



The Rt Hon. The Lord Foster of Bath

Chair of the House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee

House of Lords

London

SW1A OPW

6th November 2024

By email to HLJusticeHomeAffairs@parliament.uk

Impact of the Electronic Travel Authorisation to Tourism in Northern Ireland

Dear Lord Foster,

Further to your inquiry into electronic border management systems, which we submitted evidence to, I have attached for your information a letter that we have sent to the Minister for Migration and Citizenship following her response to your letter on 15th October 2024.

We welcomed your support for consideration of an exemption to ETA requirements for non-visa nationals travelling to Northern Ireland via the land border. We were disappointed that the Minister has not considered the unique challenge facing the tourism industry in Northern Ireland.

As the Minister outlined in her letter, we have a meeting with Home Office officials on Monday 11th November to discuss potential mitigation measures on communication of the requirement, however, given the fact that many visitors are not aware of the land border and that they are entering another jurisdiction, we believe that a short-term exemption is the best solution.

I will keep you updated on any progress.

Best regards

Dr Joanne Stuart OBE

CEO



**Seema Malhotra, MP,
Minister for Migration and Citizenship**

Home Office,
2 Marsham Street,
London, SW1P 4DF

6th November 2024

By email to public.enquiries@homeoffice.gov.uk

Impact of the Electronic Travel Authorisation to Tourism in Northern Ireland

Dear Minister Malhotra,

The Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance (NITA) represents the diverse sectors that drive the tourism economy in Northern Ireland. On behalf of our members, we are writing to express our serious concerns regarding the economic impact of the upcoming Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) requirement.

Our primary concern is the adverse effect the ETA will have on the 70% of international visitors¹ who enter Northern Ireland via the land border. The anticipated administrative burden and legal uncertainties this measure introduces risks a significant decline in visitor numbers. This trend is already evident, with tour operators beginning to exclude Northern Ireland from their itineraries starting for 2025.

Tourism is one of the six key areas of cooperation outlined in the Good Friday Agreement. For over 20 years, Tourism Ireland has promoted Northern Ireland overseas as part of a single, unified Island of Ireland destination, supported by more than £1 billion in cross-border promotional investment. In the current economic climate, with the cost-of-living crisis impacting domestic markets, international tourism is essential to sustaining and growing our industry. Our sector has shown resilience, emerging from the pandemic with determination to recover and expand. However, seamless travel within the island of Ireland is critical, and the introduction of the ETA for major international markets, such as the USA and Europe, places 20% of total tourism spend—amounting to approximately £200-£250 million—at considerable risk.

NOTE: this estimate does not fully account for the economic impact of day trips. Given the short distance from Dublin to Belfast alongside £142m invested this year to provide an hourly cross-border train service - many independent travellers and tour operators include Northern Ireland as a key day-trip destination. The requirement to apply for an ETA 3 days prior to travel (as per Home Office guidance) and £10 per person in addition to their packaged bus tour for a half or full day trip is a significant barrier. NITA

¹ promotable visitors include holiday makers, those visiting family and friends, conference, trade/fair/exhibition including those travelling as part of a tour group or travelling independently.

anticipates that such day trips would be the first casualty should the ETA become mandatory for border crossings.

This situation is unsustainable, especially given increased business costs, including higher Employer National Insurance Contributions, lower thresholds for contributions, and a rising National Living Wage. Tourism businesses must be given the opportunity to maximise turnover and profitability to sustain and create jobs. Spending by international tourists far exceeds that of visitors from domestic markets, and we must avoid erecting barriers that could dissuade these high-value travellers from visiting Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland is unique within the UK, sharing the only UK land border with an EU member state. Many overseas visitors are unaware that Ireland comprises two jurisdictions and may not realise they are crossing into the UK when they travel to Northern Ireland. There are no visible immigration checks at the border, and visitors will not be alerted to the ETA requirement. However, under the current legislation, visitors who unknowingly fail to obtain an ETA face serious legal consequences.

The tourism industry in Northern Ireland, represented by NITA, is united in its opposition to the ETA requirement for the small numbers (in UK terms) crossing the land border into Northern Ireland. We believe that tourism in Northern Ireland is an unintended casualty of this legislation, and we proposed a targeted solution to the previous government. This proposal, which advocates for an exemption for non-visa national visitors entering Northern Ireland via the land border, garnered support from the Shadow Secretary of State, at the time, and all Northern Ireland political parties. Additionally, we have received support from the House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee and the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly, all recognising the impact on tourism and the need for a solution that preserves seamless travel.²

We welcome your planned meeting with the NI Minister for the Economy, Conor Muphy MLA, on 13th November 2024, and we urgently request your serious consideration of our proposed exemption.

With the ETA rollout imminent, swift action is essential to safeguard the tourism industry and economy of Northern Ireland from unintended consequences.

Yours sincerely,

² House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee Inquiry
<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/44826/documents/222689/default/>
British Irish Parliamentary Assembly report - [British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly | 63rd British-Irish Parliamentary](#)

Dr Joanne Stuart OBE, CEO
Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance

Judith Owens MBE, Chair
Northern Ireland Tourism Alliance
CEO Titanic Belfast

And on behalf of:

Katie Best Commercial Director	Belfast City Airport
Joe O'Neill CEO	Belfast Harbour Commissioners
Sarah Allanson Director for Scotland and Northern Ireland	British Holiday and Home Parks Association
Karen Magill CEO	Bus and Coach NI
Peter Boland CEO	Car Rental Council of Ireland
Dr Howard Hastings OBE Chairman	Hastings Hotels
Laura McCorry Head of Hillsborough Castle	Historic Royal Palaces
Brendan Kenny CEO	Ireland's Association for Adventure Tourism
Iain Bell Interim CEO	ICC Belfast, International Convention Centre
Nuala Saul President	Inbound Tourism Operators Association of Ireland
Kerrie Sweeny CEO	Maritime Belfast Trust
Kathryn Thomson CEO	National Museums NI
Heather McLachlan Regional Director	National Trust
Suzanne Wylie CEO	NI Chamber of Commerce
Catherine Burns MBE Chair	NI Tourist Guiding Association
Janice Gault MBE	NI Hotels Federation

CEO	
Rainer Pagel Treasurer	Tour Guides NI
Christopher McCausland Managing Director	Value Cabs Ltd
Gerry Lennon CEO	Visit Belfast
Michelle Simpson MBE Chair	Visit Derry
Diane Poole OBE Head of Tourism	Titanic Distillers

Letter copied to:

Minister for the Economy, Conor Murphy MLA

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP

Chair NI Affairs Committee, Tonia Antoniazzi MP

Chair House of Lords Justice and Home Affairs Committee

British Irish Parliamentary Assembly:

Rt Hon Dame Karen Bradley MP Co-Chair, Brendan Smith TD Co-Chair