

## **Kilkenny Reporter**

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### **Sale of quarries a severe blow to the south-east**

The recent forced sale of quarries owned by Dan Morrissey Ireland Limited in Co Carlow will deal a further severe blow to jobs in the south-east, Fianna Fail deputy John McGuinness told the Dáil.

Over 100 families are employed by the company concerned, he said. "I ask the Government to intervene with a bank which is owned by the taxpayer, AIB, to ensure the sale will not go ahead or that it will not go ahead without discussing the matter with the Morrisseys, the family who own the lots."

The sale will also have an impact on the marketplace because there are three super players in the quarry industry in this country who control everything, he said. A previous quarry sale resulted in the closure of viable entities. As a result, there were job losses and a lack of competition in the market. "If Morrisseys is not kept in the market, there will be job losses and a further deterioration in the level of competition in Ireland," he said.

Deputy McGuinness said the company supplies most of the county councils in the south-east. "It has a 100-year record and worked with AIB while in receivership, fulfilling almost €3 million worth of contracts in the course of the receivership," he said. "It has an excellent record."

Instead of this, he said AIB could very easily get value for the sale which involves a sum in the region of €4.6 million by selling properties directly to the Morrisseys who currently own the quarries. There would be no loser if the sale was conducted in that way. The bank would achieve value for money. The money would be raised privately and not involve AIB money record with AIB, yet it is being forced into a public sale."

In its advertising, AIB states it is "backing brave", he said. "Let it back the brave who spent 100 years building a company and worked with it during receivership, kept jobs and fulfilled contracts."

In response Minister of State Pat Breen said supporting enterprise development in all regions of the country to support job creation is a key objective of the Government, with initiatives such as the regional Action Plans for Jobs seeking to build on the capabilities and strengths of each region to maximise enterprise growth and job creation.

"The south-east plan which covers the area under discussion is the key policy response for supporting employment growth in the south-east region, with public and private stakeholders actively engaged in delivering a range of innovative and practical actions set out in the plan," he said. "The core objective of the plan is to create a further 25,000 jobs in the region by 2020 in the counties of Carlow, Kilkenny, Tipperary, Waterford and Wexford and reduce the unemployment rate to within 1% of the State average."

Although Enterprise Ireland does not fund companies to assist them to trade on the domestic market, its potential exporters division was in contact with the company to discuss exporting options and understands it was not exporting, he said. “The agency, therefore, was not in a position to assist further.”

### **Level of house inspections unacceptable**

It is very sad that the country depends on RTÉ to highlight issues that senators have been constantly highlighting to the Minister for Housing, Eoghan Murphy, in regard to the private rented sector, Fianna Fáil Senator Jennifer Murnane O'Connor told the Upper House.

“He is doing absolutely nothing about it,” she said. “Only 4% of rental properties are assessed. It is unacceptable. I have brought this up several times with the Minister, Deputy Murphy. People who are in receipt of HAP or rent allowance come into my clinic because they are looking for the landlord to do work. There is no staff in local authorities to go out and check the properties. People cannot find another property. There is no accountability, regulation or staffing yet the Minister will tell us there is plenty of money in housing. It is unacceptable.”

Senator Murnane O'Connor said well done to RTÉ for highlighting issues that we know are happening. “The Minister is not listening,” she said. “He is telling us he is doing the work but is absolutely not. There are good landlords out there too. There are a lot of properties that are not inspected and which are not up to standard which people, families and children should not be living in.”

In response, the Leader of the House, Senator Jerry Buttimer said the ‘Prime Time’ programme is one everyone watched with incredulity. “We did not need ‘Prime Time’ to tell us about some of the standards we have to watch because we actually go into those houses ourselves,” he said. “We made representations to the RTB and the city and county councils regarding the matters. It is not correct to say the Government is inactive in the matter. The Senator may shake her head and dismiss me but sometimes it might be good to listen. All of us recognise that the landlords preying on people who require accommodation must be taken to task, investigated and held to account.”

He said a total of €7.5 million has been provided to local authorities for inspection purposes over the four years to the end of 2017. In addition, the Government has increased the provision for inspections with €2.5 million in funding to be provided in 2018. “The Minister, Deputy Murphy, intends to further increase the annual allowance up to 2021 and €10 million will be invested,” he said. “This will allow for inspection rates to increase to 25% annually, which means there will be inspections of a property every four years.”

