Opening remarks

Is mór agam an deis seo a fháil inniu chun Meastacháin mo Roinne do 2019 a phlé.

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to discuss the 2019 priorities for my Department with the Committee. Key among these priorities is the effective delivery of my Department's sectoral capital plan "Investing in our Culture, Language and Heritage 2018-2027" as part of Project Ireland 2040.

*Project Ireland 2040* represents a once in a generation opportunity for my Department to conserve our unique culture and heritage and to enhance opportunities to experience it, while also stimulating tourism and our local economies.

The commitment by Government to invest €1.2 billion in our culture, our language and our heritage over the next 10 years underpins the
recognition of their importance to our sustainable development over the next decade and beyond. This level of investment is both unprecedented and transformative and given the benefits that it will bring to communities across the country, I am deeply committed to ensuring that this ambitious programme of investment is delivered; delivered fully and delivered well.

My Department's sectoral plan will bring together for the first time all aspects of our heritage – cultural, linguistic, built and natural – under a single programme of investment with an holistic vision. It is a 10 year investment programme and projects will move through a number of stages in the delivery cycle during this time. At this relatively early stage in the process, much of our energies for 2019 will be focussed on ensuring comprehensive appraisal of proposals to ensure that investment decisions are based on best available evidence and are robustly evaluated.

As we move further into the delivery phase of programmes and projects, my Department will work closely with Investment Projects and Programmes Office in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in terms of technical and other supports. Together we will work to
ensure that all of our projects and programmes are subject to robust project governance and rigorous cost control, and are delivered to the highest standard possible.

This year will see some positive developments in terms of delivery on a number of capital projects under our sectoral capital plan as part of Project Ireland 2040. We will see the completion of phase 1 of the National Library and subsequent phases moving into detailed design and planning. We will also see significant progress on the National Archives project, beginning with the decanting of materials to facilitate development works next month, and the launch, in September, of Galway 2020 our European Capital of Culture with cultural programming starting in late 2019.

In terms of our commitments to supporting enterprise development, 2019 will see us increase our investment in the audio-visual sector through Screen Ireland and across Gaeltacht communities through Údarás na Gaeltachta. We will deliver on commitments to protect our Built Heritage through the Built Heritage Investment Scheme which leverages private funding, local authority structures and central
government grants to protect our built heritage while utilising local craft and construction resources.

In terms of our natural heritage, we are actively working with Fáilte Ireland on the implementation of our Tourism Interpretation Masterplan to enhance visitor experiences across our National Parks and Nature Reserves network.

The Deputies are well aware that the remit and responsibilities of my Department are very broad and diverse. I therefore propose to address the issues arising across my Department’s Vote on a Programme by Programme basis but in the first instance, I would like to provide a broad outline of the overall position.

A gross provision of just under €339m is available to my Department in 2019. An additional €0.7m in funding has been carried over from the 2018 capital provision for expenditure on priority projects in accordance with the provisions of Public Financial Procedures.

In broad terms, the 2019 breakdown of allocations to my Vote is as follows:
- **€189m** for Culture, including **€75m** for the Arts Council;
  **€47.4m** for the National Cultural Institutions; **€20m** for Screen Ireland; **€12.2m** for Cultural Infrastructure and development and a dedicated funding stream of over **€7m** for *Creative Ireland*, the Government’s Legacy Project for *Ireland 2016*;

- over **€54m** for the conservation and protection of Ireland’s built and natural heritage, including **€13.7m** for Natural Heritage; just under **€6.6m** for the Heritage Council and just over **€6.3m** for Built Heritage including the very successful Built Heritage Investment Scheme;

- **€55.5m** for the Irish Language, the Gaeltacht and the Islands; and

- just under **€40.4m** for North-South Co-Operation, including support for two North-South implementation bodies - Waterways Ireland and An Foras Teanga.

The gross allocation for my Department in 2019 is 12% higher than the comparable figure for 2018 and allows for increases in funding across a
range of bodies under my Department’s remit, as well as increases in funding for a number of culture, heritage and Gaeltacht schemes.

This additional funding is targeted at key initiatives, including:

- **Arts Council** funding is up by 10% to €75m, including over €6m in current funding, more than double the increase in 2018;

- **Fís Eireann** funding is up €2m or 11% for implementation of the *Audiovisual Action Plan*;

- €6m in funding for the **European Capital of Culture – Galway 2020**;

- Boosts in funding for all of the **National Cultural Institutions**;

- Dedicated funding of over €7m for the further development and implementation of the **Creative Ireland** programme;

- The **Heritage programme** has additional capital of just under €5m in 2019, an increase of some 47% on 2018, which will provide for over 520 restoration projects; further investment in visitor services and trails at our National Parks and implementation of the National Biodiversity Action Plan.
- An additional €1m has also been provided to allow for increased investment in our Waterways;

- An additional €2m in funding for Údarás na Gaeltachta in addition to the €0.7m available to it via capital carryover from 2018;

- An increase of 20% or €1.5m for our Islands and an increase of €0.6m for the 20 Year Strategy for the Irish Language;

- Almost €1.7m in additional funding towards Schemes to promote the Irish language both inside and outside the Gaeltacht.

This increased funding is tangible evidence of the importance attached to our cultural and creative heritage under Project Ireland 2040 and clearly demonstrates the Government's commitment to increase spending in the arts and culture sector on a trajectory that will see funding doubled by 2025.

My colleague, Minister of State Seán Kyne T.D., and I will now both make brief remarks on individual programme areas and are happy to expand later on any matter that Members may wish to raise.

I will commence with some details on the Culture programme.
Part I - Culture

Some €189m is provided in 2019 for Culture. This includes boosts in funding for all of the National Cultural Institutions, making their combined total allocations for 2019 in excess of €47m. Collectively, these institutions attracted over 3 million visitors in 2018 and represent a key component of our cultural tourism product offering.

The Arts Council, our national agency for funding, developing and promoting the arts in Ireland will receive an additional €7m in 2019 to enhance its support to artists and arts organisations of all sizes throughout the country.

Screen Ireland will receive an additional €2m to build on its vital work in supporting Irish film, television drama, documentary and animation. This additional funding together with the extension of Section 481 relief until 2024 will help develop and support the necessary environment for Ireland to become a global hub for the production of Film, TV drama and animation as outlined in my Department's Audiovisual Action Plan published last June. This industry-wide, long-term plan, under the Creative Ireland Programme, will support the Government’s ambition to enable
Ireland to become a global hub for this sector and the first progress report under the Plan is due to be published in the second half of this year.

The Creative Ireland programme is the Government’s Legacy Project for Ireland 2016, which aims to harness the goodwill, engagement and momentum created by the Ireland 2016 programme and places creativity at the centre of public policy. 2018 was the second year of the programme and saw the successful delivery of a number of cross Departmental and interagency co-operative initiatives including:

- **Creative Schools** together with the Department of Education and Skills and led by the Arts Council involving some 38,000 children;

- **Culture and Creativity Strategies** for all 31 local authorities together with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government;

- **National Creativity Fund** facilitating 30 new cross-sectoral initiatives including Le Chéile the first music ensemble for young disabled musicians in Europe led by the Royal Irish Academy of Music and culminating in the founding of the Open Youth Orchestra of Ireland.
The increase in funding for Creative Ireland in 2019 will build on this momentum by further developing the programme as well as providing funding increases to key institutions, agencies and initiatives that deliver arts, creativity and culture right across the country.

*Cruinniú na nÓg* which is presented in partnership with the local authorities and RTÉ took place for the first time in 2018 and was a major success with 500 events across the country. This national day of creativity for children has been received positively as a way of getting children involved in new creative activities and supporting local artists and voluntary arts groups.

Ireland is the first country in the world to have a day dedicated to children’s creativity and plans for 2019 include a global programme for Cruinniú in our embassies and Consul Offices as part of *Global Ireland 2025* in partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

*Cruinniú na nÓg* is part of the *Creative Youth* pillar of the Creative Ireland programme and will enjoy increased funding of €6m for 2019 funded by my Department and the Department of Education and Skills to further enable the creativity of all children and young people.
Culture Ireland will deliver a global programme of Irish arts in 2019 with an increased budget of €4.6m. It is planned to reach new markets, which Ireland is targeting for trade and tourism, including China. To achieve a wider reach for Irish arts Culture Ireland will continue to showcase Irish artists at a planned series of showcases and build on the 470 events supported in 55 countries in 2018.

As part of my Department's ongoing contribution to the Global Ireland 2025 initiative, a conference of cultural stakeholders to identify how best to advance our global visibility and strengthen our global relationships was held on 24 January 2019 involving international guests, festivals and programmers as well as business, tourism and cultural interests in Ireland. This day-long conference brought together more than 250 key stakeholders in the arts and culture community to debate how we can strategically strengthen and advance our renowned global reputation for creativity.

Finally in terms of the Culture programme, €6m has been allocated in 2019 to Galway 2020, European Capital of Culture to allow for preparatory work on this year of unforgettable cultural experience
which will allow Galway and Ireland to become a window to Europe and indeed the rest of the world.
Part II - Heritage

Funding of over €54m has been made available in 2019 for my Department’s Heritage Programme.

This includes €38.7m allocated for current expenditure with a further €15.4m in capital funding and allows for increased investment in both our built and natural heritage.

2018 saw some 8 million visits to our National Parks, Nature Reserves and National Monuments, including the Prince of Wales and his wife, the Duchess of Cornwall who visited Killarney National Park at the end of a 2 day visit to Ireland. A 10 year €100 million Tourism Interpretative Masterplan, in partnership with Fáilte Ireland, was also launched in 2018 to improve the experience for all visitors through the provision of enhanced amenities, interpretation and recreational facilities and technology.

My Department continued to work with the Office of Public Works in the conservation of over 700 national monuments, including the very significant archaeological discoveries made at Brú na Bóinne last year.
Heritage Week continued its successful run with well over 2,000 registered events undertaken by 1,200 event organisers and some 90,000 website users.

Over the last year, my Department has engaged with a number of key stakeholders to inform a public consultation process to develop a revised and updated National Heritage Plan - Heritage Ireland 2030 - to set out key principles and policies for conserving and managing Ireland's unique heritage over the next decade and more.

This new policy will be built around a vision that Ireland's living heritage is valued, enjoyed and protected for future generations with 3 themes supporting this vision, namely:

- National Leadership and Heritage
- Heritage Partnerships
- Communities and Heritage

Heritage Ireland 2030 will ensure a flexible, modern approach to caring for, managing and celebrating our heritage which takes account of best practice internationally.
Ireland’s first **National Biodiversity** Conference took place in Dublin Castle last month. Jointly organised by my Department and the Irish Forum for Natural Capital, the event brought together all key stakeholders from Government, public bodies, business and NGOs to identify measures to help reverse biodiversity loss and implement the **National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017 – 2021**.

I was pleased to be able to announce a number of new initiatives to protect Ireland’s biodiversity at that conference including:

- Doubling annual funding by my Department for biodiversity actions by local authorities’ **Biodiversity and Heritage Officers** to €1m and doubling funding to tackle invasive species by 2021;
- Establishing a **Climate Action Programme** to improve understanding of the impact of climate change on biodiversity and creating an **Irish Business and Biodiversity Platform** with Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation with a range of Irish businesses; and
- Improving surveillance, detection and prosecution of **wildlife crime** with a Memorandum of Understanding with An Garda Síochána.
In terms of protecting our architectural heritage, my Department's **Historic Structures Fund 2019** was launched at the end of last year allowing for improved supports for the owners of historic buildings and structures. This fund will build on the 430 projects across all local authority areas funded through the Built Heritage Investment Scheme and the Structures at Risk Fund in 2018.

Finally, in terms of the Heritage programme area, my Department remains committed to the full and effective implementation and enforcement of the **Habitats Directive** and will continue to build on the progress achieved in the last two years with a revised Special Areas of Conservation, Designation and Management Work Programme. An increased allocation of **€3m** is being made available in 2019 for Peatlands Restoration, Conservation and Management.
Part III - Irish Language Gaeltacht and the Islands

My colleague, Minister of State Seán Kyne T.D., will speak about the relevant aspects of the Gaeltacht, Irish Language and Islands estimate. He will also deal with Foras na Gaeilge, while I will outline some details in relation to Waterways Ireland.
Part IV - North-South Co-operation

In terms of North-South Co-Operation, a provision of over €40m is made available to support the two North-South implementation bodies, An Foras Teanga (comprising Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency) and Waterways Ireland.

These allocations are also subject to the approval of the North/South Ministerial Council.

In respect of Waterways Ireland, the overall allocation for 2019 is increased by over €1m to just over €25.1m.

Over 90% of the waterways remained open during the 2019 boating season. The programme of towpath redevelopment along 140km of the Royal Canal continued throughout the year as did work to extend navigation on the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne to Castle Saunderson with the completion of a bypass canal channel and new bridge at Derrykerrib.

Waterways Ireland successfully hosted the 2018 World Canals Conference in Athlone with 320 delegates attending from 12 countries,
48 speakers and 7 tours taking in 11 counties and 5 navigations.

Minister of State Seán Kyne T.D. will now address the aspects of Vote relating to his brief and then he and I will be happy to answer any questions the Deputies may have.