

James Finan
Electric Garden & Theatre

Thank you, chair

First I would like to say thank you for our invitation today and we look forward to working with members on the committee this afternoon.

Earlier this year, Minister Madigan convened an engaging forum for stakeholders and we are encouraged to be this far in the process.

There are over two hundred thousand hospitality jobs in Ireland and the industry is worth over nine billion to the economy each year.

This is especially so in the West of Ireland where culture and tourism are often the main sources of income for many communities

— There is no harm in saying that this is a challenge at which we excel.

The Wild Atlantic Way has become an important initiative and local people have been the engine behind this success.

Small businesses, arts companies, community groups and workers have helped drive the west as a destination for food, for culture, heritage and a unique experience.

People can enjoy art, music, and drama to a standard on par with anywhere else in Europe.

Challenges remain, however.

There is great concern presently with Brexit and any outcome that would place the Irish economy at a disadvantage.

Government work very hard to ensure that sectors like agriculture or finance can do their business on a level playing field with counterparts elsewhere.

Yet our cultural and night-time industries have been struggling with one hand behind their back.

In an age of budget travel, we are competing with cities and events on the continent, who operate in much more favorable conditions.

An Irish night out is world-famous, but it is often more attractive to leave the country for a weekend.

Thousands of euros go abroad each week because as Ireland closes its doors at night, Europe carries on doing business.

People's habits, lifestyle and the country we all live in has changed dramatically.

The hours people work and how they socialise have changed.

There are more options than ever but all this happening against the backdrop of laws from the 1930s such as the Dancehalls Act when Ireland was a very different place.

At the workshop organised by the Minister earlier this year, there was a policy suggestion to map venues in curating events of cultural significance.

Giving such venues an opportunity to promote musicians and artists for extended hours during festival periods such as the Galway International Arts Festival would be extremely beneficial to the local economy and the cultural life of a town or city. This is of particular significance as Galway City and County have the honour of hosting the European Capital of Culture in 2020.

Our venue spends in excess of €125,000 on special exemptions every year despite having the earliest curfews in all of Europe and I'm sure insurance costs are an issue many members are already aware of.

To keep trading with such high costs we have evolved into a multi-purpose event space. We have opened our doors to the Galway Jazz Festival, Cuirt Literature Festival, Galway Theatre Festival, Tulca Visual Arts Festival, Above The Fold Design Festival & have become a temporary home Theatre 57 a collective of 90+ independent theatre artists making work in Galway City and County.

However, in the current licensing legislation there is no distinction between a bar and a venue.

A bar can apply for the same exemption order and trade for the same hours. When you add the extra costs and higher risks of promoting an event it is understandable why many venues have closed around the country. Without these performance spaces, artists have no avenue and we are all poorer for it.

A one size fits all approach has not served us.

Previous ministers have spoken of their intention to modernise the laws and streamline the licencing process but reform has stalled on a number of occasions.

In this respect, we welcome the development of Ireland's first Night-Time Cultural Policy