

ADDRESS BY MR JOHN BROWNE, T.D.,
MINISTER OF STATE AT THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS,
MARINE AND NATURAL RESOURCES
ON THE OCCASION OF THE CONFERENCE
“LAND USE AND SPATIAL PLANNING IN IRELAND”
ON 26 FEBRUARY 2003 IN DUBLIN CASTLE.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This conference on land use and spatial planning in Ireland comes at an important time for Irish society. The Government has just published the National Spatial Strategy and there is considerable public interest in how it will be implemented. This strategy is aimed at promoting balanced regional development throughout the country, thereby enhancing our environment while at the same time offering improved quality of life and greater choice in job opportunities to everyone. This conference provides an important and timely forum for examining the importance of the physical environment in this context.

Balanced regional development requires that each region realises its full potential on a sustainable economic, social and environmental basis. Sustainable development is a key concept underlying all aspects of the strategy. It requires us to meet current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. We must, for example, make prudent use of our natural resources while maintaining a high quality natural and built environment.

There is an obvious need for the geological community to contribute skills and knowledge to the successful implementation of the National Spatial Strategy. Accordingly I want to welcome the idea of holding this conference. Geoscience is an integral part of land use planning. It provides essential information to develop the technical infrastructure of the country, whether it is part of the National Spatial Strategy or involves projects under the National Development Plan. Geological data underpin the identification and management of important earth resources, including water, aggregates and landscapes, and can assist in ensuring that none are sterilised through imprudent planning decisions. For example, water is critical to all aspects of our lives and I am conscious of the enormous contribution that geologists make in ensuring its quality is protected.

It is appropriate that the initial stimulus for this conference came from the Institute of Geologists of Ireland. This Institute promotes the geosciences in Ireland and sets quality standards for the provision of geological services. Although still a relatively new body, it has already gained considerable influence. There is no doubt that potential clients will be more willing to engage geological expertise when its quality can be guaranteed through such an institute. I wish the Institute and its members every success in the future.

I am pleased that the conference is being jointly organised by the Institute along with the Geological Survey of Ireland, or GSI, and the Geological Survey of Northern Ireland, or GSNI. My ministerial duties include responsibility for GSI, which operates as a division of my Department. I have become familiar with the range of issues that GSI addresses, ranging from groundwater quality and foundation conditions onshore to fisheries habitats and hydrocarbons targets offshore. As the national geological organisation, GSI serves the needs of society for relevant public sector information. I expect that new legislation will be introduced later this year, which will set out the functions of GSI in a modern era and ensure it has the necessary powers to acquire relevant geological information wherever it is generated.

I am particularly pleased to note that GSNI is part of this conference. I am aware of the effective cooperation which has taken place between GSI and GSNI over recent years. It is particularly important that such cooperation includes spatial planning, because geology and landscape are not shaped by political boundaries. This is recognised in the National Spatial Strategy, which acknowledges that it addresses issues for the island of Ireland in conjunction with the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland.

I wish you all a very effective meeting and hope that it will improve dialogue between geologists and the broader community. Delegates from overseas are particularly welcome and I hope they find their stay rewarding and enjoyable. It is my pleasure to formally declare this conference open.

Thank you all very much.