



***Border, Midland & Western
Regional Assembly
Shaping the Region***

PRESS RELEASE

**“Regional Assemblies Call on the Tánaiste to Develop
Competitive and Innovative Regions”**

The Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Mary Coughlan addressed the Annual Joint Meeting of the Border, Midland and Western and the Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly which took place in the Bush Hotel in Carrick on Shannon on March 6th.

In his opening address Councillor Tom Crosby, Chairman of the BMW Regional Assembly, called for innovative solutions and new thinking in order to restore the Irish economy to a sustainable growth path. He stated that, “our future national competitiveness and employment creation are to be found in maximising the contribution of all regions to national output”. He called on the Government to implement fully the National Spatial Strategy and urged the restoration of the Gateway Innovation Fund as a stimulus mechanism for job creation and economic development in the regions. The Chairman also stated both Assemblies’ view that it was now more important than ever that a structured mechanism should be established for regional participation within the social partnership process.

The Chairman of the BMW Regional Assembly strongly suggested that the Government should re-visit policies and initiatives that were effective in the past in creating employment and which acted as a catalyst for getting people back to the work. He proposed that a review of the role of enterprise support agencies should be initiated in order to refocus on employment creation.

Councillor Crosby also stated that the role of industry-related research was essential in regional locations in order to build and sustain a core of knowledge-based sectors of employment in regional locations. The Chairman added that the Regional

Assemblies are also well positioned to contribute towards this strategy in partnership with the Development Agencies.

Addressing the Assembly Members, the Tánaiste referred to the harsh economic reality here in Ireland and internationally. She stated that the Government would focus on addressing the public finances, reforming the banking system and sustaining jobs. She emphasised the need to improve Ireland's competitiveness by reducing the cost base and urged local government to play its part by reducing local charges. The Tánaiste outlined her plans to reduce the statutory payment period by public bodies from 30 to 15 days. She emphasised the need for "real balanced regional development" and highlighted the role that the Regional Assemblies can play in this regard. Minister Coughlan acknowledged Councillor Crosby's point in relation to enterprise supports and confirmed that the Government intends to refocus the role of enterprise support agencies and their schemes to address the current crisis.

Councillor James Holloway, Chairman of the Southern and Eastern Regional Assembly thanked Minister Coughlan on behalf of both Assemblies for her attendance at the joint meeting. He highlighted the challenges faced by SMEs operating in the current economic climate and stressed the need for enterprise agencies to do their utmost to engage with SMEs. Councillor Holloway, while acknowledging that the knowledge economy is critical to Ireland's future economic success stressed that we must not forget the lower and semi-skilled workers who also play a vital role in our economy.

The Director of the BMW Regional Assembly, Mr. Gerry Finn welcomed the Tánaiste's commitment to regional development and her willingness to continue a constructive engagement with the Regional Assemblies.

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