# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Thirty-second Summit meeting of the British-Irish Council held in Manchester, England**  |
| **DATE**  | **11 July 2019** |
| **BY** | **Mark Drakeford AM, First Minister** |

On 28 June, together with the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, I represented the Welsh Government at the thirty-second Summit of the British-Irish Council (BIC) hosted by the UK Government in Manchester. The Summit was chaired by Rt Hon David Lidington MP, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office. The Summit was attended by lead Ministers from the other BIC Member Administrations including;

* An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar TD, of the Irish Government;
* First Minister, Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP, of the Scottish Government;
* Chief Minister, Senator John Le Fondré, of the Government of Jersey;
* Chief Minister, Deputy Gavin St Pier, of the Government of the Guernsey; and
* Chief Minister, Hon Howard Quayle MHK, of the Isle of Man Government.

The British-Irish Council Summit is an important opportunity for Member Administrations to collaborate and share good practice on the common issues we face. This Summit provided an opportunity for Member Administrations to further consider the impact of the UK’s exit from the European Union on BIC Members and the work of all Member administrations in delivering on energy commitments and working towards zero emissions.

The Summit commenced with a Ministerial meeting of the BIC Energy work sector, and discussion of paper‘Making the Transition to a Smarter Energy System’: <https://www.britishirishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/communiqu%C3%A9s/Making%20the%20Transition%20to%20a%20Smarter%20Energy%20System.pdf>

The Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs represented Wales.

During the subsequent Plenary discussion on energy, I outlined that we recognise the significant importance of the challenges faced in Wales in terms of tackling climate change, and the range of actions we are taking to deal with the legacy of the past; and the new actions to shape the future. I outlined the importance of meaningful engagement with, and shared knowledge and good practice between BIC Administrations in order to achieve our ambitious targets for low emissions and decarbonisation. It is also important that BIC Administrations continue to build partnerships as we have done with Ireland and Scotland. I also emphasised that we must look for new opportunities. We share with other jurisdictions a particular interest in marine, owing to tidal predictability and, for Wales, range and variation. I explained that experimental technologies of the type being explored in Wales leading to a breakthrough in marine would provide the UK with a world-leading repertoire of naturally derived energy.

The Council celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, and the Summit agreed that the Council continues to have an important role to play in the context of both the Good Friday Agreement and in promoting good relationships between the nations of the UK, Ireland, and the Crown Dependencies. The absence of Northern Ireland Executive Ministers at this milestone was deeply regretted by all jurisdictions, but the Summit was encouraged that following the joint statement issued by the UK and Irish Government in June, inter-party talks in Northern Ireland continue, with a view to the restoration of devolved power sharing government.

The impact of the UK’s exit from the EU was at the forefront of discussions on the latest political developments. I reaffirmed my view that leaving the EU without a deal would be catastrophic, with the Welsh economy particularly exposed. I reiterated that if Parliament was deadlocked, a decision must go back to the people of the United Kingdom, seeking their views through a second referendum. I welcomed the shape, regularity and underpinning order BIC had given to what were previously more informal relationships. I observed that owing to Brexit, the UK itself internally now faced the same challenges as the BIC family of jurisdictions had. The UK had relied on the EU, but current institutional arrangements would not stand up to the demands of the post Brexit world. I highlighted the importance of learning lessons from how BIC is organised, as these are the raw material we need to draw on to ensure the UK can function successfully.

The key discussion points of the thirty-second Summit were published in a joint Communiqué:

<https://www.britishirishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/communiqu%C3%A9s/Thirty%20Second%20Summit%20-%20UK%20-%2028%2006%2019.pdf>