

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee
Tourism in Northern Ireland inquiry

Opening Statement

by Niall Gibbons, Chief Executive, Tourism Ireland

19 June 2019

Introduction and background

Chairman, members, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Niall Gibbons and I am Chief Executive at Tourism Ireland.

Tourism Ireland is the organisation responsible for marketing the island of Ireland overseas as a leading holiday destination. Tourism Ireland was established as one of the “six areas of cooperation” under the framework of the Belfast Agreement of Good Friday 1998. The organisation operates under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC), through the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport in Ireland. Our principal objectives are to increase tourism to the island of Ireland and to support Northern Ireland to realise its tourism potential.

We operate in over 20 markets around the world and roll out world-class global marketing campaigns for Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland. We work closely with Tourism Northern Ireland to ensure that our promotional themes align with their development priorities for the industry. This is a very integrated and collaborative approach. In long

haul markets, **Tourism Ireland also works with VisitBritain** to promote the island of Ireland and Great Britain as destinations to be visited as part of a single holiday.

The **World Economic Forum ranks Ireland third in the world** out of 136 countries for ‘effectiveness of marketing and branding to attract tourists’.

Importance of Tourism to Northern Ireland

Tourism is a vital industry for Northern Ireland – a significant driver of economic growth that helps to support more **than 65,000 valuable jobs** – that is, one job in every 13 in Northern Ireland.

Growth in overseas visitors to Northern Ireland

Since Tourism Ireland came into operation in 2002, almost **30 million overseas visitors have come to Northern Ireland, and more than £6.6 billion** has been generated for the Northern Ireland economy.

Growth in **overseas tourism to Northern Ireland has outpaced the rate of overseas tourism growth to the UK as a whole**, in terms of visitors and revenue, over the past five years. During this period (2013-2018), **Northern Ireland has grown almost twice as fast as the UK as a whole** in terms of visitors and revenue. And **overseas holiday trips to Northern Ireland have grown 3 times faster than to the UK**. **Northern Ireland’s share of UK holidaymakers grew by +36% between 2013 and 2018.**

And, **since 2010, the number of North American and European visitors to Northern Ireland has increased by +106% and +47%**

respectively. During the years 2011 to 2018, overseas holiday revenue doubled at a time when investment by the Northern Ireland Executive in Tourism Ireland and overseas tourism marketing was static.

2018 was another record year. The Northern Ireland Research and Statistics Agency (**NISRA**) confirms that we welcomed **2.22 million** overseas visitors to Northern Ireland in 2018, **who delivered £561 million** in overseas tourism revenue to the economy. Within those figures, **overseas holidaymakers grew by +12%** – GB (+10%), North America (+22%), Mainland Europe (+5%) and Australia and Developing Markets (+14%).

No official data is available yet, but **Northern Ireland industry partners suggest that growth continues into 2019.** For example, overseas visitors to the Giant's Causeway this spring (Jan-May) were up almost +12% over the same period last year. And Titanic Belfast grew by high single digits for the same period.

Promoting Northern Ireland overseas – some examples

Tourism Ireland is rolling out an extensive global marketing campaign to build on the success of 2018 and continue to grow overseas tourism to Northern Ireland in 2019. **Our TV campaigns** alone so far this year have reached up to 72 million in the US, 34 million in Germany and France and 12 million in Great Britain.

Our **Northern Ireland city breaks campaign** this spring reached an estimated 73% of all adults in major British cities with direct flights to Northern Ireland like London, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow and Edinburgh. This resulted in double-digit increases in visits

to Belfast and Derry/Londonderry pages on our website and key partners reported increased bookings from the promotion.

Our **Game of Thrones campaign** this spring has reached 27 million fans around the world on Facebook and Instagram and already racked up 8.4 million video views, all highlighting Northern Ireland as 'Game of Thrones Territory'. This builds on earlier campaigns which reached 120 million fans across the world including our 'Door of Thrones' and 'Game of Thrones Tapestry'.

The 148th Open Championship at Royal Portrush in July is another once in a lifetime opportunity and Tourism Ireland is building on its successful *Home of Champions* golf campaigns – which capitalise on the global success of Northern Ireland champions like Rory McIlroy, Graeme McDowell and Darren Clarke – to promote Northern Ireland as a superb golf destination, a great place to hold world-class events, while also encouraging those attending The Open to extend their stay in Northern Ireland.

This spring, Tourism Ireland's video **campaign with Darren Clarke** reached around 4.2 million golf enthusiasts through the Sky Sports website in Britain. We reached another 16 million golf enthusiasts through our **campaigns on the NBC Golf Channel** in the US. And further TV and digital campaigns will run around The Open itself, in July.

Great Britain – market of opportunity

The **Great Britain market continues to be very important** for tourism to Northern Ireland, delivering around 64% of all overseas visitors and around 58% of all overseas tourism revenue (2018). I am delighted to

say that **revenue from GB holidaymakers to Northern Ireland has risen a massive +86%** since 2012. Growth continued in 2018, when we welcomed 1.425 million visitors from Britain (+2%). Great Britain is a market of considerable potential for tourism to Northern Ireland. We have just launched a new strategy, in conjunction with Tourism Northern Ireland, **to grow revenue from British holidaymakers to Northern Ireland by a potential +33% by 2022** – while also prioritising continued regional growth and season extension.

Showcasing Northern Ireland online

Tourism Ireland has a **significant digital footprint and a major presence on social media**. Our international website attracts over 20 million unique visits each year and delivers over 5 million referrals to tourism industry partners so they can close the sale. **Page views of Northern Ireland content have increased by almost +40%** since 2016, more than twice the growth in page views on the site overall.

Keeping Northern Ireland in the global publicity spotlight

Tourism Ireland's **overseas publicity machine generates positive coverage for Northern Ireland each year worth around £115 million** in equivalent advertising value. Our programme includes close cooperation with Tourism Northern Ireland on co-hosting familiarisation visits for top overseas media. Overseas publicity activity also significantly enhances perceptions of Northern Ireland overseas as a place to invest and study, as well as visit.

Helping to keep Northern Ireland connected

Each year **Tourism Ireland invites all of Northern Ireland's airports, airlines and sea carriers to engage with us** in activity to attract new

routes and sustain existing ones, through cooperative marketing. In 2018, **Tourism Ireland invested £556,000/€618,860 in cooperative marketing with Northern Ireland partners.** To date this year, we have partnered with easyJet, Ryanair, British Airways, Aer Lingus, Flybe and LoganAir to promote direct flights to Northern Ireland from a range of airports in Great Britain, Milan, Berlin, and with Online Travel Agent Atrapalo in Spain on flights from Barcelona to Belfast. This summer, Northern Ireland will have **one of its highest ever level of air seats** – over 110,319 per week. We have also partnered with P&O and Stena Line.

Working with partners to ‘close the sale’

Tourism Ireland also actively encourages **overseas tour operators** to include more Northern Ireland tourism inventory in their programmes. More than 800 top **traditional and online tour operators** now specifically programme Northern Ireland.

Tourism Ireland works closely with Northern Ireland tourism businesses, in conjunction with Tourism NI. In 2018, **Northern Ireland tourism partners availed of over 9,700 Tourism Ireland marketing opportunities** overseas to promote their own products and services, an increase of +5% on the previous year.

Conclusion

Tourism Ireland markets Northern Ireland as a ‘must see’ destination in over 20 markets across the world. We work closely with Tourism Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland tourism industry and together we have made significant progress on our goals, while there is still plenty of opportunity and much to achieve. Despite uncertainty on the

horizon, we look to the future with confidence. Tourism Ireland's aims is to grow overseas tourism revenue to Northern Ireland by a further +8% in 2019.

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