

Opening statement from Martin Kenny TD

Local Government (Water Pollution) Bill, 2018

When I got elected, I promised the people in my constituency that I would try to address their needs here in the Oireachtas.

The issue of underpopulation and a decreasing population the North-West, is a long-term and insidious blight on my own county of Leitrim and in other parts of the region.

There are many reasons for this: we need jobs, we need infrastructure and we need transport, but while we fight for all that, we want, too, to hold onto what we have.

This bill is designed to tackle a situation where young families who want to stay in rural Ireland but who cannot get planning permission to build homes there. The problem lies in the nature of the soil in parts of the region and in parts of the South-West also.

In these areas, the present code of practise of the Environmental Protection Agency has virtually halted construction of one-off dwelling houses in areas of heavy soil.

The nature of the soil means that the standard T-test, the percolation test will not be passed. Therefore, there must be zero discharge of effluent, no matter how efficient the waste water treatment systems are.

The achievement of zero discharge is impossible in these areas, but it is possible in this day and age to install a system which will mean that the waste water produced will be bathing water standard.

This amendment to the Local Government (Water Pollution) Act 1977 will allow the minister to design and regulate a discharge licence which would be issued by local authorities for one-off houses where the percolation test fails.

The government has acknowledged that rural Ireland needs rehabilitation after years of neglect and austerity.

In my own area I can instance dozens of young families who for the refusal of planning permission have not been able to settle in their home place where they wanted to live for the rest of their lives.

If discharge licences are granted in an appropriate and proportionate way, there is no danger to the environment from this amendment.

I truly believe that this is a good move for rural Ireland and I propose this amendment in that spirit.

ends

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