

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



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**Title:** Copy letter received from the Department of Foreign Affairs of a letter from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Merlyn Rees, MP, to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Garret FitzGerald, TD, in which he rejects the argument that the border has had a depressing effect on the areas immediately on either side of it and the idea of a study of Derry and its hinterland. Letter expresses support for a joint study of fisheries in Lough Foyle and the seas around Ireland

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EC 11/55

Mr Curran

*Mr. Curran I agree. E-11/55  
to the pt. think we can  
forget cross border studies &  
probably projects also  
9/5/75*

Please see the attached copy, received for information from the Department of Foreign Affairs, of the recent letter from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Basically he rejects the Irish argument that the border has had a depressing effect on the areas immediately on either side of it. He rejects the idea that there would be or is support in Northern Ireland for a study of Derry and its hinterland and feels that agreement of the British Government to such a study could pose political problems as ~~it~~<sup>it</sup> could imply acceptance of the concept of institutionalising cross border affairs.

He returns to strongly supporting a joint study of fisheries not only in Lough Foyle but in the "sea around Ireland", whether or not EEC funds are available (paragraph 11). He is also willing to proceed with a study of Derry harbour (paragraph 12) and presents an ultimatum that if agreement on these is not available then he would prefer to "leave the matter for the present."

The indications are that, without taking political factors into account, the Commission would not favour studies of fisheries, under Article 266 but perhaps the Agricultural Affairs Directorate would oblige. With regard to the Derry harbour study, this is one that could be supported from Article 266, but whether the Irish Government is prepared or not to support it is a matter for Department of Foreign Affairs.

*R Doyle  
9 May 1975*

*blair*

*Pl give me file on  
EEC cross-border studies  
lwk.*

*16.5.75*



LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND  
TO THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

CROSS-BORDER STUDIES

1. When we met on 5 March 1975 you left with me a memorandum on cross-border studies which I undertook to examine.
2. I welcome your suggestion that we should look to the present and the future to see what can be realistically achieved to further the agreement in principle by both governments to sponsor a cross-border study. I was, however, most disappointed to see that what you now propose is the study put forward originally in 1973 which takes no account of the views which we have expressed at the meetings last November and in the subsequent discussions.
3. Turning now to the substance of the paper, however, I cannot agree with your analysis of factors contributing to the under-development of areas adjacent to the border. I am not aware of any evidence that these areas have been artificially held back. There are other parts of Ireland which show an equal lack of prosperity. They suffer on account of poor agricultural land and remoteness from the centres of activity - factors which apply also to many of the border areas.
4. The suggestion that an area of economic depression leading to particularly high rates of emigration, has been caused by the establishment of the border, is hardly supported by

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historical evidence. These rates of emigration are much more likely to arise from what you refer to as "the natural fate of a peripheral area". This is a pattern which appears in most, if not all, countries irrespective of the existence of borders. A similar pattern is apparent in Great Britain. The problems of the development areas in Great Britain owe nothing to the existence of political frontiers.

5. The application in the United Kingdom of very extensive regional policies (which have included the annual allocation to peripheral areas of resources far in excess of the total EEC Regional Development Fund) has done much to prevent further deterioration of the situation in the peripheral areas without unfortunately as yet producing a solution to the underlying problem. The new employment which it has been possible to encourage in the development areas by all the methods available to us has done much to compensate for the loss of employment from the decline in the basic occupations, but has not so far succeeded in narrowing substantially the distinctions between peripheral areas and the rest of the country.

6. It is against this background that one must consider the contribution which would be made by a cross-border study such as that you propose. Very thorough planning studies have already been made of the areas on either side of the border. I have seen reports of such studies in the Republic which are as recent as 1973, and we are well advanced in the preparation of area plans for a number of the border areas; those for Londonderry and West Tyrone have been the subject of public enquiries and are / likely



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likely to be made statutory soon. I have no doubt that those involved in the preparation of these plans have sought to take account of all the factors relevant to the planning and development of the area.

7. To commission a fresh study now including the areas covered by the existing plans would inevitably delay their implementation; urgently needed decisions would be put off in case they prejudiced the outcome of the study. I have little doubt that the announcement of such a study would raise expectations that the outcome would produce overnight a solution to all the problems of the area. Such expectations would be false.

8. You have expressed the view that not only would there be no political obstacle in the North to your proposals, but that they have already attracted widespread support. It is my judgement that whatever the level of Loyalist support for your ideas in Londonderry an announcement of British Government agreement would be certain to arouse deep suspicions and hostility on a wider political front. The implication that it is desirable that wide areas on either side of the border need to be studied together can well lead to the belief that the economies ought to be controlled together and thus to the concept of institutionalising cross border affairs. These are political risks which I cannot lightly run.

9. There have been some apparently conflicting statements as to requests made to me by the Londonderry City Council for a

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cross border study. I understand that the Council wrote to Mr Whitelaw in October 1973 urging the setting up of a Development Corporation which would draw up an area plan for the North West, including Donegal, so as to maximise Regional Development Aid from the EEC. On 4 April 1975 the Clerk to the City Council requested a meeting to discuss (and I quote) the delay by the Westminster Government in proceeding with any form of feasibility study within the North West of the Province for the purpose of preparing a submission to the European Economic Community for grant from its Regional Development Funds.

A reply was sent to the Clerk of the Council explaining the main features of the operation of the Regional Development Fund and in particular that regional studies are not a prerequisite of assistance from the Fund and that there was no question of the Londonderry City Council having missed the boat in relation to the Fund.

10. I understand the Council will discuss EEC matters at a meeting of 5 May. This may lead to a clearer statement of their view, in the light of the latest information about the Regional Development Fund.

11. I note that the Fisheries Division of your Department of Agriculture (and Fisheries) are considering our suggestion and I hope that they will wish to be associated with the wide ranging study of fish conservation which we have proposed. Incidentally, we see this in the context of the sea around Ireland and not just Lough Foyle as my earlier message might have seemed to imply.

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I think that such a study is well worth proceeding with whether under EEC auspices or not.

12. We are still willing to proceed with the study proposed for the harbour at Londonderry and we are satisfied that this would fall within the terms of Article 266. You yourself have applied for support for studies of a sectoral and practical nature under this Article - the studies do not have to be wide ranging regional studies. However, if you do not wish to proceed with the Londonderry study and have no other essentially practical studies to propose we had better leave the matter for the present. I am certainly not prepared to agree to the wide ranging regional study that you envisage which would raise false hopes and provide an excuse to delay projects. We want more action and less planning now in our peripheral areas.