



**BRITISH-IRISH
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

**COMHLACHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH
NA BREATAINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN**

**THE FUTURE OF THE BODY:
A FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

Reform of the Body: A Further Note

1. Article 11 of Strand 3 of the Good Friday Agreement in relation to the British-Irish Council states that "*the elected institutions of the members will be encouraged to develop interparliamentary links, perhaps building on the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body*".
2. Previous plenaries have given consideration to the question of possible reform of the Body. The 17th Plenary in York in September 1998 and the 19th Plenary in Cambridge in September 1999 debated Reports from the Steering Committee on the future of the Body. Those debates reflected the view among the Members that the Body, as then constituted, might need to be reformed. The continuing progress towards the implementation of the Agreement now presents an ideal opportunity for the Body to further consider its future role.
3. The issues requiring future consideration include:
 - the Body's relationship with the new institutions;
 - its structures;
 - its work;
 - its size, composition and funding;
 - the format of the plenaries and the committees; and
 - resources.

In this regard Documents No. 60 (*The Future of the Body*) and 66 (*The Future of the Body: Options for Development - A Discussion Paper*) are relevant and should be consulted. See also the attached Appendix.

4. The reform process must take full account of the views of the existing members and the potential future members. It is proposed that the Body should empower the Steering Committee to take undertake this reform process in an ordered and structured way taking account of the extraordinary complexity of the many issues raised and their inter-related nature (see Appendix 1 for example).

The Steering Committee

8 October 2000

APPENDIX

Structures

Document No 66, which the Body debated and formally noted, reflected the views of the Working

Group on the Future of the Body that:

- *the Body should have a role in establishing the parliamentary tier of the British-Irish Council,*
- *the Body should seek to remain the premier parliamentary dimension of British-Irish relations for next few years; and*
- *loss of parity of representation between Westminster and Dublin would be unfortunate.*

The paper also outlined various scenarios and possible structures which might be appropriate depending on various contingencies.

The many permutations and combinations which now present themselves raise issues of great complexity and sensitivity regarding the possible future structure of the Body. Given this, it is proposed that the Steering Committee be empowered to take appropriate steps to put a new structure in place. It is envisaged that this may well be a 'rolling' process of structural reform which takes account of actual operational experience gained, the ongoing views of Members and relevant external political developments.

The Work of the Body

The issue of the work which a reformed and restructured Body might usefully undertake as it evolves was also discussed in Document No. 66: see, for example, paragraphs 7.3 and 8.2. Given the fact of devolution in the United Kingdom and the establishment of the British-Irish Council this is an area which needs a great deal of further careful and detailed consideration and consultation which the Steering Committee is perhaps best placed to advance in an ordered way.

Size, Composition and Funding, Format of Plenaries and Committees and Resources

This combined heading raises many of the issues which are related to the 'Structure' of the Body, discussed above, as well as issues such as funding, staffing, control mechanisms (eg. the membership of the Steering Committee, the number of committees and their remit, rules and procedures etc: see for example initial discussion in Document No. 66, paragraphs 8.2, 9.1 et al. Again, an entire range of

complex and difficult issues present themselves. The resolution of these issues will depend on decisions, yet to be taken, on a whole range of inter-related topics and it is difficult, if not impossible, to propose any model in advance of decisions on related major issues. Again it is proposed that the Steering Committee be empowered, on behalf of the Body, to take the required decisions following appropriate consultation and discussion. It is again foreseen that any decisions taken in these areas may need to be reviewed in the light of experience gained and feedback from Members of the Body.