

Rt Hon Lord Foster of Bath  
Chair, House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee  
By email only: [HLJusticeHomeAffairs@parliament.uk](mailto:HLJusticeHomeAffairs@parliament.uk)

Dear Lord Foster,

### **Submission to inquiry into Electronic Border Management**

I'm writing in my capacity as Chair of Committee A (Sovereign Affairs) of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly (BIPA) regarding your Committee's ongoing inquiry into Electronic Border Management, and how the UK's Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) scheme impacts the Common Travel Area (CTA).

The effective functioning of the CTA is of vital importance, as it facilitates the cross-border nature of many people's lives in Ireland and Northern Ireland. In October, BIPA adopted Committee A's report "Protecting the Common Travel Area in the Post-Brexit era". As part of this inquiry, we examined a range of issues including the introduction of the UK Government's ETA scheme and policies related to visa nationals across Ireland and the UK.

As you will be aware, the ETA scheme requires short-term visitors, who do not require a visa, to register before travelling to the UK. We welcome that, following engagement with the Government of Ireland, the UK Government exempted third country nationals who are lawfully resident in Ireland from the ETA requirement. However, we remain concerned that the ETA scheme is at odds with long-standing CTA arrangements and principles that underpinned the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and will have a negative impact on tourism in Northern Ireland.

During our inquiry, tourism stakeholders shared their deep concerns with the Committee about the potential impact on tourism. There are 1 million tourists each year that arrive in Northern Ireland from abroad, 70% of whom arrive in Ireland first and travel across the land border, and around half only come for the day. The tourism stakeholders emphasised that both the £10 per person cost and the administrative burden imposed by the ETA risked acting as a barrier to tourists visiting Northern Ireland. This was particularly the case for coach and group tours, which is a market particularly sensitive to both additional cost and additional administrative burdens.

In our report, we called on the UK Government to pause progress on the ETA's introduction for Northern Ireland visitors coming through Ireland, and if a full exemption is not possible, to extend an exemption for tourists crossing the land border into Northern Ireland for up to a week. We also suggested that the creation of



a special application process for group travel may alleviate concerns from the tourism industry. Our full report can be read [here](#).

Following the publication of report, we met with the UK Government's Minister of State for Legal Migration and the Border, Tom Pursglove MP, regarding our recommendations. This was a constructive meeting and the Minister subsequently wrote to the Committee, which can be read [here](#). The Minister acknowledged our concerns surrounding the ETA scheme's impact on the "all-Island" approach to tourism, confirmed that coach companies and taxi services will not be required to check if their customers have an ETA, and said that the UK Government is working on targeted messaging to improve awareness. However, unfortunately to date our specific recommendation for an exemption for short visits to Northern Ireland has not been taken forward. We remain unclear as to how this will be operated and effectively communicated without compromising our all-island marketing proposition.

Should you wish to discuss any of these matters in further detail, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Senator Emer Currie  
Chair of Committee A (Sovereign Affairs)