphs 5.47 - 5.61

With this in mind we request that you consider the following question;

Question 6:

What are your views on the proposed implementation arrangements for the INTERREG Programme?

Equality Impact Assessment

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is required to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity.

Without prejudice to the obligations set out above, SEUPB is also required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations. A full Equality Impact Assessment has been included for consultation purposes.

The EQIA Process

When undertaking the EQIA, SEUPB has closely followed the Equality Commission's Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment (February 2005) which recommends that there should be seven steps in the EQIA process;

1. Defining the aims of the policy
2. Consideration of the available data and research
3. Assessment of impacts

4. Consideration of measures which might mitigate any adverse impact, and alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity
5. Consultation
6. Decision of public authority and publication of report on results of Equality Impact Assessment
7. Monitoring for adverse impact in the future and publication of the results of such monitoring.

The EQIA Consultative document provided with the INTERREG Operational Programme has been written to provide information on the first four steps of the process and outlines the action to be taken under the remaining three steps.

Question 7:

Do you have any views on the identified Equality Impact of the Programme?

Strategic Environmental Assessment

A screening exercise will be carried out for the Programme to determine whether a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is necessary. The competent environmental authorities north and south will review the screening exercise and advise on the necessity of a full SEA. However, in view of the fact that certain projects which may be included in the Programme in the future might have an environmental impact, and following discussions with the European Union Commission, we are considering conducting a full Strategic Environmental Assessment of the Programme.

Question 8:

Do you have any views on the likely environmental and sustainable development impacts of the Programme?

Question 9:

Are there any other comments or observations you would like to make about the INTERREG Operational Programme?

INTERREG consultation

<http://www.seupb.eu/consultation.htm>

The closing date for submissions is 30 April 2007